

Diocesan Safeguarding Day, 2023

Letter from Archbishop Farrell

Sunday, 24th September, is Diocesan Safeguarding Sunday. This year we mark the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Child Safeguarding and Protection Service. The service was set up by Cardinal Connell, initially as the Child Protection Service, on the advice of the Diocesan Panel on Child Protection. An anniversary such as this provides an opportunity not only to look back and consider what has been done but also to look forward at what remains to be done and the challenges of the future.

It is possible to divide the history of the Service into two distinct ten year periods. For the first ten years the emphasis was very much on support for victim/survivors and ensuring that allegations of abuse against clerics were dealt with in accordance with both national child protection guidelines, *Children First*, and with the Church's own guidelines. This work, dealing with the consequences of the past, was accompanied by measures to improve the safety of children involved in church activities. However, it was only with the establishment of the diocesan Safeguarding Committee in 2013 that the work of safeguarding, the proactive work of creating and maintaining safe environments, initially for children and then also for vulnerable adults, came to have the same prominence as dealing with cases and supporting those who were harmed.

We have learned, then, that dealing with the consequences of the past vital though it remains, has to be accompanied by steps to ensure that what happened then is not happening now and will not happen in the future. That is part of the debt we owe to victims and survivors. Many of those who have disclosed abuse have given as their primary reason for doing so that they want to ensure that no child will ever again suffer as they did.

We have learned too that the lay faithful have taken this matter to heart and are determined to rid the Church of the scourge of clerical child abuse. A recent article in the Irish Times by columnist, Breda O'Brien, noted that there has been real progress in the Church, mostly due to an army of faithful lay volunteers and dogged persistence by campaigners. We owe a great debt to the campaigners, even if they sometimes tell us things we would rather not hear. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the campaigners. Also, I want to thank all of you who have attended training, implemented safeguarding practices in our parishes, served as parish safeguarding representatives and sat on our various committees at both parish and diocesan level.

We must look to the future with hope, including the hope that children can be brought back to the Church. We are more likely to succeed in doing so if we can convince their parents that the safety of their loved ones is our utmost concern. We need also a realistic understanding that threats to the safety of children can come from the most unexpected sources and that we can only protect them if we remain alert and vigilant.

Finally, I ask you to remember in your prayers all those who have suffered abuse.

+ Dermot Farrell