



NEWSLETTER



POPE FRANCIS IN IRELAND

Pope Francis brought a message of repentance, hope and healing when he came here for the World Meeting of Families in August, 2018. He met with eight survivors of abuse. Scheduled to last 30 minutes, the meeting went on for an hour and a half. Those who attended spoke afterwards of how Pope Francis had listened intently to what they had to say, asked them about their experiences and seemed to learn from what they told him. He promised to reflect on what they had said to him and to speak about it at Mass the following day in the Phoenix Park.

This is what Pope Francis said during the penitential rite:

Yesterday I met with eight persons who are survivors of the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience and sexual abuse. In reflecting on what they told me, I wish to implore the Lord's mercy for these crimes and to ask forgiveness for them.

We ask forgiveness for the cases of abuse in Ireland, the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience and sexual abuse on the part of representatives of the Church. In a special way we ask forgiveness for all those abuses that took place in different kinds of institutions directed by men and women religious and

other members of the Church. We ask forgiveness for cases in which minors were exploited for their labour.

We ask forgiveness for all times when, as a Church, we did not offer to the survivors of any type of abuse compassion and the pursuit of justice and truth by concrete actions. We ask forgiveness.

We ask forgiveness for some members of the hierarchy who took no responsibility for these painful situations and kept silent. We ask forgiveness.

We ask forgiveness for those children who were taken away from their mothers and all those times when so many single mothers who tried to find their children that had been taken away, or those children who tried to find their mothers, were told that this was a mortal sin. It is not a mortal sin; it is the fourth commandment! We ask forgiveness.

May the Lord preserve and increase this sense of shame and repentance, and grant us the strength to ensure that it never happens again and that justice is done. Amen.

2018: A CHALLENGING YEAR

In the months leading up to the World Meeting of Families a number of events occurred to bring the issue of abuse within the Church to the fore. The revelations contained in the Grand Jury Report on Pennsylvania was one such. What was disclosed was truly shocking. Pope Francis, in his letter to the People of God, referred to some of the abuses of children described in the report as atrocities. Closer to home there were continual reminders of our troubled and shameful past. It was difficult, at times, not to give in to the temptation to despair, to believe that nothing we say or do makes any difference and the situation with regard to the abuse of children in the Church is as bad as it ever was. This, however, would be a mistake.

The Church in Dublin, in Ireland and in those parts of the world that have faced up to the reality of abuse in the Church, is a safer place for children and the measures taken

to protect children have made a positive impact. The report of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury acknowledged that the situation in the U.S. improved after 2002. It was in that year that the American bishops agreed a set of norms relating to the protection of children. These are very similar to our own norms and include such things as cooperating with the civil authorities, ensuring those who have offended against children do not continue to minister in the Church, and putting in place policies and practices to create and maintain safe environments for children involved in Church activities.

Getting volunteers vetted, ensuring adequate supervision ratios for children's activities and undertaking safeguarding training can seem burdensome at times but these measures are effective. We know what needs to be done. We have to keep on doing it.

VULNERABLE ADULTS

During 2019, we will be finalising the diocesan vulnerable adult policy and providing training on safeguarding vulnerable adults. Loraine Byrne joined the team as our Safeguarding Officer for vulnerable adults in June 2018. Loraine is a qualified social worker who previously worked with Crosscare, the diocesan social care agency, for nine years. We were delighted when Loraine accepted an offer of a position with the CSPS team, following her return from living abroad with her family for a number of years.

The challenges of safeguarding vulnerable adults differ somewhat from those of safeguarding children. Though we recognise four forms of child abuse: neglect and physical, emotional and sexual abuse, public attention has tended to focus on the last of these. Sadly, recent UK research would indicate a significant problem with the sexual abuse of older people living in care homes. However, there are categories of abuse of vulnerable adults that do not apply to children. Financial abuse is one such. As we develop our practice guidance, we will have to consider situations such as visiting older, frail parishioners in their own home. As it



Loraine Byrne, Safeguarding Officer

is many organisations such as the Vincent de Paul Society and the Legion of Mary insist that their members do visitation in pairs. These and other important issues will be considered by our new Safeguarding Officer. Our new policy will be developed in consultation with those working with vulnerable adults and with the civil authorities.

Since 2016 we have had an interim vulnerable adult policy and this will be completed and published this year. A difficulty in writing such a policy is that there is no agreed definition of a vulnerable adult and, indeed, no consensus on the use of the term. Some argue for referring to 'adults at risk of abuse' as an alternative to 'vulnerable adult'. However, Safeguarding Ireland, a not-for-profit organisation set up with government and HSE support uses the term 'vulnerable

adult' and it was used in a recent public information campaign so we are retaining use of the term, at least until we have a nationally agreed alternative.

In a general way we think of adults with Down syndrome and dementia as vulnerable adults. However, there are degrees of vulnerability and one of the many challenges of working in this area is to find a balance between protecting people from harm and respecting their personal autonomy.

It is likely that we will need to draw up some good practice guidelines for those generally considered vulnerable, such as older people living alone. When it comes to dealing with allegations of abuse, however, we will need greater clarity in relation to whether a person fits the definition of a vulnerable adult. This centres around the issue of capacity to make decisions. For example, asking a person to whom one is ministering for money may be inappropriate and a breach of professional boundaries. However, to take or accept money from a person who is not capable of making an informed decision about the use of their money is a form of abuse and may well be criminal.

Loraine and the rest of the team at CSPS will be getting to grips with issues such as these over the coming months so as to be able to offer training, advice and guidance to those working in our parishes and diocesan agencies.

PARISH AUDITS

Every year the Diocese is required to report to the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) on the steps taken to ensure implementation of Church safeguarding policies in the parishes of the Diocese. In order to complete this report, we need information on the situation in the parishes. Accordingly, audit forms were distributed to all parishes in January with a completion date of the end of March. Your cooperation in this matter is very much appreciated. If you have any difficulties or questions please feel free to contact Gary Kehoe on 086 0841734.

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