



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

Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice

in the

Diocese of Clonfert

undertaken by

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the

Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board)

Date of Review Report: November 2022

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Background

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church Ireland (National Board) was established in 2006 to provide advice, services and assistance in the ongoing development of safeguarding children within the Roman Catholic Church on the island of Ireland; to monitor compliance with legislation, policy and best practice; and to report on these activities. This 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, Bishop Michael Duignan of Clonfert Diocese invited the National Board to undertake a review of practice, which took place in October 2022.

The Diocese of Clonfert was previously reviewed in November 2011 under the *Safeguarding Children - Standards and Guidance for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2008*. The report of the first Review including recommendations can be found on the National Board's website at www.safeguarding.ie/publications.

There were eight (8) recommendations made in the previous Review Report. This current Review was an opportunity for the National Board to confirm that these planned actions had been completed.

The Recommendations in the 2011 Review Report were:

Recommendation 1.

- Bishop Kirby must ensure the finalisation of the Clonfert Diocese Safeguarding Policy and Procedures as a matter of urgency. A reader-friendly summary version should accompany the full procedures.
- Bishop Kirby, with assistance from his committee, priests of the diocese and those with communications skills in the diocese, should launch, distribute and ensure the implementation of the policy and procedures.
- As Clonfert is within the Metropolitan Area of the Tuam Archdiocese, Bishop Kirby should consider seeking the support of Safeguarding personnel of that Archdiocese in completing this essential work in the shortest possible time.

Recommendation 2.

Bishop Kirby should divest himself of the responsibility for dealing with allegations alone by ensuring that all new allegations are referred to the Designated Persons for them to notify the statutory authorities, respond to complainants and put in place any risk management plans for respondents. New cases should all be recorded using the NBSCCCI case file template.

Recommendation 3.

Clonfert Diocese should join the new National Case Management Advisory Group (NCMRG) established by the NBSCCCI and seek advice from them on all future reports of a concern, complaint or allegation of child abuse.

Recommendation 4.

Bishop Kirby should appoint a Support Person for victims at the point of disclosure. Were the Support Person to attend all initial interviews with complainants alongside the Designated Person, this would allow the complainant to meet the Support Person and initiate a relationship.

Recommendation 5.

In all cases, Bishop Kirby should write to complainants upon receipt of a credible allegation offering support and counselling.

Recommendation 6.

It is recommended that following the removal of a priest from public ministry, Bishop Kirby set down in writing the restrictions imposed on the respondent and the relevant supervision, management and reporting arrangements that will apply.

Recommendation 7.

- Bishop Kirby should stand down the current Safeguarding Committee.
- A new Safeguarding Committee should be appointed to implement the new policy and procedures and to monitor safeguarding practice across the diocese.

Recommendation 8

Bishop Kirby should appoint an overall Safeguarding Co-ordinator to ensure that all personnel are aware of their roles and responsibilities, that they are supported and monitored in carrying out their responsibilities.

The first Review Report on the diocese was published on 5th September 2012 as one of a tranche of seven Review Reports. Bishop Kirby subsequently submitted a report to the National Board indicating the status of the implementation of the eight recommendations, and the National Board was satisfied with the actions taken in relation to each recommendation. The reviewers confirm from examining the report submitted by Bishop Kirby and through the process of fieldwork in the current Review that that these Recommendations have been implemented.

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* and make statements based on evidence, which 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

A full history of the Diocese of Clonfert was provided in the first Review Report of 2011. It is relatively small in area at 616 square kilometres (237 square miles), and encompassing parts of Counties Galway, Roscommon and Offaly. The total Catholic population of its administrative area in 2021 was 37,865. The diocese has 24 parishes, and it is a suffragan diocese of the Tuam Archdiocesan Metropolitan Area. Bishop Michael Duignan was appointed in July 2019, following the retirement of his predecessor, Bishop John Kirby.¹ Bishop Duignan was ordained Bishop of Clonfert in October 2019.

At the time of the Review, there were thirty-two (32) priests listed on the Clonfert Diocese website, thirty-three (33) if Bishop Duignan is included. Of these, seven (7) are listed as being retired. There are 47 churches in the diocese, including the Cathedral of St Brendan in Loughrea. There are two (2) female Religious Orders located in two (2) towns within the Clonfert Diocese's administrative area, and in 2021, these had a combined membership of 67 Sisters.² In 2021, there were two (2) male Religious Orders in the diocese, with 22 members between them.³ The Redemptorists however will be leaving their community house at Esker, Athenry on November 30, 2022, so their 12 members will be relocated to other community houses outside of the Clonfert Diocese.

Process of Review

The Clonfert Diocese Review was undertaken well after the lifting of government Covid-19 restrictions, so in-person interviews and meetings were used. However, many parish ministries and activities involving children and young people had not recommenced at the time of the Review fieldwork. The reviewers conducted the fieldwork on October 26th and 27th, 2022, and they were based in the Diocesan Office just outside Loughrea.

The following is a list of those with whom the reviewers met or spoke with by phone during the course of this Review:

- Bishop Michael Duignan
- The DLP and the Deputy DLP
- The Diocesan Secretary
- The Safeguarding Coordinator
- A Trainer
- The Chairperson and members of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee
- Parish Safeguarding Representatives and Sacristans in two parishes
- Three Parish Priests
- A group of altar servers and their parents
- The Co-ordinator of the Pope John-Paul II Awards Scheme, a local school leader, and two participants on the scheme

¹ <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dclon.html>

² *ibid*

³ *Op cit.*

- A Priest Advisor
- Three members of the Lourdes Pilgrimage management committee – the Youth Leader, the Director of Nursing, and the priest Spiritual Youth Leader
- The founder, the DLP, the Chaplain and a Council member of Emmanuel House of Providence

As well as the bishop, the reviewers met six priests who are in ministry in the diocese. All the people that were met were happy to share all information that was sought by the reviewers, and their openness and cooperation was greatly appreciated.

Standards

This section provides the findings of the Review. The template employed to present the findings are the seven standards, set down and described in the Church guidance, *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*. Clonfert Diocese agreed to adopt *Safeguarding Children 2016* as its child safeguarding policy through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2016.

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

Each Standard contains a list of indicators, which ensure that the standards are met. To support implementation of the Standards, the National Board has produced detailed guidance. The Diocese of Clonfert has adopted in full the guidance of the National Board. It has also contributed to the writing of, and it implements the contents of, the *Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook of the Western Province*.⁴

This review does not assess written procedures, but concentrates on practice through a review of written records, interviews with Church personnel, communication with children and their parents, and information from a respondent.

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 children can trust, who respect, protect and enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.

As one of the six western dioceses of the Tuam Metropolitan Area, Clonfert uses the central Vetting Office that is operated by the Diocese of Galway on behalf of all six dioceses. The Safeguarding Coordinator acts as the link person with the Vetting Office in Galway, and she keeps a file on the status of each diocesan cleric's Garda vetting, reminding each individual of when re-vetting is required, and assisting any cleric who needs help in using the web portal. She also manages the vetting application for new diocesan employees. Vetting for safeguarding personnel at parish level is handled by the relevant Parish Priest or his nominee. The reviewers were able to examine the Garda vetting files in the two parishes they visited. The Safeguarding Coordinator briefs the Safeguarding Children Committee of the status of Garda vetting; and all committee members have themselves been vetted. Vetting also features in the annual parish self-audit exercise across the diocese. That will be further discussed under Standard 7 below.

The bishop and safeguarding personnel are using the 2021 Parish Audit Report as the basis of their safeguarding children work for 2022 and 2023. Compliance had slipped when compared to the immediate pre-Covid-19 years, but that was to be expected, as no ministry or Church related activities with children and young people had taken place for almost two years. The Clonfert Child Safeguarding Committee (CCSC) has drawn up plans to address the difficulties identified in the audit, and remedial work was well underway at the time of the Review fieldwork.

The diocese has recently updated and circulated its safeguarding children posters and leaflets. One of the leaflets is for people who want to volunteer in assisting with parish activities involving children – *Volunteers Welcome*; and another is written for parents (and their children) who are considering enrolling their child/children in a parish activity – *A Word of Welcome for Parents, Guardians and Children*. The first of these includes the up-to-date Code of Behaviour for Adults working with Children /Young People, while the second includes the current Code of Behaviour for Children and Young People.

The reviewers had the opportunity to meet with two teenage girls who were participating in the Pope John Paul II Awards Scheme, as part of which they assisted the 2022 Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes. It was clear in discussing their experiences with them that they were very aware of the two Codes of Behaviour. This was further emphasised in a meeting with three leaders of the Lourdes Pilgrimage.

The reviewers met with a group of seven (7) altar servers, all of whom were under 10-years of age, along with their mothers, in a rural parish. When they applied to become altar servers, consent forms and information on safeguarding, including all leaflets and codes of behaviour, were provided with the application forms. The parish visited has a panel of approximately 25 altar servers, both female and male. The girls and boys met by the reviewers were clear that if they had

any concerns or felt uncomfortable about anything, they would speak with their mothers. The mothers were of the opinion that they have no concerns about their children's safety as they attend the liturgies in which they participate, and there is always one parent supervising the children when they are changing into their robes. It was clear that the altar servers enjoy their role. They are recruited through the local school where their Parish Priest visits to invite them to consider altar serving. They particularly like the opportunities to read at Mass.

The diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage is a good example of both risk / hazard assessment as part of the planning and preparation safe combined with care practice. In 2022, eighty (80) pilgrims to Lourdes were supported and assisted by forty (40) volunteers, nineteen (19) of whom were under 18 years of age. Bishop Duignan took a lead role in assisting the organisers to review all aspects of the pilgrimage as part of their planning. This involved

- Meetings with parents and young people
- Follow up individual phone calls to ensure understanding
- Comprehensive risk-assessments, using diocesan templates
- Clear understanding of the boundaries of behaviour for volunteers and young people
- Clear outline of the tasks to be undertaken by young people
- Safeguarding training for volunteers, leaders and staff
- Policies and procedures were in place and implemented to a higher degree than previously
- Leader rota established to support young people
- While on the pilgrimage, leaders met with the young people each evening to reflect on the day's activities and discuss any issues that arose. It was also an opportunity for the leaders to give positive feedback to the young people.
- On the final night the young people reviewed their experience and gave feedback
- A Zoom call was held after their return home to check in and get feedback on the young people's experience.

The Lourdes Pilgrimage organizers stated that this was a hugely successful trip, which benefitted the pilgrims who required support, as well as the young people who volunteered, and the leaders themselves. Their enthusiasm for the contribution that the young people made was evident in their feedback to the reviewers. The leadership by the bishop in the preparations, and the fact that he went on the pilgrimage and interacted with the young people there, were underlined as contributing factors to its success.

During the pandemic lockdown, Bishop Duignan and the safeguarding personnel drew up a new and very comprehensive six-page Safeguarding Hazard Assessment Form, which was completed in October 2021. The reviewers commend this excellent assessment template. It is to be used by the Parish Priest (or Administrator or Moderator) and the Local Safeguarding Representative to annually assess or renew their existing assessment of risk / hazard in relation to each activity involving children and young people. If '...significant changes in circumstances occur during the year...' the template has to be updated as soon as possible to reflect these. The template is laid out as indicated below:

Review of Safeguarding Practice in the Diocese of Clonfert

Risk identified	Procedures in place to manage risk identified	Yes / No	If the answer is 'No', what action is required, by whom, and when?
Church personnel are unsafe to work with children – recruitment guidelines not followed	Have safe recruitment procedures been followed, i.e. are the necessary recruitment forms completed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Application form ▪ Declaration form ▪ Safeguarding Agreement form Are all clergy and volunteers who have necessary and regular contact with children / young people / vulnerable persons been Garda Vetted? Are all forms filed securely in the parish office?	Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No	

The other risks identified are:

- Church personnel fail to understand their responsibilities to safeguard children
- Protocol for visiting clergy / religious / lay ministers not followed
- Procedures for children/young people to take part in church activities are not adhered to
- Children and their parents do not understand the Church's policy, procedures and structure to safeguard children and protect them from harm
- Risk of harm through bullying of a child by Church personnel or peers or another child
- Inappropriate use of technology (digital media, photography, video and social media, text and email.)
- Risk of external groups who use Church property are unsafe to do so
- Participation of children/young people with specific needs
- Pope John Paul II Awards
- Children coming from schools to participate in religious ceremonies
- Safe physical hazards not fully in place

There is also room on the template in which to insert additional risks / hazards identified locally. The complete form can be seen at and downloaded from www.clonfertdiocese.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/A4Safeguardinghazardform.pdf

The Clonfert Diocese Children First Act-required Child Safeguarding Statement is accessible on its website at www.clonfertdiocese.ie/safeguarding/, and this was discussed with safeguarding personnel.

Every parish has an appointed and trained Local Safeguarding Representative (LSR), and these laypeople work closely with the relevant Parish Priest. Each LSR has received a detailed written role description and recent briefing on their responsibilities.

The 2021 Audit Report produced by the Safeguarding Coordinator indicates that few parishes have outside groups using Church property. The two parishes visited have the procedure required under Standard 1.5 in place.

The diocese has a General Complaints Form and a Whistleblowing Policy and Procedures document on its website, the latter updated in May 2022. At the time of the Review fieldwork, neither policy has needed to be applied to a real life event. Both documents are of the required quality.

Due to the reducing number of active Clonfert priests, there are none ministering outside the diocese, so Standard 1.10 is not that relevant currently. The diocese does however have a list of priests who have retired into its administrative area from elsewhere. It also has a clear and concise *Protocol for visiting Priests or Deacons who wish to minister within the Diocese of Clonfert* – accessible at www.clonfertdiocese.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20191206-Protocol-for-Ministry-.pdf. It is clear to the reviewers from their discussions with Parish Priests and with safeguarding personnel that this protocol is being implemented.

As well as having twenty-four parishes, the Diocese of Clonfert also has within its administrative Area a healing and retreat centre, the Emmanuel House of Providence, Clonfert, Co. Galway. This centre is described on its website, <https://emmanuelhouse.ie/> in the following way:

Emmanuel House of Providence is a Catholic Centre for Prayer, Evangelization Renewal, Preaching and Spreading God's word and the public celebration of religious ceremonies, services and the sacraments of the Catholic Church and is under the ecclesiastical authority of the Bishop of Clonfert Diocese.

The mission of Emmanuel House of Providence is the advancement and promotion of the Catholic Faith to the public at large in order to foster a more Christian Life to enable people to live a more perfect and full life in Jesus Christ and to encounter His healing graces.

Emmanuel House of Providence is a spiritual hospital where people can experience and embrace the love, mercy and healing power of God in spirit, mind and body.

Emmanuel House was established by a married couple 32 years ago, and is not a diocesan centre. However, for child safeguarding purposes, Bishop Duignan has reached agreement with the Emmanuel House Council that it will abide by the diocese's Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures. The reviewers visited Emmanuel House and met with three members of the Council, as well as with the diocesan Episcopal Delegate and Chaplain to the centre. They explained the operation of the centre, the responsibilities of its dedicated LSR, and its links with Clonfert Diocese through Bishop Duignan being a member of its Board, and the Safeguarding Coordinator supporting and advising it as she would a diocesan parish. Emmanuel House staff and volunteers have all been Garda vetted, and they have received appropriate child safeguarding training. There is a section on the home page of their website on Child Protection and Safeguarding, at <https://emmanuelhouse.ie/child-protection-and-safeguarding/>. Emmanuel House now takes part in the annual diocesan self-audit exercise.

While Emmanuel House can have attendances in excess of 400 people at some of its events, with as many as 900 on occasions, children and young people are always accompanied by their parents. There are no altar servers or other specific activities for children at Emmanuel House. Any visiting priest has to be Garda vetted through the diocese as existing Garda vetting from elsewhere is not accepted. This is experienced as cumbersome, but it is accepted.

The Clonfert Children Safeguarding Committee (CCSC) has eight (8) members, including Bishop Duignan. Its meetings are always chaired by a layperson. The current committee is in place since 2012, although there have been some changes in membership during that time. The reviewers had the opportunity to meet with the full committee. The reviewers were given the minutes file for the committee to examine accounts of the conduct of committee business. During the pandemic lockdown, the CCSC continued to meet virtually. The committee meets six or seven times per year. The Safeguarding Coordinator and the DLP are both members of the committee, and the reviewers see this as a positive in a small diocese, as necessary information can be easily shared. The DLP provides the committee with a report on the most recent National Board Newsletter, and adds supplementary information as necessary to ensure that members have sufficient understanding of the issues covered. Both she and the Safeguarding Coordinator visit the parishes twice a year to provide support and advice, as well as to assist with the annual self-audit exercise.

Committee members explained to the reviewers that attendance has always been excellent; and a number of members commented on the commitment to safeguarding that has been evident with all members, past and present. The impression taken from their meeting by the reviewers was of a cohesive and industrious group of motivated people from diverse professional backgrounds who pull together very well in the ministry of keeping children safe. Members commented very positively about the leadership provided by Bishop Duignan, and about the benefit to the committee from the inputs and work of the Safeguarding Coordinator. According to committee members, there is more structure to the diocesan safeguarding efforts than there had been previously.

In addition to the CCSC, Bishop Duignan established a small Executive Committee to address day-to-day issues that can arise at short notice. The bishop, the DLP and the Safeguarding Coordinator comprise this group. It was most active during the pandemic lockdown, having convened on 13 occasions between February 2020 and January 2022. This group ensured that matters could be progressed, even if Church ministries were very constrained. It was during this period that new policy development and the updating of required information, leaflets, posters etc. were achieved, and these were brought to the CCSC for ratification.

The Safeguarding Coordinator and DLP are leading out on supporting parishes in making further improvements, through their joint visits to each parish on behalf of the CCSC.

Standard 1 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.

Since the first Review, four new allegations against diocesan priests have been reported to the diocese. Three of these were managed by the previous bishop and the most recent by Bishop Duignan. These four case management files were examined by the reviewers.

The reviewers also spoke with the bishop and the DLP.

Table 1 below sets out the details of the allegations received since the previous Review.

Table 1: Number of concerns and allegations reported to Clonfert Diocese since the 2011 Review

Cleric	Current status	Number of complainants, and date notified to the diocese	Gardai notified	Tusla notified	National Board notified	Appropriate and timely canonical action taken
Cleric 1	In ministry	1	Yes – within 5 weeks	The report to the diocese was made by Tusla	Yes - next day	N/A
Cleric 2	In ministry	1	Yes – by HSE	The report to the diocese was made by HSE	Yes – next day	N/A
Cleric 3	Deceased	1	Yes – same day	Yes	Yes - next day	N/A
Cleric 4	Deceased	0	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	N/A

In the case of Cleric 1, the complainant made their report to Tusla directly, and Tusla informed the diocese. Tusla had notified the Gardai, but the diocese also did so, after five weeks.

In the case of Cleric 2, the complainant was attending a professional HSE service, and they disclosed their allegation to the practitioner who was working with them. HSE made the notification to the Gardai and subsequently to the then bishop. The National Board was notified on the following day.

Cleric 3 had died before the report was made by the complainant to a priest of the diocese. This priest informed the then bishop, who notified the Gardai. Despite being encouraged by the priest to engage in follow up, the complainant made no further contact.

Information in relation to Cleric 4 was provided to the Diocese post his death. Advice was sought from the National Board who advised reporting it to An Garda Siochana. From the information available, it could not be certain that this was a concern about child abuse. As the respondent was deceased, there was no risk to children and a complainant was never identified. The Diocese took appropriate steps in consultation with An Garda Siochana and the National Board.

The section on Standard 4 below will mention another priest, Cleric 5 who had been part of the cohort reviewed during the previous Review, but about whom no additional concerns were reported during the current Review period.

In relation to one closed file, the reviewers made a suggestion about the need to add a signed and dated case closure sheet. Apart from this small matter, case management files are well constructed and easy to follow. Case management files are stored safely and can only be accessed with the permission of the bishop.

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 reviewers were unable to speak with any complainant, as none is currently engaged with the diocese.

There was no complainant in one case; in another, the complainant did not identify himself or herself; and in the two other cases, the complainants did not want to maintain any contact with the diocese. In one further case that had been dealt with in the previous Review, and which related to a deceased priest, the complainant was engaged in a civil legal process during the current Review period, and the diocese communicated with their solicitor.

It is clear from the examination of case management files and from discussions with relevant personnel that, where possible, support was offered from a professionally qualified Support Person whose services had been retained by the diocese. This professional practitioner no longer has any diocesan cases, and as they are retiring, it was decided that they would not be interviewed.

The case management files indicate that efforts were made to engage with complainants and that the offer of counselling and other support was evident in the case management files reviewed. The reviewers also established that Towards Healing have not been providing counselling in the last two years to any client who has alleged abuse by a cleric from the diocese.

The reviewers are satisfied that they received all available information on complainants from the diocese. From their discussions with Bishop Duignan and his safeguarding personnel, they are assured that there is a real commitment to the welfare and support of all complainants, and that new ways of reaching out to them are being explored.

When the three Indicators for Standard 3 are applied, the diocese has met this standard.

Standard 3 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 (cleric or religious) is provided.

There are no priests of the Diocese of Clonfert out of ministry due to child safeguarding concerns. The Reviewers examined five case management files relating to allegations against priests from Clonfert Diocese accused of abuse.

Three respondents were deceased before any child protection concern was raised about them. In the case of the two living respondent priests, one returned a completed questionnaire to the National Board. He indicated a degree of disappointment with the level support from the diocese he said that he experienced, once the allegation had been shared with him.

The reviewers are satisfied that all appropriate actions were taken in these two cases to expedite the investigations that were conducted by the Gardai, and by the diocese. In both cases, it was HSE / Tusla that made the initial report to the diocese. The National Board was contacted for advice and guidance in both cases. As part of the risk assessment, it was determined that restrictions on ministry were not required. Both were offered the support of a Priest Advisor.

The reviewers spoke with the diocesan Priest Advisor, who informed them that there has been no respondent priest with a management plan since the first Review in 2011. He has been the named Priest Advisor for ten years, but he has not been called on to act in that capacity. He expressed the hope that in the event that he were to be engaged as the Priest Advisor in the future, he would receive support in that role by the bishop. He received updated training in 2018.

The reviewers also spoke with the bishop, the DLP and a Priest Advisor.

In the case of Cleric 1, a report was made to An Garda Síochána who investigated the complaint and submitted a file to the DPP, who in turn decided not to prosecute due to 'insufficient evidence'. Tusla advised the then bishop that they would not be carrying out a risk assessment. The respondent priest denied the allegation; and a preliminary canonical investigation was not possible due to the complainant declining the opportunity to participate. The National Case Management Committee (NCMC) of the National Board was consulted by the diocese. The advice provided to the bishop was that he should invite the complainant to share any additional detail supporting their allegation, within a specified timeframe; and that if they did not do so, the matter could not be pursued. This advice was followed. The complainant did not provide further details of their allegation. The DLP met with them to inform them that they could reengage with the statutory services and with the diocese in the future if they changed their mind. This priest remains in good standing.

In the matter concerning Cleric 2, the complainant did not want to make a report to the Gardai and did not wish to have contact with the diocese. The initial report came from the HSE. The then

bishop followed the advice provided by the National Board on the management of this case. That advice was that there was insufficient evidence provided to the diocese for it to act; and as the complainant did not want engagement, a canonical process could not proceed. The priest was offered support if he felt he needed this. He remains in ministry and in good standing.

In the case of Cleric 3, he was deceased at the time that an unidentified person alleged that he had been abused by him. The complainant approached a priest of the diocese and made their allegation to him. The priest advised them to make a statement to the Gardai, and he offered them an opportunity to meet with the bishop in order to receive support. However, the complainant did not identify himself or herself, and they made no further contact with the diocese.

The case records in relation to Cleric 4 are noted under Standard 2 earlier. It was not clear that a child safeguarding concern had been established, and there was no risk to children as the cleric was deceased.

Cleric 5 died before the first Review in 2011. This case management file remained active, as a civil suit was ongoing for years. This was eventually resolved. The file contains legal correspondence, but no other case management information.

The reviewers are satisfied that there has been good engagement with the statutory authorities, and that advice has been sought by the respective bishop in order to assess and manage risk. In conclusion, we believe that cases have been managed in accordance with the standard, and therefore, that

Standard 4 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 diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator has a comprehensive job description, which includes responsibility for organising relevant safeguarding training and keeping the training log. This staff member acts as the link person between the various elements of the safeguarding service, such as Garda vetting, the Safeguarding Committee, the annual Parish Audit, and the safeguarding section of the diocesan website. This inclusive role allows her to identify when and where training is required and to arrange for this to be provided.

One of the benefits of the close relationship between the six dioceses within the Tuam Metropolitan Area is that services can be shared as needed. Clonfert Diocese does not have an accredited Trainer on its safeguarding staff team, but it has negotiated with three other western dioceses to engage their Trainers on occasions.

Like every other Church body, Clonfert Diocese had to stand down ministries, liturgies and training during the two years of pandemic lockdown. Bishop Duignan had really only arrived in late 2019 when Covid-19 became a major issue in Ireland. The lockdown however provided the bishop and his safeguarding team the opportunity to put plans in place for when some opening up would eventually occur.

The reviewers examined the diocese's Training log back going back to 2015, the National Board Training Returns Forms, and the Register of those needing Training in 2023 (56 persons, including all priests). They also reviewed the Attendance sheets for diocesan Training in March 2022 and for Emmanuel House in the same month, four LSR Training sessions in November 2021 and in January 2022, and the record of training for the DLP and the Safeguarding Coordinator for the years 2020 – 2022.

The three-year **Strategic Safeguarding Plan September 2020 – September 2023** was a product of the work undertaken by Bishop Duignan and the Safeguarding Committee during lockdown, and it addresses all of the Standards and Indicators contained in *Safeguarding Children 2016*, including 5.1 through 5.6., which deal with Training. This plan was informed by the annual parish self-audit exercise, which includes a training needs analysis.

As every parish in the diocese has Local Safeguarding Representatives (LSRs), the first priority was to ensure that they were kept up to speed with training, and a training session was designed by the Safeguarding Coordinator and the DLP, and delivered to them in November 2021 and in January 2022. Bishop Duignan attended, which gave him the opportunity to both encourage and to thank people for their important voluntary contribution to the safety of children and young people in the diocese. This was then supplemented by an in-person training for safeguarding volunteers, which was facilitated by two Trainers from two other dioceses in March 2022.

In October 2022, the diocese presented its own Training for Supervisors and Coordinators of Children's Activities in the Church, in which 28 people participated, and this Zoom session included a new Training for Induction of Altar Servers and Children / Young People Involved in Church Activities. The reviewers have been provided with the slides used in these training initiatives, and the standard of content and presentation achieved is very high. This particular training initiative was taken in order to support and facilitate the reintroduction of children's and youth ministry and Church related activities following the pandemic, and it is commended.

As in all safeguarding planning, the staff and volunteers in Emmanuel House of Providence are included in safeguarding training.

The Safeguarding Coordinator and the bishop provide a great deal of support to the priests and volunteers who undertake the bulk of the safeguarding work in the diocese.

Standard 5 is met.

Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Church bodies appropriately communicate the Church's child safeguarding message.

As has been mentioned previously in this document, a range of new printed safeguarding materials in the form of posters and leaflets have been developed by the diocese during the pandemic lockdown, and these have been distributed since the start of 2022 to all parishes and other Church locations. They are of an extremely high quality, are colourful and attractive, and contain all essential information. Posters have been produced in A3 and A4 format, while leaflets are in A5. Among the printed materials developed and distributed are:

- Safeguarding Children – Code of Behaviour for Children and Young People (A3 poster)
- Safeguarding Children – Code of Behaviour for Adults caring for Children and Young People (A3 poster)
- Safeguarding Children – Policy Statement (A4 poster) – versions of this poster in Irish, Polish and Portuguese languages are being developed.
- Diocese of Clonfert Celebret Notice (A4 poster)
- Safeguarding Children – A Word of Welcome for Parents, Guardians and Children (A5 leaflet)
- Safeguarding Children – Volunteer Welcome (A5 leaflet).

The diocese also maintains and updates the Safeguarding webpage on its website at <https://www.clonfertdiocese.ie/safeguarding/>. The drop-down menu under Safeguarding Children contains the Safeguarding Statement, as required by the Children First Act 2015; Diocesan Policies and Procedures; information on how to report a concern, with contact details; information on Towards Healing and Towards Peace; and Safeguarding forms. It also has soft copies of the printed materials already listed above; and it has a link to the National Board's website.

There is an emphasis in the diocese on the Parish Priest and the LSR in each parish to work together to ensure that communicating the safeguarding children message is promoted, and they in turn are supported in this task by the Safeguarding Coordinator and the DLP who together, on behalf of the Safeguarding Committee visit every parish twice each year.

The Diocese of Clonfert has a three-year Communications Plan as part of its Strategic Safeguarding Plan, which allocates responsibilities for identified tasks, with deadlines and review dates. It is planned to hold an annual Safeguarding Sunday in May of each year, to begin in 2023, along with which an annual Safeguarding Newsletter will be published for circulation to all parishes in the diocese.

Part of the Communications Plan was to bring both the Lourdes Diocesan Pilgrimage and the Pope John Paul II Award programme under the safeguarding children umbrella, and to ensure that they are included in training and communications initiatives; this has been achieved.

Bishop Duignan has established and personally maintains and monitors diocesan Facebook and Twitter platforms. It is of interest that on occasion individuals have made contact with the diocese with regard to safeguarding issues through these media.

The bishops of the six western dioceses produced two pastoral letters for Church membership during the pandemic lockdown. The first of these was entitled, *Faith in Difficult Times*, and the second was entitled *Nothing Can Separate Us from the Love of God (Rom 8:39) - Guidance for a Return to the Public Pastoral Life of the Church in the Tuam Ecclesiastical Province*. This longer and detailed second document of 29 pages was very well drafted and provided excellent guidance on reopening the local Church after a period of hibernation, including conducting risk assessments, training and communication. Both were carried on the Clonfert Diocese's website.

Clonfert Diocese conducted a synodal pathway consultation, and produced its own *Synthesis* document, which is also accessible on its website, at <https://www.clonfertdiocese.ie/diocesan-synthesis/>. A number of matters pertinent to safeguarding children are contained in this report in a listing of challenges facing the Church.

Standard 6 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.

In July 2022, Bishop Duignan invited the National Board to conduct this Review, and preparations for it took place from August to October,

The following notice was posted on the Diocese of Clonfert website in advance of the Review:

Diocese of Clonfert NBSCCCI Safeguarding Review October 2022

20 October 2022

The Diocese of Clonfert has invited the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) to conduct a review of its child safeguarding practice. If you have any views about the Safeguarding of Children in the Parishes / Diocese, we invite you to contact us at office@clonfertdiocese.ie or tel. 091 841 560 or directly to the NBSCCCI at admin@safeguarding.ie or tel. 01 5053124.

Our Designated Liaison Persons for receiving reports of a child safeguarding concern are (names and contact numbers provided), or contact or An Garda Síochána (tel. 1800 555 222), or TUSLA (tel. 091 546366).

Bishop Duignan has written to all priests and LSRs in the diocese to inform them of the planned National Board Review.

It has previously been noted that the annual Parish Self Audit exercise is assisted by the Safeguarding Coordinator and the diocesan DLP visiting each parish and assisting the Parish Priest and LSR to complete the Safeguarding Children Parish Review Form. This 11-page template specifically seeks information on ministries and Church related activities that involve children and young people, including altar servers, children's, youth and mixed choirs, children's liturgies, and lay apostolates that work with or include children and/or young people. It checks on the contact details and Garda vetting status of all leaders of such ministries and activities.

The second half of the form deals with each of the seven Standards and the level of compliance with these. The Safeguarding Coordinator prepares an annual report to the bishop once the audit returns have been analysed and discussed at the Safeguarding Committee. Audit Reports for the years 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021 were examined by the reviewers.

It is clear from the report on the 2021 audit exercise that the pandemic lockdown had a very detrimental impact on many of the diocese's parishes, something seen particularly in relation to ministries and activities involving children and young people, as well as compliance with a number of the Indicators under Standard 1.

The results provided Bishop Duignan and his small safeguarding children team with a baseline from which to plan their interventions and developments over the next year or so.

The 2021 Audit Report is by far the most extensive one that has been provided to the bishop since these annual reports were first required. The second 2022 parish visits to all parishes in the diocese by the Safeguarding Coordinator and the diocesan DLP are well under way, and these are being used to support and assist parishes to work on the priority issues identified in their audit returns. The reviewers commend the very proactive manner in which the realities on the ground are being acknowledged and addressed.

The reviewers have also read the 2021 Annual Report of the diocesan DLP to Bishop Duignan, which records one new case during the reporting year. It also refers to school-related child protection concerns with which the DLP has provided support and assistance.

As previously referenced, the Diocese of Clonfert has produced its comprehensive Three Year Strategic Safeguarding Plan September 2020 – September 2023

Standard 7 is met.

Conclusion

Despite the government restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the Bishop of Clonfert and his safeguarding team have achieved a lot over the past three years. The Pope John Paul II Award scheme, the Lourdes Pilgrimage organisation, and the Emmanuel House of Providence have been brought under the safeguarding children umbrella, with obvious positive effects. Policies and training have been developed, and a lot of work has been done to improve the communication of the safeguarding message. There is a focus on thorough risk assessment and management in ministries and Church related activities that involve children and young people.

Since his ordination as Bishop of Clonfert, Bishop Duignan has demonstrated vision, commitment and leadership, and it is clear from the reviewers' discussions with a wide variety of involved people during the fieldwork that his contribution is appreciated. He and his small team are realistic about the challenges facing the diocese, well summarised in the Synthesis document produced at the end of the Synodal Pathway consultation process.

The Reviewers are satisfied that Bishop Duignan and his team have a good grasp of safeguarding, in terms of promoting good practice, as well as responding to allegations.