

Communicating the Church`s message on Safeguarding Children

(c.f. Resource R)

Introduction

Communication is an essential element of the Church`s mission, which centres on the proclamation of the Gospel. The communicating of effective safeguarding measures reflects this task in two ways: promoting the inherent dignity of every person and advocating justice and fairness in serving the needs of the community.

This policy statement sets out the processes put in place to disseminate our child safeguarding policy and procedures to Church personnel, parishioners and external agencies. It is consistent with Standard 5 of *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* – Communicating the Church`s safeguarding message. This diocesan policy reflects a commitment to openness, in a manner which respects the privacy and reputation of all persons who are affected by matters pertaining to the abuse of children. Where safeguarding children concerns arise, information must be shared on a “need to know” basis in the best interests of the child. Sharing information in this regard is not a breach of confidentiality.

Target Groups

The main target groups with which the Diocese needs to communicate regarding its safeguarding children policy and procedures are:

- Church personnel – volunteers, staff and clergy
- Children, and their parents or carers, involved in Church based activities.*
- Parishioners
- The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSC), the Health Service Executive (HSE) and An Garda Siochana (GS)
- Relevant external agencies, the media and the general public.

Safeguarding messages

What we mean by safeguarding

- Information of the safeguarding policy and procedures of the Diocese of Meath
- Contact details of those with safeguarding responsibilities
- Children and their parents/carers:
 - How to keep safe
 - What to do if you, or someone you know is being harmed
 - Sources of advice and support
 - Role of agencies involved in safeguarding
 - How the process works
- Church personnel
- Good practice and how to deliver it
- Safe recruitment

**We recognise the need to improve communication and consultation with disabled children and their parents/carers and aim to increase competence and confidence among Church personnel in doing so through raising awareness and use of a range of communication tools.*

Dealing with allegations
Accessing help and advice
Availability of training
Contact details for relevant persons/agencies

Methods

The Diocese currently uses, and will continue to use, the following methods of communication and will, in addition, in consultation with the NBSC, explore/develop child friendly methods of communication. The diversity of communities and how best to reach those (eg whose first language is not English; disabled people) will also be considered.

Safeguarding website

The website www.meathsafeguarding.ie is the principal means of communicating/accessing information about the diocesan policy and procedures for safeguarding children involved in church related activities.

The following types of information may be found on the website:

- The policy document and resource material, including e.g. forms, may be downloaded from this site.
- New or revised material will be added as it becomes available and personnel will be advised of this
- The annual report on safeguarding in the Diocese
- The annual training plan
- Safeguarding newsletters

Newsletter

Regular newsletters will cover general information about safeguarding activity; developments in safeguarding policy and procedures; notices for inclusion in parish bulletins. They will include examples of good safeguarding practice, from time to time, and encourage evidence based practice informed by research. The newsletter will be published on the website and also distributed electronically to Parish Safeguarding Representatives; Safeguarding Resource Team; Clergy; Safeguarding related committees.

Printed material

- Copies of the diocesan safeguarding handbook available in every parish
- Poster for display in each church carrying the safeguarding policy statement and contact details for reporting child protection concerns.
- Reports e.g. annual report on safeguarding in the diocese

Safeguarding Support Team

The members of the Support Team will prepare and publicise an annual training plan which will incorporate information on

- Training in safeguarding for PSR and Clergy
- Information sessions for priests, PSR, volunteers
- Attendance at meetings e.g. Deanery meetings, meetings with PSR, to provide updates and advice

Media relations

In order to promote and develop a positive understanding of safeguarding activity in the Diocese among the media and general public, press releases will accompany events such as launch of reports. As appropriate, and as determined by the Communications Officer in consultation with the Bishop, other means of communication may be used to publish the policies and procedures of the Diocese of Meath concerning the safeguarding of children.

Responsibility for implementing this policy

The Diocesan Safeguarding Children Committee has the responsibility of managing all aspects of policy development at diocesan and parish level. Responsibility for the observance of this policy belongs to the Diocesan Communications Officer. Only those persons designated by the Bishop may speak on his behalf and on behalf of the Diocese of Meath. Any statements, observations, or opinions offered by another, not designated as a diocesan spokesperson, are to be understood as personal or private remarks, not necessarily reflecting an official communication of the diocese or any of its parishes, institutions or agencies. The PSR; members of the Safeguarding Resource Team; Designated Person; Authorised Signatory; Activity Leaders, all have certain responsibilities in relation to communicating the safeguarding message which are outlined in their role descriptions. Within each parish the overall responsibility for implementing this policy, as in all aspects of safeguarding children involved in Church related activities, remains with the Parish Priest.

Monitoring and review of this policy

In accordance with the requirements of the NBSC, the implementation of this communications policy will be considered by the Safeguarding Committee and reported on in the context of the annual diocesan report on safeguarding activities. It will be reviewed biannually in the context of the review of the Action Plan for Implementation and Review of Safeguarding Policy in the Diocese of Meath.

Communication is a two way process so consideration will be given to developing consultation and feedback processes with the target groups, in order to ensure that their needs in this area are met and to improve practice.

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