

Parish Safeguarding Committee – Report delivered to the parish by Committee Member at all masses 8th November 2014

One of the functions of the parish safeguarding committee is to update the parish on an annual basis on its purpose and to remind the parish of the role we all play in keeping children and vulnerable adults safe.

The Diocese of Down and Connor under the leadership of Bishop Noel Treanor has dedicated much time, effort and resources into learning lessons from the past and developing a culture where children are seen & heard, respected and protected. As a result policies have been developed which underpins best practice, in line with statutory bodies, and the National Board for Safeguarding Children based in Maynooth.

As a parish we are directed by the Diocesan Safeguarding Office office to implement the policies & procedures of the Down & Connor Diocese regarding safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

This is a three point process which involves vetting & training, auditing and a yearly report to the diocesan office.

One of the roles of the parish safeguarding committee is to ensure that these policies are implemented and that there is adherence to the policies. This is the first step in trying to keep children and vulnerable adults within the parish safe.

No parish can work without the cooperation, good will and support from volunteers, and this parish is fortunate to have a large number of volunteers.

When individuals approach the parish office to volunteer a process begins where all volunteers or paid staff are vetted (police checked) through Access (NI). In addition to this the parish provides training in Best Practice procedures which is specific to children or vulnerable adults depending on their voluntary role. Volunteers are also required to provide character references.

No volunteer or staff member can commence their role prior to having a police check completed.

Since commencing this process in 2005 the parish has vetted 199 volunteers with 37 vetted specifically for taking the Eucharistic to vulnerable adults.

The second role of the parish safeguarding committee is to audit parish groups.

All groups that are organised within the parish that involve children are audited yearly to ensure there is compliance with all safeguarding policies. These groups include the children literature, Spred, both choirs, Eucharistic ministers, Sacristans, GIFT, Youth group, and the preschool play group.

Each group has an identified leader who meets with a parish safeguarding committee member yearly and verifies that all policies are adhered to.

The third role is the annual report.

In addition to this the parish safeguarding committee completes a detailed report for the diocesan office every October. This report looks at many aspects that could affect the child or vulnerable adult including the compliance to policy, code of conduct, training, allegations, the condition of building that children are using, data protection, process for visiting priests etc. There are twenty six different domains in total, and the parish must be compliant with all.

Currently in the parish we have two groups in their infancy, the GIFT programme and the Youth group. Both are designed to support and develop the Christian faith in young people; however both will require additional speakers from outside the parish in order to develop and grow. To ensure best practice all outside speakers must provide evidence that they have been vetted and received training prior to attending these groups.

In the case of an organisation or group who are not parish based and who wish to hire any of the parish facilities - they must be able to demonstrate, in written format, they comply with Safeguarding Policies and Procedures and have appropriate insurance for their activities.

While the parish's adherence to policies and procedures will reduce the risk of harm, it must be remembered that we all must play a role in protecting children and vulnerable adults.

Safeguarding is everyone's business.

It is easy to be critical of historical decisions, however in order that we do not repeat the past we must all take responsibility and ensure that the child and vulnerable adult is valued and protected within society.

In the main porch and in all parish buildings you will find a framed copy of details of who to contact should you have a concerns about a child.

It is important to note, that recognising child or vulnerable adult abuse is not easy – it will demand professional intervention to investigate and I would like to emphasise, it is not the responsibility of any clergy, staff, volunteer, or Committee member in the parish to decide if an action or behaviour is abuse or not. That is the role of the statutory authorities – police, social services or NSPCC.

The parish safeguarding committee is comprised of six members and includes the Parish priest – Father Boyle, and the following volunteers, Collette Fitzgerald (chair) Jayne McClenaghan, Mary Gately, Mary O'Boyle, Angela McNickle, Kevin McAuley & Julian Mc Gale.

Patricia McCann also provides a voluntary administrative support role to ensure we meet Data Protection guidelines.