

Diocese of Limerick

Safeguarding Newsletter

Winter 2021

SAFEGUARDING ADULTS WHO MAY BE VULNERABLE

Letter from Bishop Leahy

The Church has a long tradition of caring for the vulnerable in society. Many Religious Congregations were established to care for the elderly, the sick, the vulnerable and the poor. We should be proud of what is good in that tradition. However, we also need to learn from the times when people and services were not person centred in their approach and people were not treated with respect and dignity.

There has been a growing awareness over the past 30 years regarding child safeguarding. The Church has taken significant steps in ensuring the safety of children in their involvement with church activities.

In recent years' society has begun to give attention to safeguarding adults who may be vulnerable to abuse. In May 2019 Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Letter 'Vos Estis Lux Mundi'. This stresses the importance of protecting vulnerable people and the need to put in place 'concrete and effective' actions to achieve this. In 2020 the Diocese of Limerick adopted an Adult Safeguarding Policy. I would encourage you to visit our Diocesan Safeguarding Website and familiarise yourself with the Policy and the guidance it provides.

In the past we learned about safeguarding through our failures, let's ensure this won't be necessary again in relation to adults who may be vulnerable.

The same principles that were adopted in addressing child safeguarding apply to protecting adults who may be vulnerable. In planning our services and ministries we must consider risks of harm and plan to mitigate these risks. We must be open to the possibility of harm occurring and seek help and advice.

The Gospels are full of positive encounters between Jesus and those who for one reason or other were vulnerable. In Ireland we have an expression in which a person who is vulnerable is seen as closer to God than others. (Duine le Dia). Jesus emphasised the importance of protecting the child and the adults who may be vulnerable but he also stressed the importance of seeing them as people with something to offer the wider community. We are all part of the Body of Christ each with our own special gifts.

As well as ensuring that members of our community are protected from harm, we need also to ensure that they are enabled to participate fully in the kingdom of heaven here on earth. We need to listen to them and learn from them. As we move on the journey of safeguarding people who may be vulnerable, let us do so in an inclusive and enabling manner. A key part of safeguarding is ensuring that those who may be vulnerable are given opportunities to have their voice heard and that they are supported in engaging in society.

Let us all commit to encouraging not only children but also adults who may be vulnerable to participate actively and safely in the life of our Church and community.

With kind regards,

✠ Brendan Leahy Bishop of Limerick



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Adult Safeguarding Policy

This Diocese's Adult Safeguarding Policy developed with the other Dioceses in the province of Cashel informs our respectful relationships with people we interact with in the course of ministry for or on behalf of the Diocese/Parish. It describes how to recognise and respond to concerns that an adult who may be vulnerable has been abused, is being abused or is at risk of abuse.

What must we as a diocese do to ensure that adults are properly protected?

- Ensure that safe arrangements are in place in all areas of relevant ministry
- Ensure that people involved in ministry with adults who may be vulnerable are safely selected and trained
- Avoid any behaviour that constitutes abuse or could reasonably be interpreted as abuse, and complying with the code of behaviour
- Ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained in relationships with people to whom we minister
- Contribute to a culture of safeguarding by being transparent and accountable in our practices and by calling others to account for their actions in a constructive and respectful manner
- Recognise that there may be people who are at risk in their families or communities and know how to respond when we believe that they may have been abused or are at risk of abuse.

What is meant by the term "adult who may be vulnerable"?

In the Diocese's Adult Safeguarding Policy an adult is deemed to be vulnerable if he/she lacks or has seriously impaired capacity either to make informed decisions or to defend him or herself from harm. An adult's risk of abuse through, for example, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their personal characteristics and/or their life circumstances

Included in this are an adult who

- a) is suffering from a disorder of the mind, whether as a result of mental illness or dementia,
- b) has an intellectual disability,
- c) is suffering from a physical impairment, whether as a result of injury, illness or age, or
- d) has a physical disability, which is of such a nature or degree
 - (i) as to restrict the capacity of the person to guard himself or herself against harm by another person, or
 - (ii) that results in the person requiring assistance with the activities of daily living including dressing, eating, walking, washing and bathing.



Abuse Concerns

How might I come across a concern of abuse?

- The adult may disclose to you
- Someone else may tell you of their concerns
- You may see something that causes you concern:
 - oThe adult may show some signs of physical injury for which there does not appear to be a satisfactory or credible explanation
 - oDemeanour/behaviour may lead you to suspect abuse or neglect.
 - oThe behaviour of a person close to the adult makes you feel uncomfortable

What do I do if I have a concern but am unsure if an adult may be vulnerable?

You should consult with the Diocesan Designated Liaison Person (DLP) or the HSE Safeguarding & Protection Team. While the HSE has explicit responsibility for people availing of services it provides or funds, people may also report or discuss other adult safeguarding concerns with the HSE Safeguarding & Protection Teams.

Church personnel may be concerned regarding a person's capacity to give consent being compromised but are not qualified to make this determination. Both the DLP and HSE Safeguarding & Protection Team can assist you if you have concerns about the capacity of an adult, who may be vulnerable, to give consent. The disclosure of information, without consent, by reporting to an appropriate person may be necessary in situations where there is a risk to safety or in order to prevent a crime



What should I do if I come across a concern of abuse?

A disclosure can raise anxiety and confusion for those who receive the information. However, it is very important that you know how to respond appropriately. Such information is sensitive, and it may have taken a lot of courage for the person to reach the stage of disclosing. Your role is to pass it on to the DLP who will assess the situation. You always have the right to contact the statutory authorities yourself directly. The following are guidelines for dealing with disclosure, which all Church personal should follow

Do

- STAY CALM
- LISTEN TO WHAT THE ADULT WHO MAY BE VULNERABLE IS TELLING YOU
- EXPRESS CONCERN AND REGRET ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED
- REASSURE THE ADULT THAT THEY HAVE DONE THE RIGHT THING IN TELLING YOU
- RECORD - ENSURE YOU WRITE DOWN THE INFORMATION DISCLOSED AS TOLD TO YOU
- TELL THEM YOU WILL SEEK ADVICE FROM THE DLP AND TALK TO THEM AGAIN

Don't

- PANIC
- STOP SOMEONE FROM DISCLOSING TO YOU
- IGNORE: IT IS IMPORTANT THAT CONCERNS REGARDING ABUSE ARE NEVER IGNORED
- ASK THE PERSON LEADING QUESTIONS OR PRESS FOR MORE DETAILS. YOU SHOULD ALLOW THE PERSON TO FREELY RECALL EVENTS
- INVESTIGATE
YOU MUST NEVER TRY TO INVESTIGATE INCIDENTS OF ABUSE YOURSELF OR
CONFRONT THE PERSON YOU THINK IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ABUSE
- PROMISE TO KEEP SECRETS. ALTHOUGH YOU SHOULD REASSURE THE PERSON THAT ANY ISSUE WILL BE DEALT WITH SENSITIVELY AND DISCUSSED ONLY WITH THOSE WHO NEED TO KNOW.
- GOSSIP ABOUT THE DISCLOSURE OR SPEAK WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO LEGITIMATE NEED TO KNOW
- DECIDE NOT TO REPORT, FROM FEAR OF GETTING IT WRONG OR DAMAGING THE REPUTATION OF A COLLEAGUE

Ministry to the Vulnerable

If Church personnel are involved in ministry with a person who may be vulnerable, this is their primary relationship. Any other subsequent forms of relationships with the person who may be vulnerable, which may impair judgement, or have the potential to exploit or appear to exploit should be avoided.

Do Ensure

- People are treated with dignity and respect
- Physical contact is minimised and is not secretive.
- Communication difficulties and diversity of beliefs and practices are respected
- Appropriate boundaries are maintained
- The right to personal privacy is respected
- Avoid prolonged one to one contact particularly in “closed” settings

Never

- Behave disrespectfully
- Abuse or exploit in behaviour or communication
- Shame, humiliate or belittle
- Discriminate
- Involve yourself in financial affairs or make/accept loans or gifts of more than token value
- Behave in a sexually exploitative manner
- Provide intimate or personal care
- Ignore or fail to report disclosures or evidence of abuse
- Arrange activities without assessing risk of harm and ensuring such risk is mitigated
- Inappropriately use social media
- Gossip about personal and sensitive information
- Involve yourself in matters that are beyond their competence

Training

The Diocese of Limerick offers safeguarding information training for those engaged with children, young people and adults who may be vulnerable. If any groups or individuals would like to attend safeguarding training organised by the diocese contact Finola Downes at 061- 35000 or by email at finola.downes@limerickdiocese.org

Useful Contacts

Designated Liaison Person (Limerick Diocese)

Mr. Ger Crowley,
Director of Safeguarding
Limerick Diocesan Centre
St Munchin's
Corbally
Limerick

Tel: 061-350000
Mobile: 087-3233564
Email: ger.crowley@limerickdiocese.org

HSE Safeguarding and Protection Team (Mid-West)

Ms. Maggie McNally
Tyone Health Centre,
Nenagh
Co Tipperary.
Tel: 067/46470.

HSE Information Line:

Monday to Saturday, 8am-8pm
Call Save: 1850 24 1850
Email: info@hse.ie

Diocesan Safeguarding Website:

<https://www.limerickdiocesessafeguarding.com/>

Key Messages

- We have learned that even services designed to provide care for children and adults who may be vulnerable can at times cause neglect and harm.
- We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past and always rely on our instincts and personal judgement.
- If a person, on behalf of a parish, has more than incidental involvement with a child or an adult who may be vulnerable they must be recruited safely (Volunteer Form) and vetted. They must also be provided with information and training appropriate to their role and comply with a Code of Conduct.
- If a parish is providing a service or ministry to children or adults who may be vulnerable it must formally assess any risks arising and take action to mitigate these risks (support available from the Safeguarding Service).
- If a concern of abuse or neglect concerning church personnel or arising while involved in an area of ministry arises it must not be ignored and must be reported to the Diocesan Director of Safeguarding.



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