



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

**Review of Child Safeguarding Practice in the  
religious congregation of**

**The Sisters of Saint Brigid  
(The Brigidine Sisters)**

**undertaken by**

**The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the  
Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI)**

**Date: May 2015**

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## **Background**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) was asked by the Sponsoring Bodies, namely the Irish Episcopal Conference, the Conference of Religious of Ireland and the Irish Missionary Union, to undertake a comprehensive review of safeguarding practice within and across all the Church authorities on the island of Ireland.

The NBSCCCI is aware that some religious congregations have ministries that involve direct contact with children while others do not. In religious congregations that have direct involvement with children, reviews of Child Safeguarding have been undertaken by measuring their practice compliance against all seven Church Standards. Where a religious congregation no longer has, or never had ministry involving children, and has not received any allegation of sexual abuse the NBSCCCI reviews are conducted using a shorter procedure. The size, age and activity profiles of religious congregations can vary significantly, and the NBSCCCI accepts that it is rational that the form of review be tailored to the profile of each Church Authority, where the ministry with children is limited or non-existent. The procedure for assessment of safeguarding practice with such congregations is set out in the contents page of this report. The NBSCCCI welcomes that in order to have full openness, transparency and accountability, religious congregations that do not have ministry with children have made requests to have their safeguarding practice examined and commented upon.

The purpose of this review remains the same and it is to confirm that current safeguarding practice complies with the standards set down within the guidance issued by the Sponsoring Bodies in February 2009 *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* and that all known allegations and concerns had been appropriately dealt with. To achieve this task, safeguarding practice in each of these Church Authorities is reviewed through an examination of policy and procedures, and through interviews with key personnel involved both within and external to the Religious Congregation.

This report contains the findings of the *Review of Safeguarding Practice within the religious congregation of the Sisters of Saint Brigid (The Brigidines)*, undertaken by the NBSCCCI in line with the request made to it by the Sponsoring Bodies.

The findings of the review have been shared with a reference group before being submitted to the Congregational Leader, Sr. Mary Slattery, along with any recommendations arising from the findings. The review is not based on a review of case material as during the relevant time period there were no allegations made against members of the congregation that were within the Terms of Reference. There also were no allegations in respect of other forms of abuse within the time period, in respect of deceased and living members of the congregation. The review therefore is primarily based on policies and procedures made available plus interviews with key personnel involved in the safeguarding process within the Congregation, particularly in the services run by the Congregation.

## **Introduction**

The Congregation of Brigidine Sisters was founded in Tullow, Co Carlow on St. Brigid's Day, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1807, by the then Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin, Daniel Delany (see the Brigidine website, [www.brigidine.org.au](http://www.brigidine.org.au)). He founded the Congregation in response to the urgent need for education for life and faith at the time when impoverished and downtrodden Irish people were emerging from the oppressive Penal Laws. Having studied for the priesthood in Paris, Tullow had been his first parish as a newly ordained priest in 1777. Bishop Delany chose St. Brigid as the Patroness of the Congregation because his vision was that the spirit of this Congregation would reflect the spiritual heritage of St. Brigid. Bishop Delaney was also the founder of the Patrician Brothers, in 1808.

The initial foundation in Tullow was comprised of six Sisters. Bishop Delaney was of the view that he was reinstating a religious congregation of St. Brigid that had in fact existed from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, until the suppression of the monasteries. From its simple beginnings, the congregation is currently active in Ireland, the UK, the USA, Kenya, New Zealand and Australia, where the largest number of Brigidines serve.

The focus of the Brigidine mission in recent years has moved from providing schools towards working with adults, in parishes, hospitals, prisons, Asylum Seekers' Centres and Travellers Centres. Sisters are also involved in Spirituality Centres with a holistic focus, responding to the educational and spiritual needs of adults. Brigidines are involved with lay and religious colleagues at local and national level, including groups such as the Associates group, Cáirde Bhríde, AFri, Ruhama, CAFOD, and the Tallaght Inter-cultural Action Group.

Brigidines work in partnership with seventeen other religious Congregations on issues related to human trafficking, the plight of displaced persons and the welfare of the planet; and the Sisters provide financial support for these projects. They also fund a water project in Africa, adults seeking third level educational opportunities, relief responses to world disasters, homelessness and other projects that fit with the vision, mission and ethos of the Congregation.

## **Role Profile (past and present role with children)**

From the outset the Brigidine Mission has been Education. The Brigidine Sisters established schools in the diocese of Kildare & Leighlin from 1807 onwards; and for over 150 years they ran boarding schools at Tullow, Co. Carlow, Mountrath, and Abbeyleix, Co. Laois and at Goresbridge, Co. Kilkenny. They also ran six primary schools at Tullow, Mountrath, Abbeyleix, Goresbridge, Paulstown and Ballyroan, and they were involved in Meadowbrook Primary school, Dublin between 1980 and 1993.

In 1979 the Brigidines became involved in the Community School in Tullow, which was formed from the amalgamation of the Brigidine Secondary School at Tullow with the local Vocational School and the Patrician Brothers' school. They joined the Community School at Ballinteer, Dublin, in 1974; and in 1990 they amalgamated their school at Abbeyleix, Co. Laois with Salesian College, Heywood, the local Vocational School and the Presentation Sisters' school in Durrow, to form Heywood Community School. In 2009 the Brigidine sisters amalgamated with the local Vocational School and the Patrician Brothers, Ballyfin to form the Community School at Mountrath. Brigidine sisters in Ireland continue to be

involved as Trustees in these four Community Schools. Further details about each school can be found on the respective websites, [www.tullowcommunityschool.ie](http://www.tullowcommunityschool.ie); [www.ballinteerics.ie](http://www.ballinteerics.ie); [www.heywood.ie](http://www.heywood.ie); and [www.mountrathcs.ie](http://www.mountrathcs.ie).

There has been no Brigidine Sister on the staff of any second level school since 2009; and no Sister of the congregation involved in primary education since 2011.

There are 52 Sisters in the Irish Brigidine Community, and 15 of these are active in a variety of ministries, including:

- Two sisters are in full time employment in hospital ministry
- Two sisters work in parish ministry
- Three sisters work in a Christian Spirituality Centre in the spirit of Brigid
- One sister works in a Holistic Centre
- One sister works in a Drop-In Asylum Centre, working with adults to help them with English language and reading skills
- Three sisters are members of Boards of Management in Community Schools
- Three sisters continue to be involved in voluntary activities in parish communities and prisons.

The other 37 Sisters are retired, 3 of whom are in supported living and 5 of whom are in nursing homes. Prior to their retirement, all members of the Congregation in Ireland were involved either in the teaching or in catering professions

### **Profile of Members**

The 52 Brigidine Sisters in Ireland live in Community Houses in Co. Laois (3 houses), Co. Dublin (6 houses), Co. Galway (1 house) and Co. Carlow (2 houses), Co. Kildare (1 house) and Co. Kilkenny (1 house).

The age profile of the Congregation's membership is:

- 55 years to 60 years – 1
- 60 to 69 years – 7
- 70 to 79 years – 16
- 80 to 89 years – 24
- 90 years and over - 4

The average age of the Congregation's membership in Ireland is 78.7 years.

### **Policy and Procedures Document:**

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Brigid has a safeguarding Policy statement that applies to both children and vulnerable adults. This is clearly stated and comprehensive. It is dated April 5<sup>th</sup> 2015 and it replaces and supersedes the previous policy of 2011. The Policy is displayed at the entrance / foyer / reception area of every Congregational building, together with the contact details of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy DLP.

The Policy statement is also the first page of the *Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Brigid - Policy and Procedures relating to the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Persons*, it is signed and dated and it contains a written commitment to Child Safeguarding. This 106-page document is both up to date (it is also dated April 5<sup>th</sup> 2015) and very thorough. It contains an excellent list of statutory and voluntary child welfare and protection agencies with full

contact details for these. The document is structured according to the NBSCCCI's seven Standards, and it references *Children First* and contains pro-forma Tusla and NBSCCCI reporting forms. The Congregation is commended for having such an outstanding Policy and Procedures document in place.

## **Structures**

### **Leadership Structures**

The governing instrument of the Congregation is the Constitution of the Brigidine Sisters. The congregation is governed by one canonical Leader with an international team of three; and delegated authority to three Community Leadership teams, one of which is in Ireland. The Irish Community Leadership Team is responsible for the life and ministry of the members in Ireland and the day to day running of the Community.

Teams in the Irish Community are formed after nominations by the members and ratification by the Congregational Leadership Team. Currently there are 5 Sisters on the Irish leadership team who are supported by task groups, as required.

### **Safeguarding Structures**

The *Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Brigid - Policy and Procedures relating to the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Persons*, 2015 sets out clearly the role of the Designated Liaison Person.

Under Section 4, which deals with Training and Education, the following statement is made:

#### **4.1.1 Induction**

The Congregation is not currently involved in running or administering any activities or direct services to or for children or young people. However, all Congregational personnel (including Brigidine Sisters, employees and volunteers) are inducted into this Safeguarding Policy. Where individuals are coming to a Congregational house to live and/or work for 3 months or more, they shall receive induction and training on our Policy. They will be required to sign an Acceptance Form accepting the Policy (see Appendix 17) when they begin working or volunteering within the organization. On appointment, each person will be given:

- (a) The name and contact details of the DLP and advised of the role of the DLP in relation to child protection procedures
- (b) A copy of this Policy
- (c) A copy of the Code of Behaviour

This approach that the Congregation has adopted is very thoughtful and responsible.

In advance of this review, the Congregation placed the following notice on its website ([www.brigidine.org.au/news](http://www.brigidine.org.au/news))

*The Brigidine Congregation has invited the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) to conduct a review of their safeguarding practices. If you have any concerns about safeguarding in the Brigidine Congregation in Ireland, we invite you to represent them to:*

*The Community Leader  
42, The Downs*

*Portlaoise*

*Co. Laois. 057 866 4959*

*or*

*NBSCCCI at 01 5053124*

*or*

*An Garda Síochána at 057 8674112*

*or*

*Túsla /HSE at 01 8467129*

At the time of writing no child safeguarding concern has been raised in response to this notice.

The Congregation invited NBSCCCI to deliver an awareness raising training programme to all Sisters in 2009 and again 2011; in addition there were further training days on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> April 2015, delivered by a registered NBSCCCI trainer and Sisters from the Safeguarding Structure have attended training in Maynooth

**Management of allegations and liaison with the statutory authorities:**

There have been no child-safeguarding concerns, suspicions or allegations related to any member of the Irish Community of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Brigid. As a result, it has not been necessary for the Congregation to develop working relationships with An Garda Síochána or with Tusla.

**Conclusion**

The Brigidine Sisters have fully met the requirements of child safeguarding as evidenced by the documents and communications examined in the course of this review. They are to be commended for their detailed safeguarding policy and procedures and their commitment and interest in child safeguarding. Sisters have attended training with NBSCCCI in Maynooth and maintain active contact with the NBSCCCI staff in relation to all child safeguarding matters.

## **Review of Child Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland**

### **Terms of Reference**

#### **Small Religious Congregations**

**(which should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Notes)**

#### **Introduction**

In order for the NBSCCCI to be able to state that all Church Authorities on the island of Ireland have been evaluated in respect of their child safeguarding policies and practices, both historical and current, then some form of appropriate assessment has to be conducted of every one of these. It is rational however that the form of assessment is tailored to the profile of each Church Authority, and that needless expenditure of resources and unnecessary interference in the life of religious orders and communities that have no children-specific ministry would be avoided.

This review seeks to examine the current arrangements for safeguarding children across small religious congregations /orders, and missionary societies in Ireland who have limited or no direct contact with children as part of the congregation's ministry.

It would also scrutinize practice within all known cases to ensure that they have been responded to appropriately.

The review's methodology is an adaptation of the methodology developed for all dioceses and large religious congregations and missionary societies, where the ministry involves regular contact with children.

The proposed review would consider the following:-

- (a) Former role with children
- (b) Allegations of child abuse against members and how these have been responded to
- (c) Existing relationships with statutory authorities such as the HSE, Gardai in the Republic and the HSCT or PSNI in Northern Ireland.
- (d) Policies in place and being applied for safeguarding children
- (e) Roles and responsibilities and where they exist the operation of Advisory Panels, and Safeguarding Committees

The objective of the review would be to confirm if there have been any allegations and how known allegations have been responded to; in addition the review seeks to confirm what the current arrangements for safeguarding children are. In particular, emphasis will be placed on establishing how policies and practice match up to the standards set down in *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* published by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland and launched in February 2009. Priority, at all times, will be given to how policy and practice can be improved and strengthened. If policies and/or practices are identified that are concerning, inadequate, or dangerous, they will be addressed through the provision of guidance and support, and through the reporting of these situations to the appropriate statutory authorities, if this has not already happened. Similarly, those that are good examples will be highlighted with a view to them being adopted comprehensively across all parts of the Church. All cases that relate to alleged or known offenders that are alive will be read and included in the review. In cases where the alleged or known offender is deceased, these will be sampled in an attempt to gather learning from them that will be used to inform the framing of recommendations.

### **Guidance Documents**

The review will be guided by the following:-

- (a) *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*
- (b) *Children First* Guidance in ROI; and Regional Child Protection Guidelines in Northern Ireland;
- (c) Legislation that exists in each jurisdiction which contributes to safeguarding children and young people.

The review will be undertaken by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) through their National Office and led by the Chief Executive Officer.

The review process will be overseen by a Reference Group to whom the CEO will report on a regular basis. The membership of this Reference Group has been drawn from each of the statutory child protection agencies in both jurisdictions, along with eminent individuals in the field from academia. The current Reference Group consists of: Dr Helen Buckley (TCD); Mr Paul Harrison (Tusla), and John Toner (SBNI).

It is important to confirm that the value of the review is dependent upon full and complete access to all relevant documentation and information relating to the abuse of children known to the individual Church authorities. The review will proceed on the basis that willingness exists on the part of each of the subjects of the review to provide full access to the fieldwork team, subject, where relevant, to the terms of the Data Processing Deed agreed between the Sponsoring Bodies and entered into between the parties hereto.

## **Step Guide to the Review Process**

### **Step 1.**

A letter of invitation to review is sent by the Provincial/Regional Superior or other person responsible for the congregation/ order or missionary society (hereinafter referred to as 'the Ordinary').

### **Step 2.**

The CEO will forward a survey to the provincial which will identify:

- Current number of members
- Past role with children
- Current role with children
- Total number of allegations received up to 2014
- Number of living members against whom there are allegations

### **Step 3.**

For any Order where there have been allegations a full review will proceed, as per step 4 - 23. For those Orders where there have been no known allegations a desk top examination of policies and procedures will take place followed by a site visit to interview all relevant personnel within the safeguarding structure. For these orders step 5 and 13-23 will apply.

### **Step 4.**

The CEO and Ordinary will confirm the dates for the fieldwork for the review, and names of the fieldwork team.

### **Step 5.**

The Church Authority will be asked to make available all of the case files and related documentation in respect of any safeguarding concerns that have been identified within the diocese. The Church Authority will make available a room with wireless internet access for the reviewers to conduct their review of files, so that any records made by the reviewers can be directly typed and stored onto a secure server which is only accessed by the reviewers. In the absence of internet access the reviewers will type their notes onto a secure encrypted USB stick for later uploading onto the secure server.

### **Step 6.**

The Church Authority will be requested to sign the revised Data Processing Deed prior to the arrival of the team.

**Step 7.**

The Church Authority will arrange a schedule of interviews with all who hold safeguarding roles within its functional area. The designated person and the Church Authority will be available to the reviewers throughout the period of fieldwork.

**Step 8.**

The fieldwork team when they arrive on site will firstly confirm that they have a suitable place to work in and that all the required documentation has been provided to them for their review. In the event that the fieldwork team forms the opinion that the Church Authority has not provided access to all such documents, the NBSCCCI shall give notice in writing to the Church Authority of the opinion of the fieldwork team and such notice shall specify the reasons for same. Thereupon, the Church Authority shall respond in detail to the notice. Each party shall use its best endeavours to resolve any differences of opinion which shall arise and, in the event that resolution is not arrived at, the parties will attempt to resolve the dispute by recourse to the services of a mediator agreed between them or nominated for the purpose at the request of any of them without prejudice to the NBSCCCI's entitlement to terminate the review. In the event that resolution has not been arrived at following mediation, either party shall be at liberty to terminate forthwith the review.

**Step 9.**

On arrival, the fieldwork team should be supplied with a single case file index that lists all the cases that have been created within the diocese. These may be divided into two groups. The first group will contain all allegations that relate to living alleged or known perpetrators. The second will contain any that are deceased.

**Step 10.**

Depending on the volume involved a decision should be made as to whether all or a random sample of the "deceased group" should be reviewed. Care should be taken to include all prominent cases in the sample.

**Step 11.**

Each case file will be reviewed by each fieldworker independently in the first instance. They will create a written summary with chronological information of the case. In certain cases a second reader may be required, this will be discussed and agreed between the fieldworkers.

**Step 12.**

Following the reading of the case and the creation of a summary, the fieldworkers will analyse and assess the actions taken in the case. They will assess compliance with agreed Church policy that was extant at that time. They will also indicate whether any current risk exists in respect of the information contained within the file and advise the church Authority of necessary safeguarding action to reduce the risk.

**Step 13.**

When all the case files have been read, the fieldwork team will then examine and review any procedures or protocols that exist within the diocese to confirm that they are in compliance with the *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance* document issued by the NBSCCCI in February of 2009.

**Step 14.**

To complete the review, the fieldwork team will then seek to speak to those directly involved in the safeguarding structure in the diocese. This should include the Advisory Panel, a sample of parish safeguarding representatives, the designated person, the safeguarding committee, victim support and advisors and the Bishop/Provincial. The purpose of these interviews is to form a view of the competence and effectiveness of the safeguarding structure that exists within the Church Authority.

**Step 15.**

The fieldwork team will also seek to speak to representatives of the key statutory agencies to provide them with an opportunity to express their views on the quality of the working relationships that exist between them and the Church Authority.

**Step 16.**

A verbal feedback session on initial key findings will be given to the Church Authority.

**Step 17.**

Upon completion of the field work, the team may request to take materials – other than casework records to review off-site; this alongside all materials gathered by the reviewers, including written notes on cases and meetings, will be analysed and will form the basis of the draft assessment review report.

**Step 18.**

The draft will be forwarded to the Church Authority for factual accuracy checking.

**Step 19.**

Alongside all other reports under review, the report will be presented in draft to the Reference Group for their critique and comment. If further work is required at the direction of the Reference group the CEO will ensure this work is completed and advise the Church Authority accordingly.

**Step 20.**

The report will be legally proofed by NBSCCCI lawyer.

**Step 21.**

The report will be forwarded to the NBSCCCI for approval

**Step 22**

A final draft report will then be submitted to the Church Authority. The expectation would be that the report will be published by the Church Authority at an agreed time in the future.

**Step 23.**

All case material written, including summaries, as part of the review, which are for the reviewers use only, will be stored on a secure server.

**Guide for Reviewers**

In terms of small (female religious orders) reference should be made to the following:

1. Has the Order provided alternative care to children in an orphanage, industrial school or children's residential home, but no longer is engaged in running such services;
2. Has the order provided education to children, in both or either boarding schools and day schools, but no longer does so ;
3. Has the order provided medical and/or nursing services to children, but no longer does so;
4. Has the order provided any other services to children, in community services centres, youth clubs etc., and no longer does so;
5. Does the order currently provide any sort of service to children and families that brings them into regular contact with children;
6. Has the order never provided any service to children (e.g. contemplative orders).

In relation to category 1 above;

1. The reviewers will establish whether any service they provided is included in the list of children's residential services produced by the Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB);
2. If this is the case, reference should be made to this.

3. If complaints have been referred to the Redress Board or Ryan Commission, this review cannot access these records and that will be stated in the report.
4. If the order has received complaints which have not been processed through Redress or Ryan these cases will be thoroughly examined as detailed above.

## **Review of Policy and Procedures**

1. It is recognised that not all Orders will have any ministry with children and therefore their policies and procedures should reflect the work that they do with children.
2. If the Order only works through other organisations, example in Diocesan work or in schools, they are required to follow the policies of those organisations.
3. If there are gaps in the policy document an assessment should be made as to whether the ministry engaged in requires full compliance with all criteria attached to the seven standards
4. Where it is clear that the criteria do not apply a reference should be made at the beginning of the review report that the Order's ministry is not directly with children and therefore adherence to particular criteria do not apply.
5. If the Order is a contemplative Order, there is no expectation that they will have detailed policies and procedures, but reference should be made to their ministry and that they have no contact with children.
6. In all cases, contact will be made with the civil authorities to identify if they have any child safeguarding concerns in relation to the order.