



**Private and Confidential**

**Review of Safeguarding Practice  
In the Religious Congregation of  
Notre Dames des Missions (Our Lady of the Missions)  
undertaken by**

**The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the  
Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI)**

**This review was undertaken at the invitation of the Regional Superior  
Sr.Louise Shields**

**July 2014**

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## **Background**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) was asked by the Sponsoring Bodies, namely the Irish Episcopal Conference, the Conference of Religious of Ireland and the Irish Missionary Union, to undertake a comprehensive review of safeguarding practice within and across all the Church authorities on the island of Ireland.

The NBSCCCI is aware that some religious congregations have ministries that involve direct contact with children while others do not. In religious congregations that have direct involvement with children, reviews of child safeguarding have been undertaken by measuring their practice compliance against all seven Church standards. Where a religious congregation no longer has, or never had ministry involving children and has not received any allegation of sexual abuse the NBSCCCI reviews are conducted using a shorter procedure. The size, age and activity profiles of religious congregations can vary significantly and the NBSCCCI accepts that it is rational that the form of review be tailored to the profile of each Church authority, where the ministry with children is limited or non-existent. The procedure for assessment of safeguarding practice with such congregations is set out in the contents page of this report. The NBSCCCI welcomes that in order to have full openness, transparency and accountability, religious congregations that do not have ministry with children have made requests to have their safeguarding practice examined and commented upon.

The purpose of this review remains the same and it is to confirm that current safeguarding practice complies with the standards set down within the guidance issued by the Sponsoring Bodies in February 2009 *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* and that all known allegations and concerns had been appropriately dealt with. To achieve this task, safeguarding practice in each of these Church Authorities is reviewed through an examination of policy and procedures, and through interviews with key personnel involved both within and external to the religious congregation.

This report contains the findings of the *Review of Safeguarding Practice within the Congregation of the Notre Dames Des Missions* undertaken by the NBSCCCI in line with the request made to it by the Sponsoring Bodies. The findings of the review have been shared with a reference group before being submitted to the sisters of the Notre Dames Des Missions congregation, along with any recommendations arising from the findings.

The review is primarily based on policies and procedures made available, plus interviews with key personnel involved in the safeguarding process within the congregation,

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particularly in the services run by the congregation. The review terms of reference request that all allegations of sexual abuse are examined. In the Congregation of Notre Dames Des Missions, there have not been any allegations of this nature and which fall within the Terms of Reference of this review. There were, however two allegations in respect of physical abuse, which the reviewer was invited by the Provincial, to examine and comment upon in the report.

## **1. Introduction**

The Congregation of Notre Dames des Missions, also known as Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions is a Roman Catholic religious congregation of women. They were founded in Lyons, France in 1861 by Adele Euphrasie Barbier (1829- 1893). The congregation's presence is felt worldwide. The Congregation of Notre Dames des Missions reside in Italy, Australia, Bangladesh, British Isles, Canada, France, India, Kenya, countries in Latin America, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Senegal and Vietnam.<sup>[4]</sup>

The primary focus of the congregation is education of women and children. The congregation also provides health care services for the poor and underprivileged and organises medical camps, free schools with meals for the less privileged children

## **2. Past and Present Role with Children**

Three countries form the Province of the British Isles and Ireland: England, Ireland and Scotland, each of which has its own culture and tradition. However, many multi-cultural and ethnic groups have now established their homes within these countries.

Historically the Province of the British Isles and Ireland has always had sisters missioned to other countries and down the years this has taken them to: Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar (Burma) Philippines, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Canada, Peru, France, Kenya and Rome.

In the late 1960's a change began to take place from the traditional works of the congregation e.g. education in schools. In order to answer the needs of the times, sisters began to move into pastoral ministries, nursing and ministries among the marginalized. Projects with and for families were undertaken developed and then passed on to others and are continuing very successfully. As sisters retired from teaching, many with their vast experience, moved into pastoral work.

The congregation's current role with children has been greatly reduced due to the declining numbers of sisters and their age profile. The sisters who are active are now involved in parish work and voluntary work in schools for the preparation for sacraments. As part of this work they are also involved in visiting homes in the preparation for Baptisms and in the occasional preparation of individual children for the sacraments in their own home. The sisters view their calling as one of community and pastoral support.

There are 35 sisters living in Ireland, where traditionally they have been responsible for education, both in primary and secondary schools. In recent years their schools have been transferred to Trust, with religious sisters having no active involvement in teaching or school management.

### **3. Profile of Members:**

To-day there are 119 sisters living in 26 communities located in the above areas.

In all areas there are sisters involved in pastoral and parish ministries but particularly in Scotland, Northern Ireland, North West England and the Republic of Ireland.

The Congregation of Notre Dame des Missions in Ireland, the UK and Scotland form one province and the provincial house is situated in North London. The Provincial Sr. Louise Shields travelled from the UK for the purposes of the review which indicated to the reviewer a high level of interest on her part in the process of the review. There are 35 sisters of the congregation living on the island of Ireland with the largest number of sisters (19) living at the convent in Churchtown, Dublin which is where the more elderly sisters live and where there is a degree of care provided for those living there. There are also 4 student sisters from abroad who are in training and learning English living there. The congregation has in place a policy whereby visiting sisters must produce a letter, stating that they are of "good standing" from the provincial in their home country before taking up residence in the convents or houses in Ireland. Sisters who have returned from the missions or working abroad must also produce a letter of "good standing" from the provincial in the area from where they have come.

There are 2 sisters living in a nursing home in Castlebellingham and Longford and the other sisters live in community houses at Lucan, Wexford, Longford, Dundalk, Antrim. Two other locations in Leitrim and Belfast will be closing in the next number of months again due to declining numbers.

The average age of the sisters in Ireland is 80 with 16 sisters in their 80's. There are 10 sisters in their 90's, 7 in their 70's and 2 in their 60's. There are a very small number of

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sisters (5) in active ministry in the wider community. Those that do hold roles in pastoral work are all Garda vetted and vetted by Access NI (Northern Ireland).

The two sisters living in the community house in Lucan have attended Child Safeguarding training in spring 2014. All sisters from the congregation working in pastoral support work in the dioceses observe the child protection procedures of the relevant diocese and obey the procedures of the NBSCCCI's *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* to which the congregation signed up in 2010. A copy of that document and also a copy of the congregation's own policy are available in all convents in Ireland along with the name and phone number of the person responsible for child protection in Ireland.

#### **4. Policy and Procedures:**

The congregation has its own child protection document which incorporates the protection of vulnerable adults for the island of Ireland. It is entitled *Child and vulnerable Adults Protection Policy for sisters of our Lady of the Missions in Ireland*. It was produced in 2009 and was updated in 2010, 2012, and 2013 with the relevant updates to be read in conjunction with the original document. The policy document is a 9 page document which contains the essential elements as follows: a) prevention b) recruitment processes c) disclosure checkout d) safe environment and e) good practice. It has a section on guidelines for Child Protection Coordinator (CPC) and adequately covers what action should be taken in different scenarios of suspected child abuse including cases of suspected abuse "by a member of our religious congregation". The policy notes that in all but emergency situations referral to statutory authorities should be carried out by the CPC before the end of the day. In the case of an emergency situation, immediate referral to An Garda Síochána or the PSNI is required.

Given their age profile and limited ministry, (added to the fact that where they do have ministry, which is within parish settings, they follow the policy and procedures of the diocese within which they minister) the NBSCCCI is satisfied with the extent of the congregations own policy document.

The congregation has an international website with reference to the mission in each country. There is no reference to child safeguarding, or the congregation's policy and procedures. The NBSCCCI would recommend that this is reviewed and that both the policy and reporting requirements with reference to the designated person and the statutory authorities is placed on the website so that any future complainant is aware of the policy of the congregation and how to make a complaint.

### **5. Safeguarding Structure:**

The congregation has a Provincial Leader who has overall responsibility for Safeguarding. To support her, the congregation has appointed a Safeguarding Co-Ordinator who also carries designated liaison person responsibilities.

The reviewer met both these sisters during the period of fieldwork. The assessment of the reviewer was that the designated person has developed good knowledge in the area of safeguarding procedures. She is also the person with responsibility for coordination of training.

### **6. Management of Allegations**

The congregation has not received any allegations of child sexual abuse against any sister either past or present.

They have received two allegations of physical abuse against one sister who taught in school. While allegations of physical abuse fall outside the terms of Reference of this review, in the interests of transparency, the Provincial invited the reviewer to review the file relating to these two allegations.

The two incidents were alleged to have taken place in January and April of the same year when the sister was taking a small group of children. It was alleged that Sister X slapped one of the children on the back of the hand with her hand. The sister involved stepped aside from school work while investigations were going on and the outcome was that there appeared to be no case to answer. It is interesting to note, that it was not until this second allegation that the Sister became aware of a previous similar allegation made to the school. It is further worthy of note that the school did not report either allegation to the civil authorities, but at the insistence of the respondent Sister and the designated person within Notre Dame, all information was passed to the civil authorities and the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church. In the assessment of the NBSCCCI all appropriate steps were taken by the Congregation. The Garda investigation concluded with no further action and the Sister was invited to return to the school on completion of the civil authorities' investigations, she declined the offer.

The management of this one case indicates a complete awareness of the responsibilities and obligations to report all levels of safeguarding allegations to the authorities, by the congregation. The approach adopted by the designated person and the leadership team in the management of safeguarding allegations is commendable.

As part of the review contact was made with An Garda Siochana and with TUSLA.

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An Garda Siochana advised that they are satisfied that the congregation managed the allegation they had well, that they reported it in a timely manner to them and that they do not have any concerns about this allegation or its management by the Sisters.

The representative from TUSLA stated *"This female Religious Order has been categorised as Category 2 meaning there have been no child sexual abuse allegations against members and those whose ministry does involve children in Ireland. The Designated Person did indicate that an allegation of physical abuse was made against a current member. Reporting of the allegation by the Sisters of Notre Dames Des Missions to the relevant authorities was completed. As this audit is concerned with child sexual abuse allegations this allegation will not be included in our work. Of the few Sisters in ministry they abide by the relevant Child Protection policies in place by the Diocese/ school. We have yet to review the Sisters of Notre Dames Des Missions Child Protection policy in place. In the meantime we have no concerns about this Religious Order"*.

The reviewer is satisfied that the need to safeguard children through the policy and procedures of the Congregation of Notre Dame Des Missions is given priority as evidenced in their practice.

## **6. Conclusion**

The Congregation of Notre Dames des Missions are an aging congregation with very limited contact with children. Their policy document is reflective of their limited role. The reviewer is satisfied that there is good awareness of the need to create safe environments for children and that their response to allegations is prompt and appropriate. The few sisters who continue to have ministry with children follow the diocesan policy and procedures which is appropriate.



**Review of Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland  
Terms of Reference**

**Small Religious Congregations**

**(which should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Notes)**

**Introduction**

In order for the National Board to be able to state that all Church Authorities on the island of Ireland have been evaluated in respect of their child safeguarding policies and practices, both historical and current, then some form of appropriate assessment has to be conducted of every one of these. It is rational however that the form of assessment is tailored to the profile of each Church Authority, and that needless expenditure of resources and unnecessary interference in the life of religious orders and communities that have no children-specific ministry would be avoided.

This Review seeks to examine the current arrangements for safeguarding children across small Religious Congregations /Orders, and Missionary Societies in Ireland who have limited or no direct contact with children as part of the Congregations ministry.

It would also scrutinize practice within all known cases to ensure that they have been responded to appropriately.

The review's methodology is an adaptation of the methodology developed for all Dioceses and large religious congregations and missionary societies, where the ministry involves regular contact with children.

The proposed Review would consider the following:-

- (a) Former role with children
- (b) Allegations of child abuse against members and how these have been responded to
- (c) Existing relationships with statutory authorities such as the HSE, Gardai in the Republic and the HSCT or PSNI in Northern Ireland.
- (d) Policies in place and being applied for safeguarding children
- (e) Roles and responsibilities and where they exist the operation of Advisory Panels, and Safeguarding Committees

The objective of the Review would be to confirm if there have been any allegations and how known allegations have been responded to; in addition the review seeks to confirm what the current arrangements for safeguarding children are. In particular, emphasis will be placed on establishing how policies and practice match up to the standards set down in the Safeguarding Children Guidance published by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church launched in February 2009. Priority, at all times, will be given to how policy and practice can be improved and strengthened. If policies and/or practices are identified that are concerning, inadequate, or dangerous, they will be addressed through the provision of guidance and support, and through the reporting of these situations to the appropriate statutory authorities, if this has not already happened. Similarly, those that are good examples will be highlighted with a view to them being adopted comprehensively across all parts of the Church. All cases that relate to alleged or known offenders that are alive will be read and included in the Review. In cases where the alleged or known offender is deceased, these will be sampled in an attempt to gather learning from them that will be used to inform the framing of recommendations.

### **Guidance Documents**

The Review will be guided by the following:-

- (a) Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance;
- (b) Children First Guidance in ROI; and Regional Child Protection Guidelines in Northern Ireland;
- (c) Legislation that exists in each jurisdiction which contributes to safeguarding children and young people.

The Review will be undertaken by the National Board for Safeguarding Children through their National Office and led by the Chief Executive Officer.

The Review process will be overseen by a Reference Group to whom the CEO will report on a regular basis. The membership of this Reference Group has been drawn from each of the statutory child protection agencies in both jurisdictions, along with eminent individuals in the field from academia. The current Reference Group consists of: Dr Helen Buckley (TCD); Mr Paul Harrison (Tusla), and John Toner (SBNI).

It is important to confirm that the value of the Review is dependent upon full and complete access to all relevant documentation and information relating to the abuse of children known to the individual Church authorities. The Review will proceed on the

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basis that willingness exists on the part of each of the subjects of the Review to provide full access to the fieldwork team, subject, where relevant, to the terms of the Data Processing Deed agreed between the Sponsoring Bodies and entered into between the parties hereto.

## **Step Guide to the Review Process**

### **Step 1 .**

A letter of invitation to review is sent by the Provincial/Regional Superior or other person responsible for the Congregation/Order or Missionary Society (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Ordinary’).

### **Step 2 .**

The CEO will forward a survey to the provincial which will identify:

- Current number of members
- Past role with children
- Current role with children
- Total number of allegations received up to 2014
- Number of living members against whom there are allegations

### **Step 3.**

For any Order where there have been allegations a full review will proceed, as per step 4 -23. For those Orders where there have been no known allegations a desk top examination of policies and procedures will take place followed by a site visit to interview all relevant personnel within the safeguarding structure. For these orders **step 5 and 13-23** will apply.

### **Step 4.**

The CEO and Ordinary will confirm the dates for the fieldwork for the Review, and names of the fieldwork team.

**Step 5.**

The Church Authority will be asked to make available all of the case files and related documentation in respect of any safeguarding concerns that have been identified within the diocese. The Church Authority will make available a room with wireless internet access for the reviewers to conduct their review of files, so that any records made by the reviewers can be directly typed and stored onto a secure server which is only accessed by the reviewers. In the absence of internet access the reviewers will type their notes onto a secure encrypted usb stick for later uploading onto the secure server.

**Step 6.**

The Church Authority will be requested to sign the revised Data Processing Deed prior to the arrival of the team.

**Step 7.**

The Church Authority will arrange a schedule of interviews with all who hold safeguarding roles within its functional area. The designated person and the Church Authority will be available to the reviewers throughout the period of fieldwork.

**Step 8.**

The fieldwork team when they arrive on site will firstly confirm that they have a suitable place to work in and that all the required documentation has been provided to them for their Review. In the event that the fieldwork team forms the opinion that the Church Authority has not provided access to all such documents, the Board shall give notice in writing to the Church Authority of the opinion of the fieldwork team and such notice shall specify the reasons for same. Thereupon, the Church Authority shall respond in detail to the Notice. Each party shall use its best endeavours to resolve any differences of opinion which shall arise and, in the event that resolution is not arrived at, the parties will attempt to resolve the dispute by recourse to the services of a mediator agreed between them or nominated for the purpose at the request of any of them without prejudice to the Board's entitlement to terminate the Review. In the event that resolution has not been arrived at following mediation, either party shall be at liberty to terminate forthwith the Review.

**Step 9.**

On arrival, the fieldwork team should be supplied with a single case file index that lists all the cases that have been created within the diocese. These may be divided into two groups. The first group will contain all allegations that relate to living alleged or known perpetrators. The second will contain any that are deceased.

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**Step 10.**

Depending on the volume involved a decision should be made as to whether all or a random sample of the "deceased group" should be reviewed. Care should be taken to include all prominent cases in the sample.

**Step 11.**

Each case file will be reviewed by each fieldworker independently in the first instance. They will create a written summary with chronological information of the case. In certain cases a second reader may be required, this will be discussed and agreed between the fieldworkers.

**Step 12.**

Following the reading of the case and the creation of a summary, the fieldworkers will analyse and assess the actions taken in the case. They will assess compliance with agreed Church policy that was extant at that time. They will also indicate whether any current risk exists in respect of the information contained within the file and advise the church Authority of necessary safeguarding action to reduce the risk.

**Step 13.**

When all the case files have been read, the fieldwork team will then examine and review any procedures or protocols that exist within the diocese to confirm that they are in compliance with the *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance* document issued by the NBSCCCI in February of 2009.

**Step 14.**

To complete the Review, the fieldwork team will then seek to speak to those directly involved in the safeguarding structure in the diocese. This should include the Advisory Panel, a sample of parish safeguarding representatives, the designated person, the safeguarding committee, victim support and advisors and the Bishop/Provincial. The purpose of these interviews is to form a view of the competence and effectiveness of the safeguarding structure that exists within the Church Authority.

**Step 15.**

The fieldwork team will also seek to speak to representatives of the key statutory agencies to provide them with an opportunity to express their views on the quality of the working relationships that exist between them and the Church Authority.

**Step 16.**

A verbal feedback session on initial key findings will be given to the Church Authority.

**Step 17.**

Upon completion of the field work, the team may request to take materials-other than casework records to review off-site; this alongside all materials gathered by the reviewers, including written notes on cases and meetings, will be analysed and will form the basis of the draft assessment review report.

**Step 18.**

The draft will be forwarded to the Church Authority for factual accuracy checking.

**Step 19.**

Alongside all other reports under review, the report will be presented in draft to the Reference Group for their critique and comment. If further work is required at the direction of the Reference group the CEO will ensure this work is completed and advise the Church Authority accordingly.

**Step 20.**

The report will be legally proofed by NBSCCCT lawyer.

**Step 21.**

The report will be forwarded to the National Board for approval

**Step 22.**

A final draft report will then be submitted to the Church Authority. The expectation would be that the Report will be published by the Church Authority at an agreed time in the future.

**Step 23.**

All case material written, including summaries, as part of the review, which are for the reviewers use only, will be stored on a secure server.

## **Guide for Reviewers**

In terms of small (female religious orders) reference should be made to the following:

1. Has the Order provided alternative care to children in an orphanage, industrial school or children's residential home, but no longer is engaged in running such services;
2. Has the order provided education to children, in both or either boarding schools and day schools, but no longer does so ;
3. Has the order provided medical and/or nursing services to children, but no longer does so;
4. Has the order provided any other services to children, in community services centres, youth clubs etc., and no longer does so;
5. Does the order currently provide any sort of service to children and families that brings them into regular contact with children;
6. Has the order never provided any service to children (e.g. contemplative orders).

In relation to category 1 above;

1. The reviewers will establish whether any service they provided is included in the list of children's residential services produced by the Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB);
2. If this is the case, reference should be made to this.
3. If complaints have been referred to the Redress Board or Ryan Commission, this review cannot access these records and that will be stated in the report.
4. If the order has received complaints which have not been processed through Redress or Ryan these cases will be thoroughly examined as detailed above.

## **Review of Policy and Procedures**

1. It is recognised that not all Orders will have any ministry with children and therefore their policies and procedures should reflect the work that they do with children.
2. If the Order only works through other organisations, example in Diocesan work or in schools, they are required to follow the policies of those organisations.
3. If there are gaps in the policy document an assessment should be made as to whether the ministry engaged in requires full compliance with all criteria attached to the seven standards
4. Where it is clear that the criteria do not apply a reference should be made at the beginning of the review report that the Order's ministry is not directly with children and therefore adherence to particular criteria do not apply.
5. If the Order is a contemplative Order, there is no expectation that they will have detailed policies and procedures, but reference should be made to their ministry and that they have no contact with children.
6. In all cases, contact will be made with the civil authorities to identify if they have any child safeguarding concerns in relation to the order.