



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

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice
in the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers)**

undertaken by

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

Date of Review Report: February 2024

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Background

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (the National Board) was established in 2006:

- To provide advice, services and assistance in furtherance of the development of the safeguarding of children within the Roman Catholic Church on the island of Ireland.
- To monitor compliance with legislation, policy and best practice.
- To report on these activities as is comprehensively set out in the Memorandum of Association of the Company.

Church authorities who have entered into an agreement with the National Board through signing a Memorandum of Understanding have committed to following *Safeguarding Children - Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*.

In order to assess compliance with the 2016 Standards, the Provincial Delegate of the Missionaries of Africa invited the National Board in November 2023 to undertake a review of child safeguarding practice in the Society. The Society was previously reviewed in July 2014 under the *Safeguarding Children - Standards and Guidance for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2008*.

The report of the first Review can be found on the National Board's website at www.safeguarding.ie/publications.

The recommendations from the 2014 Review are set out in the table below, with an indication about their implementation. The Society sent an update to the National Board about the implementation of the Review Report recommendations, in the summer of 2015.

Recommendation	Implemented – Yes / No
<p>Recommendation 1: The Provincial Delegate should ensure that during the review of the safeguarding procedures document the society should address the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The revisions to Children First. • Timescales for processing complaints about unacceptable behaviour towards children. 	Yes
<p>Recommendation 2: The Provincial Delegate must ensure clarity of role for the Safeguarding Committee and ensure that the committee should receive training relevant to the functions they are undertaking.</p>	Yes
<p>Recommendation 3: The Provincial Delegate should liaise with the Superior General to develop a written protocol, which allows for exchange of information in relation to allegations of abuse, and that ensures that the civil authorities in the appropriate country are notified.</p>	Yes
<p>Recommendation 4: The Provincial Delegate must ensure that supervision agreements must be signed by all relevant parties, in particular by the subject of the agreement.</p>	Yes
<p>Recommendation 5: The Designated person should amend the supervision agreement so that it explicitly states that the respondent is not allowed unsupervised contact with children.</p>	Yes

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Recommendation 6: The Provincial Delegate should initiate an annual audit of ministry and Garda vetting status of its relevant members, staff and volunteers to enhance governance in this area.	Yes
Recommendation 7: The society's safeguarding committee should carry out an assessment of safeguarding training needs and requirements. This assessment should inform the compilation of a safeguarding training plan for all relevant members, staff and volunteers.	Yes
Recommendation 8: The Provincial Delegate must ensure that a safeguarding action plan is developed. This should include how the recommendations of this review will be implemented.	Yes

The purpose of this second round of reviews is to assess child-safeguarding practice against the Catholic Church in Ireland's current standards as detailed in Safeguarding Children – Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016. The review seeks a level and quality of evidence to provide:

- Public confidence that the Church body is safe for children.
- Affirmation to child safeguarding personnel that they are doing the right things well.
- Confirmation to the Church authority that what they want to be done is in fact being done.
- Independent verification of Self-Audit – or correction and/or improvement of Self-Audit.
- Opportunities for learning.

Introduction

Details of the history, mission, and activities of the White Fathers can be accessed on their website at <https://mafrome.org/home/>. The Society's Generalate is based in Rome. The section of the Society that this Review covers is the Irish Sector of the European Province. The Provincial is located in the Brussels European Provincial Headquarters. In each of the ten (10) countries in Europe in which the Society is located, there is a Provincial Delegate who is responsible for that country, and who reports to the Provincial. There is no Irish Sector website, so as well as the international website referenced above, additional information can be accessed at the British website, <https://www.missionariesofafrica.org.uk/europe>.

There are nine (9) members of the Society living in Ireland. Eight (8) reside in the one community house in Templeogue in Dublin, of whom two (2) provide occasional cover in local parishes of the Archdiocese of Dublin. A third member is on loan to another diocese in the Republic of Ireland and lives close to the location of his temporary ministry there. The average age of the members who reside in Ireland is 75 years.

Ten (10) additional Irish-born members of the Society are ministering abroad, and their supervision is the responsibility of the relevant Provincial Delegate in the countries in which they are now living. If / when any of these men return to Ireland, and if they want to minister here, they need to show a letter of good standing from the Provincial Delegate in the country from which they have returned, and they would require to be Garda vetted and to undergo child safeguarding training.

The Missionaries of Africa do not have any ministry of their own with children in Ireland. They are however supervising and supporting two priests against whom allegations of abuse have been proven in court. The situation of the Society therefore is that referenced in the *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*, Table 2, pages 18 and 19, as a number of indicators under the seven Standards do not apply.

Process of Review

This Review was conducted by one reviewer. The fieldwork took place through an in-person visit to the Society's community house on January 24, 2024, and through a meeting held by Zoom on February 14, 2024.

The following is a list of the people met or interviewed via Zoom or by phone call in the course of the Review.

- The Provincial Delegate (Superior)
- The DLP / Director of Safeguarding
- Members of the Child Safeguarding Committee

STANDARDS

The Standards are a level of practice required to ensure good child safeguarding arrangements. Each standard is self-contained and supported by indicators to evidence if safeguarding arrangements and practice meet the required standard. The National Board has produced detailed Guidance, which is accessible on its website at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/guidance>.

The Missionaries of Africa agreed to adopt *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016* as its child safeguarding policy through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Board. The adherence of the Society to the Policy and Standards is confirmed in its May 2022 Child Safeguarding Statement, signed by the Superior, Fr. Michael O’Sullivan, which is accessible at www.mafrome.org/about-us/integrity/.

The seven Standards are:

Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments

Standard 2: Procedures for responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations

Standard 3: Care and Support for the Complainant

Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe

Standard 6: Communicating the Church’s Safeguarding Message

Standard 7: Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards

This Review concentrates on practice through evaluating written records and interviews with Church personnel.

An assessment of practice under each standard is set out below.

Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments

Church bodies provide an environment for children that is welcoming, nurturing and safe. They provide access to good role models whom the children can trust, who respect, protect and enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.

The Missionaries of Africa have one community house, located in Dublin. According to the Society's British website, <https://www.missionariesofafrica.org.uk/europe>, 'The community (in Dublin) consists of confreres responsible for administration and promotion, retired confreres and sometimes confreres doing further studies'.

While in the risk assessment in the Safeguarding Statement states that, 'We operate an Oratory, which is open to the public which includes children', this has not been the case since the pandemic. This sentence therefore needs to be removed from the Safeguarding Statement.

The Society has an international *Policy on the Prevention of Abuse and the Protection of Minors and Persons in Situation of Vulnerability, May 2022*, which is a very comprehensive and up to date document. Its content is consistent with *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*. This can be accessed at <https://mafrome.org/about-us/integrity/>, on which page can also be found the *Child Safeguarding Statement of Missionaries of Africa in Ireland*, and *Safeguarding Children, 2016*. The page is headed by the statement, 'A safe environment for all.' The May 2022 policy replaces the 2015 *Society of Missionaries of Africa Policy on Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults from Abuse in Ministry*. The Irish Sector contributed ideas and feedback to the authors of the May 2022 policy.

There is a 12-page June 2021 Garda vetting Policy, including guidance and forms. This is complemented by a 6-page Garda Vetting Disclosure Policy. The persons identified as requiring vetting are all Confreres of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa, whether ordained or not; all visiting priests from abroad; visiting priests who supply on more than 3 occasions; and the DLP. Vetting is handled through the AMRI Office, which is located in an annexe to the community house building.

The Society has a Code of Conduct for Society Members, Staff and Volunteers. All sign at the end of the code document to state that they have read and understood it, and agree to abide by and adopt the specified standards of behaviour.

The Missionaries hire the services of a commercial catering company, and its members of staff who provide services in the community house have to sign the Code of Conduct as well.

The reviewer examined the file in which these returned signed codes are kept. A local sports club had been using the Society's grounds between 2018 and 2021. The reviewer examined the file, which contained the sports club's insurance cover and child protection policy.

The Missionaries of Africa have a Complaints Policy (2021) and a Protected Disclosures (whistleblowing) Policy (2023), and each is of the required standard. Neither has needed to be utilised.

A Safeguarding Protocol Agreement between the Missionaries of Africa and the Archdiocese of Dublin was signed in November 2022, and this applies to priests of the Society who minister within the archdiocese. There is a more recent Safeguarding Protocol Agreement with the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois to underpin the ministry in that diocese of a priest member of the Society since September 2023.

The reviewer is satisfied from all evidence examined that **this Standard is met.**

Standard 2: Procedures for Responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations

Church Bodies have clear procedures and guidance on what to do when suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations arise regarding a child's safety or welfare that will ensure there is a prompt response. They also enable the Church to meet all national and international legal and practice requirements and guidance.

The Missionaries of Africa established its Safeguarding Office in December 2016, and prior to the employment of the current DLP in November 2020, there had been one other DLP.

As stated above, the Society adheres to *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*. Reference has also been made to the Society's international *Policy on the Prevention of Abuse and the Protection of Minors and Persons in Situation of Vulnerability, May 2022*.

Since the previous Review in 2014, the Society has been made aware of one concern related to one of its priest members. This concern arose within a diocese in which he was ministering, and the matter has been examined in the course of the National Board Review of that diocese. The relevant police service conducted a criminal investigation of the alleged offence, and no evidence of any crime against children was adduced. The reviewer has communicated about this with the DLP of the relevant diocese to confirm that the matter was properly managed by that Church body. The relevant diocese and the Society have engaged in regular and open communication about this concern. It was agreed that this priest had no case to answer.

The Missionaries are managing and supporting two priests who are permanently out of ministry due to child safeguarding concerns. Their court-confirmed abuses were examined in the 2014 Review. No further allegations have been received about either man since the previous Review.

The case management files are kept safely in a locked fireproof cabinet in a locked room.

This Standard is met.

Standard 3: Care and Support for the Complainant

Complainants who have suffered abuse as children receive a compassionate response when they disclose their abuse. They, and their families, are offered appropriate support, advice and pastoral care.

The case management files examined by the reviewer have details of the supports provided by the Missionaries of Africa to a complainant and their family. Two priest members have acted as Support Persons to this family. This family received pastoral support over a seven-year period, until they indicated that they no longer needed this.

In the case of the other convicted priest, the abuse occurred over forty years ago, and the complainant is no longer in receipt of pastoral support from the Society regarding their abuse.

This Standard is met.

Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

The Church Authority has in place a fair process for investigating and managing child safeguarding concerns. When the threshold for reporting has been reached, a system of support and monitoring for respondents is provided.

Two priest members of the Missionaries of Africa are permanently out of ministry, having been convicted of the abuse of children in criminal court. Their cases were examined in the 2014 Review.

The reviewer examined the case management files on both men. These are up to date and contain the required level of detail. Ongoing risk assessments have been conducted in both cases.

Cleric 1 is subject to a canonical precept, which has been reviewed and updated on nine occasions since the previous Review. He is also bound by a Supervision Agreement, which has been reviewed and updated on nine occasions since the previous Review. Both of these are monitored by the DLP at regular meetings that she has with the priest, and the detailed typed notes of 15 such meetings are on the file.

This priest has been professionally assessed by an external agency as being of 'below average risk' to children. The current DLP is trained to conduct risk assessments, and does so. The priest is cooperative and helpful in the community house.

Cleric 2 is also subject to a canonical precept. This is reviewed and updated every year, which the reviewer has evidenced. His Supervision Agreement is similarly reviewed, and updated if necessary, on an annual basis. His compliance with both is monitored by the DLP, and they meet every eight weeks. The DLP keeps detailed typed notes of each of these meetings.

The case of Cleric 3 was managed by the diocese in which he was ministering, and this has been covered in the recent Review of that diocese. Good communication between the two Church bodies has led to this matter being properly dealt with. The decision reached by both Church bodies was that he had no case to answer. This priest has returned to the Dublin community house.

This Standard is met.

Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe

Church personnel are trained and supported in all aspects of safeguarding relevant to their role, in order to develop and maintain the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to safeguard and protect children.

The DLP / Director of Safeguarding is a registered Trainer with the National Board. She provides relevant training to members of the Missionaries of Africa, visiting clergy, and lay staff. Priest members can and do access training from both the Archdiocese of Dublin and the National Board, if required, as does the DLP. There is evidence of a strong commitment to child safeguarding training.

The annual self-audit exercise provides the information that underpins the analysis of training needs, as well as the development and implementation of a Training Plan. Training needs analysis for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023 have been examined by the reviewer. These are simple, but are adequate for such a small religious community. The template used is reproduced here.

Community	Full Day Training	Refresher Training	Mandated Reporter Training	Information Session
CYPRESS GROVE HOUSE				
VISITING PRIESTS/STUDENTS				
CATERING STAFF				

In 2021, the Director of Safeguarding / Trainer provided a Refresher Training course to seven (7) members of the Society, and a Mandated Persons training to eight (8) members.

In 2022, she delivered an Information Session to three members of the catering company’s staff, and a full day session to two priest members of the Society.

There was no training undertaken in 2023, as some of the individuals identified in the training plan had not arrived in Ireland, or had only recently started their work. This situation was reviewed at the December 2023 Child Safeguarding Committee meeting, and it was agreed that the required training would be provided as early in 2024 as could be arranged by all of the parties.

This Standard is met.

Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Church Bodies appropriately communicate the Church's child safeguarding message

References have been made earlier in this report to the various websites on which information relevant to safeguarding in the Missionaries of Africa can be located. While the information available is good, it is not easy to find the required websites. The European Province is exploring options for the construction of a European website. If this is realised, it could provide contact details for the Irish Sector's safeguarding office, the Gardaí and Tusla.

The announcement of the Review was carried on <https://mafr.org/audit-announcement-irish-sector/>, the detail of which is reproduced here.

Safeguarding Audit Announcement, Irish Sector

The Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) Irish Sector have invited the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland to conduct a review of safeguarding practice in the sector.

If you have any views about safeguarding in the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) Irish Sector we invite you to come forward to us +353 1 405 5263 or to the National Board at +353 1 505 3124.

If you wish to report a child safeguarding concern, please contact (*name provided*) Designated Liaison Person for Safeguarding, on +353 86 328 8503 or email pep.irl.cim@mafr.org

Alternatively, you can contact the Garda Child Sexual abuse Free Phone: 1800 555 222 or Tusla: <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/>

There is a Safeguarding Office, Coordinator for Integrity in Ministry in the Missionaries' Rome headquarters, and the Director of Safeguarding in Ireland liaises with this person regarding Irish information to be put up on the international *Mafr* website, as well as other child safeguarding matters.

The Society's British sector of the European Province publishes an online *Missionaries of Africa Magazine*, three or four times per year, most of the contents of which are descriptions of its work in the developing world. The reviewer noted that on five occasions since November 2018, the magazine contained articles that are relevant to safeguarding – on human trafficking, the potentially abusive cultural expectations on girls in some African countries, on working with young people, and, most recently (August 2023) on *Safeguarding the Vulnerable*. This last mentioned article provides a history of the development of the Missionaries' safeguarding policy and procedures. While these articles are not specifically about the Society's activities in Ireland, they do evidence an awareness of and concern about safeguarding.

The reviewer has seen and analysed the Missionaries of Africa Communication Plan, 2021, which is the most recent version. It will need to be updated before the end of 2024. This is a detailed plan, which is seven pages in length and is more than just a statement of aspirations. The document addresses the need for targeted communication of the Church's child safeguarding message to members of the Society, children and young people, parents and guardians, members of the public and outside organisations. There are tasks identified for each target audience, allocated to named individuals, with resources and timelines listed, and dates for review established. It is predictable that as the Society becomes less engaged externally, the next Communications Plan will be shorter.

The reviewer saw the Society's Child Safeguarding Statement at the entrance to the community house, and in the porch of the Oratory, where it was accompanied by a child-friendly information poster.

Bearing in mind that the Society does not have ministry with children, and that only one of the four indicators under Standard 6 applies, the reviewer is satisfied that **this Standard is met**.

Standard 7: Quality Assuring Compliance with the Standards

The Church Body develops a plan of action to quality assure compliance with the safeguarding standards. This action plan is reviewed annually. The Church body only has responsibility to monitor, evaluate and report on compliance with the indicators under each standard that apply to it, depending on its ministry.

There is a well-functioning Safeguarding Committee in the Society, with suitable Terms of Reference. It continued its work throughout the period of pandemic restrictions using the Zoom video platform. The committee has been convened on ten occasions in the four years prior to the Review fieldwork, and the reviewer has examined the minutes of all of these meetings.

There are five members of the committee, four priests of the Society, along with a laywoman. The Provincial Delegate chairs the group, while the Director of Safeguarding provides the administrative support to the committee; she attends all of its meetings as an *ex officio* member, and takes and distributed meeting minutes.

The reviewer met with three members of the Safeguarding Committee via Zoom; the other two members were unavailable at the time scheduled for the meeting. The Society could review the balance of priest members and lay people on the committee, while also considering gender representation.

Among the subjects addressed by the Safeguarding Committee at its meetings have been:

- The Child Safeguarding Statement
- The annual audit, training needs analysis and training plan
- The code of conduct
- External ministry and safeguarding agreements with two dioceses
- Garda vetting
- The mandated persons list
- The whistleblowing policy
- The replacement of the Society's 2015 policy with *Safeguarding Children 2016*
- The Society's international safeguarding policy
- The annual DLP reports
- The three-year safeguarding children plan, including the communications plan; and
- The National Board Review

These are not listed in any order of priority. The committee also has responsibility for the safeguarding of vulnerable adults, which is outside the scope of this Review.

The reviewer saw records of the annual audits for the years 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022; and closely examined the annual audit for the year 2023, which he found to be of a satisfactory quality. It provides a good up-to-date picture of child safeguarding, and an easily accessed database for the Provincial Delegate and Director of Safeguarding / DLP.

The reviewer examined the Annual reports from the DLP to the Provincial Delegate for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023, and these contain sufficient information on what happened under the requirements of Standards 2, 3 and 4 in those years. The Provincial Delegate has notified the CEO of the National Board in writing of the completion of the annual audit reports and DLP reports, as required.

The Three-Year Child Safeguarding Plan of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), April 2021 to April 2024, was reviewed by their Child Safeguarding Committee in March 2022. It is simple while being sufficient for the Society's activities and it is reproduced here. Its objectives had been achieved by the time the Review fieldwork was done, which is commended. The Safeguarding Committee now needs to establish what is required for the next three-year plan, and this is on their agenda for their next meeting.

Standard	Specific Objective	Action	Responsibility	Implementation Date	Review Date
1. Creating and maintaining safe environments	Ensure that all new groups using Church facilities have insurance and their own safeguarding policy in place	DLP to complete checks on all new and existing groups using Church property	DLP	01/1/2021	No external groups now using the grounds
	Ensure that Church personnel have been vetted in accordance with guidance on vetting	Compose a Garda Vetting Matrix in line with current legislation to identify vetting requirements in the Society, including re-vetting	DLP	14/4/2021	14/4/2022
	Ensure all Society members with external ministry are aware of safeguarding expectations of external agencies	1. Keep a list of confreres participating in external ministries and provide them with the external ministries form for completion and return.	DLP	30/6/2021	01/12/2021
		2. Establish an agreement with the Child Safeguarding & Protection Service in the Archdiocese of Dublin	DLP	30/6/2021	01/12/2021
Ensure safeguarding is an item on induction of all Society members, staff & volunteers	Devise a safeguarding pack for induction purposes	DLP	30/5/2021		

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<p>5. Training and Support</p>	<p>Ensure all Society members, staff & volunteers receive the required safeguarding training</p>	<p>1. Compile a training needs analysis 2. Develop annual training plan</p>	<p>DLP DLP</p>		
<p>6. Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message</p>	<p>Ensure that the Church's safeguarding message is communicated to identified audiences</p>	<p>1. Safeguarding posters in public area around the Church and in residence 2. Child-friendly poster on Church noticeboard 3. Plan and operate Safeguarding Sunday 4. Safeguarding as an item on the agenda for Council meetings</p>	<p>DLP and Provincial Delegate DLP and Provincial Delegate Safeguarding Committee Safeguarding Committee</p>	<p>05/05/2021 05/05/2021 02/02/2022</p>	<p>03/11/2021 No public Mass any more 02/02/2023</p>

This Standard is met.

Conclusion

The Missionaries of Africa have no ministry with children on the island of Ireland. Their priest members who minister within Irish dioceses are subject to the safeguarding policy and practices of those external bodies. Despite this reality, the Society takes safeguarding children seriously, as is evidenced in this Review. All Standards have been met, which is commended.

The Society in Ireland is small. However, it is part of a large international organisation, which has developed strong child safeguarding policy and procedures. The Missionaries of Africa in Ireland has a fit-for-purpose structure, with the Provincial Delegate and the DLP / Director of Safeguarding making up the Safeguarding Office. Their work in child safeguarding is supported and overseen by an effective Child Safeguarding Committee, the European Provincial and the Coordinator for Integrity in Ministry (based in Rome).

The management of and support to members who are out of ministry due to their abuse of children is of a very high standard, and risk is assessed on an ongoing and regular basis. Irish members of the Society who minister abroad do and will continue to return to Ireland to retire, and care is taken to ensure that they are in good standing and are inducted into the approach to safeguarding children that has been adopted by the Catholic Church in Ireland.