

Press Release – Bishop’s Pastoral Letter September 2012

Following the recent publication of the findings of a Review conducted in the Diocese of Cork and Ross by the National Board for Safeguarding Children, I again offer my apologies to all who have suffered as the result of abuse by Church personnel. No apology, no gesture of repentance or sorrow can ever make up for the suffering caused to children and their families. I pray that the Lord’s healing power will give them peace. Every single victim has been offered access to counselling support and therapy offered by the Diocese.

The purpose of the Review was to confirm that the Diocese manages all complaints in accordance with the guidelines issued by the National Board. The Board confirms that there was full cooperation and information-sharing with the Gardai and HSE and that they have been notified *‘of all concerns, complaints and allegations against priests that are known to the Diocese of Cork and Ross’*. Garda vetting applications have also been processed for all priests of the Diocese as well as many lay people who are involved in Church activities. I welcome the positive outcome to this report and its recommendations which will further enhance our safeguarding service. The review will be a source of assurance to the people of the Diocese and a confirmation that the Diocese is taking its obligations in relation to child protection very seriously.

Guaranteeing the safety of children is relentless and ongoing. To do this, we need a strong system of inspection and oversight and demonstrative evidence that the guidelines are being implemented correctly. I commend the National Board for its determination to fulfil the mandate given to it of devising and overseeing the implementation of best practice in safeguarding children throughout the Church. These structures of review and accountability have been proven to work very effectively.

Structures have been put in place to reach out to every corner of the Diocese so that people will have full and adequate information on the safeguarding of children and on what actions to take if concerns arise in relation to child abuse by priests or church personnel. Indeed, our concern for the safety of children is underpinned by the presence in every parish of child safeguarding representatives. All have undergone training in order to fulfil their safeguarding roles in the church. I thank the many people involved in our safeguarding service whose work ensures that all children in the Diocese are respected and safeguarded. Admittedly, safeguarding and child protection is everybody’s business. We must all do what we can to make the church and society safe for children.

The priest is in a very special position of trust and the people expect the highest standards of behaviour from those in whom such trust is reposed. It is our hope that these crimes of a small number of priests will not invalidate the good work of so many hard working priests in Ireland. The vast majority of priests are good men who continue to do their job to the best of their ability and, needless to say, are demoralised by the revelations. The task of repairing the damage and restoring trust and building hope lies with each one of us priests working hard through our priestly ministry.

For the Christian community, prayer is an essential part of the journey to healing and renewal. People who suffered have told me at prayer services how much they value the prayers that are offered for them by individuals and parish communities. I am asking you to continue the prayers.

My hope is that all our efforts will result in making the Church a safer place for children. We look forward with hope, trying to ensure that this will never happen again.

Finally, if there are any people who have suffered in this way, I again invite them to contact me (021-4301717) so that everything possible can be done to help them. Alternatively, I invite them to contact 'Towards Healing', a counselling service which assists those who are victims of child abuse. Their telephone number is Freephone 1-800-30-34-16.

Praying God's blessing on you at this time,

I remain,
Yours sincerely in Christ,

+John Buckley,
Bishop of Cork and Ross.