

Sunday 19th February 2023: Safeguarding Briefing (to be read out at Masses)

This briefing can be read out at Masses on the weekend of 18th and 19th February 2023 and may be read by the Parish Safeguarding Representative, Pastoral Council Chair or the Priest.

Good morning/afternoon/evening everyone. [My name is (name), and I am the Parish Safeguarding Representative for (name of Parish).] The purpose of my short address is to provide you with some information regarding the arrangements in place in the Archdiocese of Armagh to ensure children and young people are kept safe as they participate in the life of the Church.

We are all aware of the terrible wrong that was done to many innocent children in the past and I want to make you aware of what we have done, and continue to do, to make sure we do everything in our power to prevent anything like that happening again.

The Archdiocese of Armagh abides fully by the Safeguarding Policy and Guidance developed by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. Similar to all other Dioceses in Ireland we have a Diocesan Safeguarding Committee made up of suitably experienced lay people and clergy who oversee all of the safeguarding arrangements in the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese has a Safeguarding Office based in Armagh which is staffed by Aidan Gordon, Safeguarding Director, Eleanor Kelly, Safeguarding Training Officer, and Pierce Fox, Administrator.

Aidan Gordon and Eleanor Kelly also act as Designated Liaison Persons for Safeguarding concerns or complaints to ensure that all concerns or complaints are properly followed up and reported to the relevant civil authorities. Our Diocesan Office also ensures that all Clergy and anyone who has ministry or regular contact with children and young people are trained and vetted appropriately. This is repeated every 3 years.

In each of our Parishes we have one or more volunteer Parish Safeguarding Representatives whose role is to support the Parish Priest and Clergy in implementing all best practice in safeguarding policies and arrangements. For example, we collect references and vet all volunteers who are actively helping with children in any way in the Parish. We also require everyone to sign into the Sacristy when they are involved in Mass, other sacraments or prayer activities.

This year all of the arrangements for Safeguarding in the Archdiocese were reviewed by independent Reviewers appointed by the National Board. Our Review took place in March 2022 and if you wish to read that Review you can find it on archdioceseofarmagh.com/safeguarding. That Review concluded that the Archdiocese is meeting all of the 7 standards that make up the Policy of the National Board.

The Archdiocese has also put arrangements in place to provide support to anyone who has been abused by a member of the Church. Counselling arrangements are made through Towards Healing, a free and independent counselling service, and Towards Peace which is for those who wish to re-connect with their Church spiritually. The contact details for both organisations, who work on a confidential basis, are on the posters in the porches of the Church.

As a further part of our response to victims of abuse the Irish Bishops have designated the first Friday of Lent each year as a special day of prayer for victims and survivors of abuse in the Church. This year that day will happen next Friday 24th February. All Churches across Ireland are invited to offer prayers on that day for all those who have been impacted by the terrible sins and crimes of abuse in the Church. In many churches a Candle of Atonement will be lit and the Prayer of Atonement offered as we acknowledge the wrongs of the past and pray for the assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit as we work to ensure they cannot be repeated. This initiative and the prayer were instigated by a survivor of abuse in the Church and I ask that everyone remembers victims of abuse in their personal and family prayers, and most especially in this coming Friday.

If you would like to find out more about our safeguarding arrangements or have any particular any queries on the safeguarding arrangements in place please contact your local Parish Representatives. This can also be done by contacting the Diocesan Safeguarding Office where the staff will assist you with any advice or help you may need.

Thank you for listening.

Thank You.