

Newsletter

Latest News from the National Office for
Safeguarding Children in the Catholic
Church in Ireland

ALERT BOX

This part of the Newsletter is designed to draw the attention of Church authorities to important developments outlined below:

Revision of Child Safeguarding Policy	page 2
Transitional Justice	page 2
Upcoming Training Events	page 3
Report into abuse by Church in Switzerland	page 5

December 2023

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Click on any of the links below to send an email directly to any member of staff

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Introduction

Welcome to the final National Board Newsletter of 2023.

This Newsletter provides us with an opportunity to look at what has been happening in child safeguarding over the past 12 months, in Ireland and across the Catholic Church. The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (the National Board) has spent significant time on two projects, firstly the revision of the 2016 Church's child safeguarding policy and secondly, alternative approaches to responding to complainants of abuse and their families. Both these topics are referenced in the pages below.

Internationally there have been a significant number of reports and research into abuse in the Catholic Church. Portugal, Spain, Germany and now Switzerland have, in one way or another, opened the lid of abuse in the Church. Whilst the lessons being learned across all these countries are similar, there are some new and interesting findings within the Swiss report which are set out in the practice issue at the end of the Newsletter.

Closer to home, we will be bidding a fond farewell to our Director of Training and Support Niall Moore as he will be leaving to take up the role of Safeguarding Officer (ROI) in the Church of Ireland in February 2024. I am sure you will join me in wishing Niall well in his new role, and I hope he will take some of the safeguarding practices from the Catholic Church across with him in his new role. Niall has been with the National Board since 2013 and has made a huge contribution to safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland (and abroad) through training, policy, guidance and active support and advice. We will miss his logical approach and 'can do attitude'. As we know, time does not stand still and we look forward to appointing and working with Niall's successor and you can find more information on the recruitment process by following link https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Corporate_Publications/Director%20of%20Training%20and%20Support%20-%20ADVERTISEMENT.pdf.

This Newsletter provides information on:

- *Revision of the 2016 Safeguarding Children, Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland.*
- Transitional Justice within the Church context.
- Changes to National Board Guidance.
- Training.
- Practice Issue – Review of Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Switzerland.

The Revision of Safeguarding Children, Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016.

The current safeguarding children's policy for the Catholic Church in Ireland was adopted by all Church leaders in 2016. Since then the following changes have required us to review whether all requirements of civil and canon law are captured in the policy:

Full implementation of Children First 2015.
Changes to Criminal Law ROI.
Changes to safeguarding guidance in Northern Ireland.
Introduction of data protection Acts (NI and ROI) 2018.
Vos estis lux mundi 2018 and 2023.
Revision of Book V1 2022.

In addition, many countries, including Australia, New Zealand, France, Spain, Germany and Switzerland have conducted national inquiries, which have highlighted lessons, which should be captured in a revised policy for the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Of particular relevance to the new policy are:

- Introduction of a standard on *Leadership and Governance*.
- Clarity on reporting timeframes, new approach to caring for complainants through a transitional justice approach; ensuring a fair and just process of inquiry for those accused of child abuse.
- Promoting a culture of safeguarding which views the participation of children in the life of the Church as positive .

The National Board has sought support from the Irish Episcopal Conference (IEC) and AMRI for the new policy. Upon receipt of their agreement to adopt the policy, we in the National Office will realign the guidance materials and draft any new guidance that is required.

From Spring 2024, if the policy is adopted we will run a series of workshops to introduce you to the requirements of the policy and will post the dates on the National Board's website.

Transitional Justice

A Guidance Advice and Practice Paper (GAP) on Transitional Justice approaches to dealing with abuse within the Church is now available to view by following this link

https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/GAP_Papers/GAP%20PAPER%2012%20Transitional%20Justice.pdf .

This paper leans heavily on Gospel and Scriptural teachings as well as international and local research. We would commend this approach to all who are engaging with complainants and their families. If you are interested in learning more about transitional justice approaches, can you please send your expression of interest to niall.moore@safeguarding.ie and he will identify workshops/training if sufficient interest is expressed.

Training and Support

Listed below are a number of training events that are scheduled to take place in the coming months
The following training events are now available to book for 2024 online:

- **10th January- Spirituality and Safeguarding in the Context of Catholic Social Teaching-** This training course will be facilitated by Rev Dr Barry O’Sullivan ([bio available here](#)). The course is open to any member of Church safeguarding personnel who wants to understand more fully the place of safeguarding as a ministry in the theology and social teaching of the Church. To find out more or book your place go to <https://www.safeguarding.ie/events/spirituality-and-safeguarding-in-the-context-of-catholic-social-teaching>.
- **20th January and five additional dates- Train the Trainers Course-** This training course is only for those wishing to become registered as trainers for three years with the National Board. The training will be delivered over 6 days in the Glenroyal Hotel, Maynooth on the following dates 20th, 21st, 26th, 27th and 28th January 2024 and 2nd March 2024. To find out more or book your place please follow this link <https://www.safeguarding.ie/events/train-the-trainers-2024>.
- **31st January- Training for New Church Authorities-** This training is for those who are a new Church authority. The training will focus on the governance requirements for safeguarding children to induct participants in their new role. To find out more and book your place please follow this link <https://www.safeguarding.ie/events/training-for-new-church-authorities-2024>.

Reviews of Safeguarding Practice

The National Board is still open to conducting Reviews of Safeguarding Practice. If you would like to consider inviting the National Board to conduct a Review in your Church body, please contact teresa.devlin@safeguarding.ie for more information.

All 26 Diocesan Reviews have now been completed and we are in the process of producing an overview report which will be available early in 2024.

All Review Reports that have been approved for release can be found at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/publications/national-board-publications>.

Annual Self Audits

The self-audit provides an opportunity for a Church authority to review what is working well and what needs to improve in child safeguarding within the Church body. For those who have ministry with children or are managing cases the annual self-audits should be completed and the National Board notified of its completion by the end of March 2024.

If you have received confirmation from the National Board that you are exempt from the self audit process there is no need to send in a report to the National Board. If you are unsure please contact imeldaashe@safeguarding.ie to check whether a self audit for your Church body is required.

Training Returns

All training returns need to be in by the end of March 2024. These should be completed online by registered trainers. Registered trainers can do this by:

- Clicking on the trainers login button on www.safeguarding.ie
- Typing in the username and password given to each trainer as part of their registration.
- Following login, click the 'log a training event online' button on the top right hand side of the screen.
- Filling in the relevant details and then submit.
- The event will automatically be added to the database.

This process should be completed for every training event facilitated.

Changes to Church Authorities

The National Board provides regular advice to Church authorities and annually organises an induction for new Church leaders. When a Church leader changes it is important that you inform us and provide us with the contact details of the new Church Leader by emailing admin@safeguarding.ie.

Training on Safeguarding for Religious Orders based in Ireland but who Minister with Children Internationally

In November the National Board facilitated another training session for male and female religious who have ministry with children abroad. The training day included useful discussion on a range of issues relating to how to implement effective safeguarding in other contexts. The National Board has guidance on how to construct an international policy which is available by following this link <https://www.safeguarding.ie/creating-an-international-child-safeguarding-policy?task=document.viewdoc&id=339>.

Report on the Pilot Project for the History of Sexual Abuse in the Context of the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland Since the Mid 20th Century

A Report following Research commissioned by the Swiss Bishops' Conference, the Central Roman Catholic Conference of Switzerland and the Conference of Unions of Religious Orders and Other Communities of Consecrated Life in Switzerland has been published.

The Report is not available in English. This résumé is taken from reviews of the report available in various publications, including an article by Fr. Hans Zollner, published in *La Civiltà Cattolica* on November 15 last.¹

The Report can be found, at <https://tinyurl.com/59zpbset>.

The Research lasted one year from spring 2022 to spring 2023, and it was undertaken by a research team from the Department of History at the University of Zurich, with male and female experts as advisers, including from victims' organisations.

The approach adopted was reading case records, examination of archival records, and consultation with victims/survivors of abuse, with experts in safeguarding, and with Church personnel.

Switzerland is a unique European country, with special features of constitutional and ecclesiastical law, which means cooperation between ecclesiastical and civil law bodies. There is also increased power of the laity in ecclesiastical leadership, as well as financial independence from the bishop. According to the report, neither of these unique systems (in the Catholic Church) have led in any way to a decrease in abuse or a clearer and more effective approach to dealing with perpetrators.

Case studies listed in the Report clearly show that clericalism and deference are factors that enabled abuse. Another observation made in the report is that there are no identifiable differences between dioceses headed by 'progressive' bishops and those led by conservative bishops, when comparing abuse prevention or the number of perpetrators brought to justice.

Key Findings

- The authors identified 1,002 'situations of sexual abuse' in the Swiss Church, including accusations against 510 people (not all priests). The abuse affected 921 people.
- Only a small proportion of sexual abuse cases were reported to Church or state authorities.
- Even in the 1970s, as one of those affected by abuse states in the Report, priests, as 'representatives of God', were 'untouchable', even in the case of serious criminal behaviour.
- The researchers blame incomplete sources as one of the main reasons for the allegedly high number of unreported cases. "In some cases, it has been ascertained that the complaints of abused persons were not written down in a rigorous manner and that not all complaints were recorded and kept in the archives".
- In the case of two dioceses, the destruction of records was documented; and for others, according to Zollner, it should be considered likely that something similar has happened, and has been linked to the provisions of canon law.



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



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- Church Authorities did not report relevant cases to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. In the episcopal archives of one diocese, for example, this is evidenced by a letter of one abuser's file, written by a priest:
According to canon law, your case should be reported to Rome. However, we usually do not do this, so that priests can be more easily placed elsewhere after serving their sentence.
- Victims were not responded to well – Zollner states that they had doors shut in their faces when they wanted to speak
- Church leaders systematically relocated accused and convicted clerics, sometimes abroad, to avoid criminal prosecution, and allowed them to continue to minister as priests. In this way, the interests of the Church and its representatives were put before the welfare and protection of community members.
- Those in leadership in the receiving location were not always aware of the past of a priest and the parish community not at all.
- Protecting the reputation of parishes, dioceses, and the Church itself has been a high priority.
- The period in which most of the reported cases of abuse occurred (about half) was between 1950 and 1969;
- Over half — 56% — of the cases of sexual abuse involved men or boys. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of victims were women or girls. The gender of the remaining 5% percent could not be identified from written records examined by the researchers.
- There are currently 153 religious communities and congregations in Switzerland, but compared to diocesan practices, almost no archival records of allegations of abuse - with few exceptions – were found.
- The research team lists three “social contexts” where abuse occurred: (1) pastoral care; (2) the area of the social, charitable and educational activities of the Church; and, (3) religious orders and similar forms of religious life. The areas in which pastoral care is exercised – particularly confessions, altar serving and catechesis – were by far the most frequent environments for abuse, accounting for more than 50% of the cases identified. The Report lists religious houses, schools, colleges and similar Catholic institutions as the second most frequent locations of abuse incidents, at 30%.
- The researchers noted at least one change for the better in the period after the turn of the century: the Swiss Bishops' Conference has since issued guidelines for dealing with and preventing cases of sexual abuse, establishing diocesan committees of experts to deal with reported cases. However, according to the researchers, these committees still differ greatly in their working methods and some lack professionalism.
- This Report reflects the fact that topics that were not on the agenda five or 10 years ago have recently moved to the centre of focus. These include the question of what constitutes spiritual abuse and what role it plays in sexual violence.
- In addition, attention is given to the abuse of vulnerable adults.
- Requests for information from the Apostolic Nuncio received a negative response, because of concerns about the diplomatic protection of the Nunciature. This would appear to contradict Pope Francis' commitment to openness and transparency.