



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR
SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Review of Child Safeguarding Practice
in the religious congregation of

The Sisters of St. John of God

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 Child Safeguarding Practice within the Religious congregation of the Sisters of St. John of God* 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 Sisters of St. John of God 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.

1. Introduction

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. John of God was founded in Wexford, Ireland on 7th October 1871. Sr. Visitation Clancy - a Junior Professed Sister with the Sisters of Bon Secours of Paris - and Bishop Thomas Furlong, Bishop of Ferns were the founders of the Congregation. Bishop Furlong chose St. John of God as the patron of the new group.

Mission/ Ministry

Starting from a small house in Wexford, the Sisters were joined by several other young women. Some of the first Sisters of the Congregation were experienced nurses, having trained in France with the Sisters of Bon Secours. Soon after their arrival in Wexford they began to nurse the sick in their own homes, attending to the needs of both rich and poor alike.

In 1873 the Sisters took up appointments in the Infirmary of the Wexford Union Workhouse. Established by the British Government's "Poor Relief (Ireland) Act" in 1838, Workhouses provided accommodation for destitute adults and children. After the Famine, they were the last resort for poor people. The Sisters of St. John of God undertook this work at a time when Workhouse employment was repugnant to many in the population.

By 1875 the Sisters were nursing in a number of Workhouses; Wexford, New Ross, Enniscorthy and Castlecomer. That same year they commenced teaching in the Faythe School, Wexford.

In 1895 a group of eight Sisters ventured on the long journey to Australia, at the invitation of Bishop Gibney, – to attend to the needs of the sick in the Diocese of Perth. Within a short time they were nursing miners with typhoid on the goldfields of Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie a distance of some 600 kilometres north east of Perth. In 1907 they journeyed into the remote Kimberley Region of Western Australia where they provided health care and education services for rich and poor alike. They had particular affiliation with the predominantly indigenous population and the Japanese families especially the Pearl Divers.

In the 1920s the Sisters moved to England where their main concern was the provision of Catholic Education. The mission in Nigeria was opened in 1960 and the Sisters remained there until deported at the end of the Biafran War. The Sisters later went to West Cameroon in 1974, where again they were engaged in Health Care, Education and Community and Faith Development until 2004.

In 1980, four Sisters from the Australian Province went to Sialkot, Pakistan to staff Bethania Hospital which was founded to serve the poor, particularly those suffering from tuberculosis. To the present time a small group of Sisters continues a ministry of health care, education and social outreach in Pakistan.

The Sister's most recent mission was to South Africa 2004 – 2013, where they worked specifically with people with HIV/Aids, supporting their families and Home-based Carers.

Since Vatican Two, on-going change has been integral to the life of the Congregation. Sisters have been challenged by a developing theology of religious life, new ways of being in ministry and creative forms of community living. The mission of the Congregation remains unchanged, but the ways of expressing it are continuously reassessed.

While Health Care and Education were the primary concern of the Sisters for many years, in recent decades they are engaged in a variety of other ministries including involvement in Retreat work, Spiritual Direction, Counselling, Pastoral Care, Parish Work and care for the elderly in Aged Care facilities.

Structure

Though only founded in October 1871, by the end of the century the Sisters were ministering in many parts of Wexford as well as in other dioceses in Ireland and Western Australia. The congregation was initially diocesan with its motherhouse and novitiate in Wexford. As further foundations were made, Kilkenny and Waterford in Ireland and Perth and the Kimberley Region in Australia also became autonomous diocesan units. In 1924, four of these groups amalgamated to form one congregation, centralised in Wexford. The fifth group, the Kimberley Region, joined in 1929. In 1938 the congregation received official Church approval as an autonomous congregation of religious women of pontifical right.

Currently, members of the congregation reside in Ireland, England, Australia and Pakistan. Through the years the Sisters changed the structure of the congregation to suit the effectiveness of their mission. Currently the congregation has two Regions – Ireland and Australia. The Irish Region includes 3 Sisters living in England.

2. Role Profile (past and present role with children):

Over the years, the Sisters in the Irish Province/ Region were involved mainly in healthcare and education. At one stage the Sisters ministered in two secondary schools in Ireland and in a number of primary schools both in England and Ireland. With regard to healthcare, the Sisters managed a number of nursing homes/ private hospitals and many other Sisters were employed in county hospitals, district hospitals and county homes.

Currently, while the Sisters remain the trustees of four primary schools in Ireland, their level of direct service provision to children is minimal. The Sisters of St. John of God are trustees of:

St. John of God Primary School, Wexford
St. John of God Primary School, Waterford
St. John of God Primary School, Kilkenny
St. John of God Primary School, Dublin 5

The Sisters of St. John of God (SSJG) minister in 32 locations in the Republic of Ireland, and of the 123 Sisters in the Irish Region, six Sisters have direct contact with children in their roles. This includes three Sisters, who volunteer at ‘Homework Clubs’, and two Sisters who assist with parish choirs; and one Sister who is a Children and Youth Coordinator in a UK parish. The SSJG do not have any Sisters working directly with children in any ministry that is under the management of the congregation.

The SSJG also own a retreat and Conference centre in Wexford where five Sisters minister. The centre website states that ‘*Primary and Secondary Level Students are also welcome for Prayer and Retreat Days*’. While the role conducted by the five Sisters involved with the centre does not involve direct contact with children or young people, they are trained in the safeguarding expectations of the SSJG. It is also a requirement that Department of Education safeguarding practices are adhered to by those responsible for the students who use the retreat facilities. Where external agencies, including schools, are using the retreat centre, the SSJG child safeguarding policy expects that the agency would have safeguarding policies and

protocols that are consistent with the NBSCCCI standards and guidance document, *Children First*, and child safeguarding policies of the Diocese of Ferns.

3. Profile of Members:

There are 123 Sisters within the Irish Region of the Sisters of St. John of God. The age range is between 51 and 95 years old. Seventy-four (74) Sisters are between 66 years old and 80 years old; and thirty-four (34) are between 81 and 95 years old.

No allegations of sexually harmful behaviour has been made against a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St John of Gods (Irish Region).

4. Policy and Procedures Document:

The child safeguarding policies and procedures of the SSJG are contained within their document *Safeguarding Children*. This document is dated October 2014 and signed by the Regional Leader. *Safeguarding Children* is a 33 page A5 document in booklet form; which is written in clear and unambiguous language, and is comprehensive in its detail.

The policy and procedure document contains the Safeguarding Children Policy Statement, which sets out the SSJG intent regarding safeguarding;

We cherish and affirm each child as a gift from God with an inherent right to dignity of life and bodily integrity which shall be respected, nurtured and protected by all. We recognize that we have an obligation to ensure that the fundamental rights of children are respected. These guiding principles inform this policy, which has been written to ensure that the Sisters of St. John of God take every possible measure to protect children from physical, sexual and emotional harm or neglect. We aim to ensure that none of our personnel engages in behaviour / actions that could allow abuse to occur or that could be misinterpreted by children, their families or other adults as constituting, or leading to abuse.

The policy statement, along with contact details for safeguarding personnel and statutory agencies is available on the Irish Region of the SSJG website. (<http://www.ssjpg.org>)

The opening pages of *Safeguarding Children* addresses Standard 1 in setting out good practice principles, and placing an obligation on SSJG and their employees to adhere to the safeguarding expectations. Contact details for the Designated Liaison Person and statutory authorities are also contained within the policy booklet. The document states that the safeguarding policies and procedures are based on the NBSCCCI's *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* and the SSJG document references the seven standards. Given the structure and role of the SSJG in Ireland, their safeguarding document is sufficient in meeting the needs of their congregation. The SSJG commit to reviewing their policies and procedures every three years and within their document, set out October 2017 as the next review date.

The St John of God Sisters' policy document *Safeguarding Children (2014)* provides significant guidance on Standard 2 in the provision of procedures for responding to allegations and suspicions of child abuse, including the reporting policy. It is commendable that the standard provides such detail and comprehensiveness in its direction on child safeguarding. It is worthy of note that the child safeguarding document contains extensive detail on the internal

management process in addressing concerns, and in the relationship these process have with statutory obligations and external child protective agencies.

The document sets out the responsibilities of the safeguarding personnel within SSJG and commits to seek advice from the NBSCCCI in all cases where an allegation has been made against a Sister. The congregation also commit to requesting independent review by the NBSCCCI in cases where there is a complaint regarding the management of allegations by the congregation.

With regard to the SSJG reporting policy, the policies and procedures state;

In all instances where it is known or suspected that a child has been or is being abused by one of our members or employees the matter will be reported to the civil authorities. The report will be made without delay to the Gardaí/PSNI in the area where the abuse is alleged to have taken place. Where the suspected victim is a child the relevant Tusla Office/Health and Social Care Office will be informed.

The Designated Person has carried out the role since 2010 and has received training from the NBSCCCI. Through review, her competency in the DLP role is evident.

Standards 3 to 7 are met within the SSJG *Safeguarding Children* safeguarding procedures. The document includes a code of behavior for the Sisters and SSJG employees, along with an information technology policy and training and education policy. Again, the guidance and direction provided in these policies and procedures are appropriate for the congregation.

5. Structures:

The Irish Region of SSJG has 32 locations in the Republic of Ireland and is overseen by the Regional Leader. As part of their safeguarding structures they have a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and a Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLDP). They also have a Support Person and an Advisor if needed. The roles are clearly defined in the *Safeguarding Children* policies and procedures and all of these individuals have been trained in their respective duties.

6. Management of Allegations and liaison with the statutory authorities:

As noted above, there have been no safeguarding allegations under the remit of the NBSCCCI review. Consequently there has been no need for direct communication between the Sisters and the statutory agencies, An Garda Síochána or TUSLA.

7. Conclusion:

The Sisters of St. John of God have in place safeguarding policies and procedures appropriate for the size of the congregation and the level of direct contact with children. The DLP and DDLDP are engaged in on-going safeguarding training and this is supported by the Regional Leader. Throughout this review they have expressed a commitment to child safeguarding which is apparent in their policies and procedures, and evident in the practical application of safeguarding in their roles. Staff are given child safeguarding awareness training, and members are regularly reminded of the SSJG child safeguarding policy. This ensures child safeguarding remains a live issue. Where Sisters are engaged in activities that bring them in contact with children, they are also governed by child safeguarding policies and procedures

that apply to those locations. The child safeguarding structures within the Sisters of St. John of God address the NBSCCCI safeguarding children standards.

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.