

5 September 2012

## **Limerick Diocese welcomes Child Safeguarding report and urges anybody who has been abused to come forward**

- ***NBSCCI report finds that 44 out of 48 criteria fully met in Diocese, with remaining four partially met***
- **Most striking aspect for reviewers was the ‘competence of personnel involved in both case management and safeguarding in Limerick’**

The Diocese of Limerick has today published the review by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCI) of the Safeguarding Practice in the diocese and welcomes its findings.

The report – one of seven such reports published today in relation to four dioceses and three congregations - follows a full review in March of this year of case-files in the Diocese as well as interviews with key personnel involved in safeguarding children.

The review of child safeguarding policy by the NBSCCI was initiated at the request of Diocesan Administrator Fr Tony Mullins and its aims were to determine if current safeguarding practice complies with the standards set out by the NBSCCI and if all known allegations and concerns have been dealt with appropriately.

The audit dealt with complaints received from 1975 to the present. Some complaints refer back to the 1940s. Since 1940 over 500 hundred priests ministered in the Diocese; 26 of these were the subject of complaints (18 were priests of the Limerick Diocese).

The safeguarding practices in the Diocese were assessed against seven national standards and 48 criteria. The Report found that 44 out of 48 criteria have been fully met, the remaining four are partially met. All allegations received by the Diocese have been reported to the statutory authorities.

The review is one of the key developments in an ongoing process of enhancing child safeguarding standards in the diocese, initiated by Bishop Donal Murray following his appointment in 1996 and the introduction of the first Church guidelines. Responding to the report Fr Mullins said that the

Limerick Diocesan Office | Social Service Centre | Henry Street | Limerick

Tel: (061) 315 856 | Fax: (061) 310 186 | Email: [paul@ldo.ie](mailto:paul@ldo.ie)

[www.limerickdiocese.org](http://www.limerickdiocese.org)

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immediate thoughts of the Diocese and wider Catholic Church in Ireland on its publication today must be with all victims of clerical abuse, anywhere:

“Our first thoughts on the publication of reports must be with all victims of clerical abuse. Abuse of children is reprehensible and there are no words that can adequately express the depth of pain endured by people who have been sexually abused.

“The Catholic community has been profoundly affected by the many disclosures of abuse in recent years by religious personnel and moreover by the enormous damage that this caused to the lives of children. Failure to respond to concerns regarding abuse is unacceptable and the Church must continue to apologise again and again for this.

“While our thoughts and prayers are today with the survivors of abuse, we would also reiterate the need for anyone who is aware of abuse perpetrated by clergy to come forward and notify us and the civil authorities immediately. At our end, we have a dedicated phone-line (087 3233564) to handle any complaints and are fully confident, as supported by this report, that the proper processes are in place to deal with any complaints sensitively and with certainty of prompt referral to statutory authorities.”

Fr Mullins said that while the reviewers have been satisfied with the Limerick Diocese’s child safeguarding standards today, historical practices in the Diocese prior to Bishop Murray’s appointment were not adequate and, in one case, potentially dangerous. “We have done, and will continue to do, all we possibly can to ensure current child safeguarding standards are maintained in order to prevent such abuse from happening in the future,” he said.

The 30 page report is the most comprehensive review ever undertaken into child safeguarding practices in the Limerick Diocese. It measures the practices in the Diocese under seven standards and 48 criteria under those seven standards. The four ‘partially met’ criteria relate to the need for further development of policies regarding: Whistle blowing, IT Policy, Intimate Care and Communications.

Said Fr Mullins: “All four of these are addressed in our revised policy and procedures, as acknowledged in the Review. Detail of these will be published before the end of this year following approval by the NBSCCCI. In addition, the report includes 12 recommendations as to how we can further enhance our practices. A number of these are already in place and we expect to have the remainder implemented by early next year.

“Reports such as this are ultimately focussed on ensuring the best possible child safeguarding standards we already have in place, most immediately by advancing the ‘partially’ met criteria to ‘fully met’ and implementing all recommendations. We are reassured by many findings in the report,

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not least that the reviewers described as the ‘most striking aspect’ of their review the ‘competence of personnel involved in both case management and safeguarding’.

The Report cites the “competence and enthusiasm of the trainers in the Diocese”. To that end over 800 people (clergy, religious, lay employees and volunteers) have attended information sessions and training on Safeguarding Children in the Diocese since 2004. At least 200 of these people have had specific safeguarding roles or work exclusively with young people in youth ministry.

“The report also notes that our ongoing interagency meetings, which focus on safeguarding children and management of risk and which were initiated by Bishop Murray on his appointment, are the first that the national board has seen working so successfully.”

Fr Mullins noted that despite the reviewers’ findings that a vacuum was created by Bishop Murray’s departure, they also acknowledge that the business of safeguarding children remains a central focus for us in the Diocese.

Low morale of priests, due in part to scandals of the last few years at a national level, was also an issue that emerged in the report. “While the report acknowledges that priests remain committed to their safeguarding work, there is a great need to restore that confidence. The continued delivery of the highest child safeguarding standards in the diocese will help that process,” he continued.

“The report would suggest that we are currently in keeping with those standards in the Diocese as our policies and practices are sound, we have good people in place and we have an excellent and transparent relationship with the State authorities.”

## Ends

### **Limerick Safeguarding and Child Protection contact information**

Anyone with a child protection concern may contact:

An Garda Síochána, Henry St. Limerick 061-21 24 00;  
HSE, Ballycummin Ave, Raheen Business Park, Limerick 061-48 27 92 (Office Hours);  
Diocesan Designated Person, Mr Ger Crowley 087-32 33 564 (Dedicated Mobile) Email: [ger@ldo.ie](mailto:ger@ldo.ie)  
Postal correspondence: Ger Crowley Safeguarding Children Service,  
Limerick Diocesan Office, Social Service Centre, Henry Street, Limerick

For further information including the Review please see:  
<http://www.limerickdiocese.org/services/safeguarding-children-s-service.html>

### **Support/Counselling**

**Towards Healing** is an organisation which provides telephone counselling and a counselling and psychotherapy referral service for people who have suffered physical, emotional or sexual abuse

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when they were children, by persons working for the Catholic Church in Ireland. The Limerick Diocese supports the work of the Towards Healing service. The HELPLINE can be contacted by calling:

- FREEPHONE 1800 - 303416 from ANYWHERE IN IRELAND
- ON 0800 - 0963315 from NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE U.K.

Or visit their website [www.towardshealing.ie](http://www.towardshealing.ie)

**The HSE National Counselling Service (NCS)** is a professional, confidential counselling and psychotherapy service available free of charge in all regions of the Health Services Executive. Our client group are adults who have experienced trauma and abuse in childhood with priority given to adult survivors of institutional abuse in Ireland. The Limerick service is based at 'Ré Nua', 6 Mount Vincent Terrace, O'Connell Avenue, Limerick, phone number 061 411900, or Free phone 1800 234 115. Further information is available on <http://www.hse-ncs.ie/en/>

**Limerick Social Service Council:** offers a free confidential counselling service for individuals and families to support them in their personal growth. Counselling is provided by trained Counsellors and Family Therapists, at the Centre in Henry Street and an outreach service is also in Kilmallock, Newcastle West, Abbeyfeale and Rathkeale. For further information please contact 061-314111 / 314213, [info@lssc.ie](mailto:info@lssc.ie) / <http://www.lssc.ie/>

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