



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

Communications Strategy

December 2020

Introduction

The Child Safeguarding Policy Statement of the Constituent Members of the Catholic Church in Ireland, which is contained in Safeguarding Children (2016), declares that:

‘As a constituent member of the Catholic Church in Ireland, we recognise and uphold the dignity and rights of all children, are committed to ensuring their safety and well-being, and will work in partnership with parents/guardians to do this. We recognise each child as a gift from God, and we value and encourage the participation of children in all activities that enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.

All Church personnel (including clergy, religious, staff and volunteers) have a responsibility to safeguard children through promoting their welfare, health and development in a safe and caring environment that supports their best interests and prevents abuse.’

This statement contains the essential elements of the Church’s Safeguarding Message in terms of the philosophy and principles that underpin it, as well as indicating that the responsibility for the participation and safeguarding of children in the Church is shared by safeguarding personnel and parents/guardians.

Goal

The broad goal in relation to communications is to ensure that the Church’s Child Safeguarding message is understood and adopted by everyone.

Objective

The overriding objective for communications is to raise, build and sustain awareness of the importance of child safeguarding within the Catholic Church on the island of Ireland, and within the wider communities in which the Church ministers.

Subsidiary Objectives

In strategically planning to fulfil its vision and goal, the National Office staff team through the National Board’s CEO has undertaken to do the following:

- A. To provide the members of the Board with a Quarterly Report in which details will be given about:
 - Advice and Support on all aspects of child safeguarding and case management provided to Church authorities and their nominated personnel;
 - Meetings of the National Case Management Committee;
 - Training and Support services delivered;
 - Guidance created;
 - Allegations received;
 - Data protection issues

- B. To produce an Annual Report for members of the Board containing details by way of:

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- Statistical and explanatory information on advice provided;
 - Statistical and explanatory information on allegations received;
 - Statistical and explanatory information on Reviews completed of Church bodies' compliance with the 2016 Standards.
- C. To effectively communicate with all stakeholders through:
- The continued development and maintenance of an accessible and informative website;
 - The production of regular e-Newsletters;
 - The production of policy papers, journal articles and GAP (Guidance, Advice and Practice) papers;
 - Attendance at and reporting to the quarterly meetings of the Irish Bishops' Conference;
 - Attendance at and reporting to meetings of AMRI (Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland), as required;
 - Attendance at and reporting to the AGM of Coimirce;
 - The organisation and running of a bi-annual National Child Safeguarding Conference
 - Attendance at and contribution to international child safeguarding conferences and seminars, as appropriate.

Overall, these initiatives and actions are being undertaken to secure the commitment of all stakeholders to adopting, supporting and improving child safeguarding; to participate in the development of effective child safeguarding through sharing and partnerships; and to influence the development of child safeguarding policy and practice within the Catholic Church and the communities in which it operates.

The Training and Support Strategy of the National Board 2019-2022 has eight objectives, one of which is specifically about communications, Objective G: *Supporting Best Practice*. While some of what is contained in that objective overlaps with the subsidiary objectives listed above, it is useful to reproduce the detail here for ease of reference.

Training and Support Strategy 2019-2022 - Objective G: Supporting Best Practice.

To do this the National Board has developed a range of mechanisms to ensure that it is informed by best practice and that it can share best practice amongst constituent members.

The National Board will update its constituents on developments in best child safeguarding practice through:

1. Interagency Initiatives

To inform its practice on training and support the National Board will engage with others working in the field of child safeguarding within the statutory and voluntary sector. Through sharing knowledge and practices, the National Board will update its guidance which will be available to inform improvements in practice across the Church.

2. Development of GAP Papers

To highlight best practice based on current research the National Board will develop a range of Guidance Advice and Practice papers (GAP) to assist Church bodies in taking appropriate child safeguarding action.

3. Ecclesiastical Provincial Area Meetings

Following an independent review of the National Board, it was recommended that the office facilitates regional meetings of relevant representatives of the Church to assist with communicating the Church's child safeguarding message. Facilitating meetings of relevant Church personnel on a regular basis throughout the four ecclesiastical provinces (Armagh, Dublin, Cashel and Tuam) will ensure that members of Church personnel understand and can contribute to the work of safeguarding on a national basis.

Stakeholders and priority audiences we need to reach and engage

- Children and young people; and their parents
- The wider Lay Faithful, including Mass attenders
- Cultural Catholics
- Priests and Religious, including hierarchy
- Seminarians
- Members of other faiths
- Church Safeguarding personnel - professionals and volunteers
- The full Child Safeguarding constituency - academics, researchers and practitioners, including statutory child protection agencies, and children and families NGOs; what the National Board does also matters
- Policy makers at local, regional, national and international level
- Media and General public

The messages we want to communicate

- Child safeguarding means the creation and maintenance of safe environments for children and for the adults who work with them
- The Catholic Church on the island of Ireland is a safe and worthwhile place in which children and young people can become engaged in meaningful and beneficial activities
- The Catholic Church on the island of Ireland takes responsibility for its past behaviours in relation to victims of clerical child sexual abuse
- Safeguarding is Christ-centred, Scripture-focused and theologically sound
- Safeguarding creates and supports freedom
- Safeguarding has created a new ministry within the Church that involves the Lay Faithful in very constructive ways
- Safeguarding is uncomplicated if you simply exercise common sense and 'follow the rules'
- Safeguarding will allow a very different Church to develop in the future from the Church of the past
- Safeguarding supports priests and Religious, and other adults who work with children and young people
- Safeguarding has already achieved a lot - review the last 20 years

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- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. This includes the National Board, which responsibility is explicitly accepted and described in its Memorandum of Association

The messengers

The Catholic Church in Ireland has a communications structure, with the central Catholic Communications Office in Maynooth, which service is mirrored at diocesan level, where each diocese has its own Communications Officer. The National Board can access this structure by negotiation, as necessary.

The National Board uses an external Communications and Public Relations agency when challenging and sensitive communications need to be planned for. This communications company also provides analysis of information and advice, if requested.

Each Church body that has an MOU with the National Board has undertaken to adopt and implement the 2016 national *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards*, which includes Standard 6, *Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message*; and many Church bodies have allocated responsibility for this task to a named individual. The specific Indicators for Standard 6 are:

- The Church body has a written plan, which details how the Church's child safeguarding message will be communicated.
- The Church body makes information regarding how to safeguard children available to all.
- The Church body ensures that it communicates the Church's child safeguarding message to people whose first language is not English, as well as to people who have specific needs.
- The Church body establishes links with other local organisations in order to promote a safe and caring community for children and to share best child safeguarding practice.

The National Board supports and assists the activities of each Church body in relation to these responsibilities through the provision of web-based Guidance and materials, including the 2019 GAP paper entitled *Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message*.

Strategic Goals for National Board Communications 2020 – 2022

The National Board understands that to achieve effective communication with any individual or group, a two-way process is required. To date, the listening part of this process is underdeveloped, and this imbalance will be corrected over the three-year period of the Strategy.

Existing communications activities will be sustained throughout the period of the strategy; and actions undertaken and completed in one year will have follow-through in subsequent years.

YEAR	GOAL	DETAILS
2020	To consult with stakeholders (children and young people; complainants; and respondents) in relation to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Researching, developing and implementing appropriate methodologies for consultation ○ Preparatory discussions with pertinent representative groups and agencies

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	developments in guidance, training and practice, as appropriate	
	To review and refresh the National Board's website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consultation with stakeholders ○ Ease of access and internal site navigation ○ Clarity and use of plain English ○ Development of links ○ Use of videos to complement text content ○ Development of interactive elements ○ Inclusion of age appropriate content for children and young people ○ Strengthening the branding
	To research and evaluate the use of social media by the National Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Desktop research ○ Consultation with Church authorities and Church bodies that are already using this technology ○ Estimating resource implications – staff time, and money
	To continue to produce four e-Newsletters in the calendar year	
	To produce a further two GAP papers in the calendar year	
	To respond to media inquiries	
2021	To establish a methodology for evaluating the effectiveness of our communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consultation with child safeguarding personnel across the Catholic Church on the island of Ireland ○ Developing a research study using established online survey tool ○ Commissioning expert advice and information on impact measurement
	To develop Briefing Notes on research and on developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Summarising academic papers, research reports, statutes and regulations, news items of interest etc. ○ Generating a standard format for e-publication ○ Producing an occasional digest in the form of a Briefing Note
2022	To write and publish a history of 25 years of child safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consultation with all stakeholders to develop breadth of perspectives to be represented ○ Undertaking a literature review ○ Seeking the assistance of academics in the fields of history, sociology, canon law etc.