



NEWSLETTER



THE DUBLIN DIOCESAN PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES

Every year, the Dublin Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes brings a group of around 170 sick pilgrims to France for the annual pilgrimage. Young people, such as those pictured above, from over 20 Dublin schools travel with the pilgrimage in order to help to look after the sick pilgrims. It is a unique and often life changing experience for both groups. The sick pilgrims value the care and the company of the young people and the young people are often intensely moved by the courage, resilience and sheer good humour of the sick pilgrims.

The Pilgrimage is a marvel of logistical precision. It is a huge and complex operation. Not alone have the sick pilgrims to be transported safely to Lourdes and cared for there. Helpers, equipment and a medical team have to be transported too and all has to be in place in time for the arrival of the sick pilgrims. That it works at all is a wonder. That it works as well as it does and brings such joy to so many people is a tribute to the selfless service and dedication to teamwork of a huge number of people.

Because many of the school pupils are minors, that is, under the age of 18, there is a responsibility on the Pilgrimage to have good safeguarding policies and practices in place. Practices evolved in response to particular situations. They were not always put in place in response to safeguarding concerns or as specifically safeguarding measures but were responses to issues and difficulties that had arisen over the years.

Two measures, in particular, have been significant and effective. One was a simple matter of clarifying roles and responsibilities. So, while there is a team of people on the Pilgrimage who help and support the school pupils, including the school's coordinators, schools' chaplain and the

designated child protection officer, primary responsibility for looking after them rests with the teachers from their schools who accompany them. The second was a significant and ingeniously simple innovation: the wearing of the blue shirts. The young people who come with their schools are required to wear their blue shirts at all times. This means that they are easily identifiable and are not asked to undertake certain tasks that would be inappropriate for minors, such as taking sick pilgrims to the toilet.

Much of what we do to build safe and effective organisations promotes good safeguarding. Safe and effective organisations are marked by characteristics such as clear lines of accountability, boundaries that are understood and respected, and clarity of roles and responsibilities. By contrast organisations in which nobody is very clear about who is responsible for what or what the rules are often produce very unsafe environments for children and young people.

One of the pieces of misinformation about safeguarding practice that can inhibit people from accepting the disciplines that it involves is the idea that it inhibits people from engaging with children and young people or that it takes the fun and spontaneity out of such engagement. The Dublin Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes is proof of the contrary. Clear boundaries do not restrict people's freedom. On the contrary, knowing that there are boundaries in place to keep them safe gives people the freedom to be themselves and to relate openly to others.



MANDATORY REPORTING

On 11 December 2017, the sections of the Children First Act 2015 that refer to mandatory reporting come into effect. From that date people holding certain positions, known as ‘mandated persons’ will be required by law to report to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, where they “know, believe or have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is being harmed, has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed”. Mandated persons will also be required to assist Tusla in the assessment of such concerns.

Included in the definition of mandated persons are members of the clergy or pastoral care workers of a church or religious community or a safeguarding officer or child protection officer employed by a religious body or organisation. However, parish safeguarding

representatives are not included, as they work in a voluntary capacity and are not employed to perform a child welfare and protection function.

The Director and Child Protection Officer of the Diocese will become mandated persons and this will have no impact on the current reporting arrangements. However, **priests, deacons and parish pastoral workers will also become mandated persons. Where any such person has a concern that requires to be notified to Tusla he or she should contact CSPA in line with current practice. A notification will be sent to Tusla by CSPA in the name of the mandated person so that their statutory responsibility under the Act will be discharged.**

SAFEGUARDING TRAINING

Over 2,500 people from our parishes and diocesan agencies attended either one-day training sessions or two-hour information sessions in the year to the end of April 2017. This was a 25% increase on the previous year. It demonstrates a real commitment to safeguarding on the part of priests, religious and lay faithful, one that is gathering pace rather than losing momentum. It is evidence of a determination to deliver on our promise to make the Catholic Church in Dublin a safer place for children.

The work that Garry Kehoe has been doing in visiting parishes and auditing their safeguarding practice has generated demand for extra information and training sessions. This is a welcome development but it has put a strain on our capacity to respond to requests for training. Safeguarding training can only be delivered by people who have been trained for the role and accredited by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI). At present we have five accredited trainers. NBSCCCI are running a ‘train the trainers’ programme in November and December of this year and we are sending four people on this course. This will significantly enhance our training capacity.

CSPA has always sought to deliver good quality training. Training is best delivered by two trainers working together but this has not always been possible in the recent past. With more trainers, we aim to ensure that each of the one-day training sessions is delivered by two accredited trainers.

Charging for training for those parishes that can afford it was introduced from September 2017. This was done as a means of funding at least part of the work of CSPA. We anticipate that it may reduce the numbers presenting for the one-day training. This, however, is not necessarily a negative development. There has been a tendency for some parishes to send all of their volunteers for training. However, the one-day training is really intended for those with a direct role with children. Charging may encourage parishes to be more selective about the people they send for training. Smaller numbers generally make for a more positive training experience (20 to 24 is an ideal number).

VETTING

Increase in vetting applications

CSPS processed 16,000 vetting applications in the year to the end of April, double the figure for the previous year. The increase is a direct consequence of the introduction of the vetting legislation in April 2016. The legislation made vetting a legal requirement. It also introduced a new system for processing vetting applications which has speeded up the process. Whereas formerly a vetting application could take weeks or even months to process, now such applications are often processed within a week. However, there is a lot more work involved in processing a vetting application under the new system. The increased number of applications and the extra work involved in processing them put enormous pressure on CSPS. A backlog of applications very quickly built up during 2016 and this was only cleared over the summer of 2017 when the number of new applications reduced.

Up to the time of the introduction of the vetting legislation we had one vetting administrator. It is no longer possible for just one person to do this work. Clare Harwood has taken over Vivienne Knight's role as vetting administrator on a temporary basis. She has one person who is assisting her on a full-time basis and three other members of the CSPS team who combine vetting work with their other responsibilities.

One of the things that takes up a considerable amount of time is dealing with queries. This reflects the fact that the requirements of the legislation are not well understood and there remain significant areas of uncertainty.

People are understandably frustrated at having to apply for vetting for different organisations and for different roles. It may help to have an appreciation of the reasons for this.

What vetting is and what it is not

Vetting is not like a licence or permit that 'clears' people to engage in work with children and vulnerable adults. Vetting is a disclosure of information to an organisation. The vetting applicant wishes to engage in work that brings him or her into contact with children or vulnerable adults on behalf of an organisation (like a parish) and the person in charge of the organisation (like a parish priest) has to make a decision as to whether or not the applicant is a suitable person to be around children or vulnerable adults. Vetting gives the decision taker some of the information s/he requires to

make this decision. The information that comes from vetting is only a small part of the information that the decision taker needs in order to make a good decision. S/he will also need information from other sources, through personal contact and references. The decision taker will take the decision in light of all of the information and the nature and circumstances of the position.

Some organisations have, as part of their mission, a commitment to work with people who have broken the law. Thus a decision taker in such an organisation may well decide that a person with a lot of criminal convictions can be offered a position in his/her organisation on the basis that he or she will be closely supervised and assisted to avoid situations that could lead to further offending. If this person was to apply for a position with another organisation which could not offer the same degree of supervision and support, the decision taker may well decide that the person could not be offered a position. It is not enough to know that a person was vetted when making a decision as to their suitability for a position within an organisation. The decision taker in any organisation has to know the outcome of the vetting application. Such information cannot, generally speaking, be shared between organisations without breaching data protection norms and that is why people have to be vetted by each organisation to which they apply to do work that would bring them into contact with children or vulnerable adults.

Specified information

Before the vetting legislation was introduced at the end of April 2016, the only information that was disclosed through the vetting process was whether the applicant had been convicted in the courts or whether there were any cases in process. Under the new system, other information can be disclosed. This is called specified information and it is only disclosed at the discretion of the Chief Bureau Officer who must decide whether it is relevant to the position for which the applicant has applied.

An example of specified information is a situation where a professional has been the subject of a fitness to practice enquiry by the body that regulates his or her profession. For example, if a doctor had been reported to the Medical Council for negligence in his or her care of patients and the Medical Council upheld the complaint that could, in certain

circumstances, be disclosed through the vetting process. The Chief Bureau Officer would have to consider whether the information was relevant to the position to which the person had applied. It is not hard to see how the decision would be different if the position applied for a position as a Minister of the Word as compared with taking charge of an activity for vulnerable adults. The outcome of a vetting application depends, therefore, on the position for which the applicant has applied.

Public Ministry

It is a requirement of the Archdiocese of Dublin that all who exercise public ministry and all those working with children and vulnerable adults in diocesan agencies and parishes undergo vetting through the National Vetting Bureau.

Public ministry is defined in the legislation as “Any work or activity as a minister or priest or any other person engaged in the advancement of any religious beliefs unless such work or activity is merely incidental to the advancement of religious beliefs to persons who are not children/ vulnerable persons”. Those who minister, for example as Eucharist Ministers or Ministers of the Word minister equally to children, vulnerable adults and other adult parishioners and must, therefore, be vetted.

Those who help out in an activity with children or vulnerable adults on an occasional basis are not required to be vetted but they should only work alongside those who have been vetted and if the occasional helping out becomes a regular occurrence they must undergo vetting.

Not everyone can be vetted

Not every ministry is a public ministry. Some people work on behalf of their parish behind the scenes and in circumstances where it would not be apparent to the parishioners that they had a role in the parish. For example, members of parish finance committees who have no other role in the parish, could not be considered to be exercising public ministry if all they do is work alongside clergy and other members of the committee. Another example might

be flower arrangers or those who decorate the altar at times when other people are not present. Such people ought not to be vetted. The Diocese has been advised that it is a breach of data protection norms to hold what is described as sensitive personal information about people that has not been collected in accordance with the requirements of legislation.

It is not possible for the CSPA to know whether every application submitted refers to a person applying for a role that involves public ministry. We are happy to deal with your queries but the decision has to be made at local level in the parish by those who know what the role involves. Most roles in parishes do involve public ministry and it is only in a small number of cases that any doubt arises.

We will do this together

The new system for processing applications has caused problems for CSPA because of the extra work it has generated. It has also meant extra work on parishes and on those who are applying for vetting. It is important that we all work together in a spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance. Our staff are happy to deal with your queries and, in particular, to assist those not used to using computers to complete their on-line vetting applications. Your understanding and cooperation is appreciated as it is not always possible to respond to requests for assistance immediately.

It is important that people read the information about how to apply for vetting and follow the instructions given. It is vital to provide all of the information requested and to ensure that it can be read easily. Remember also that under 16 year olds cannot be vetted and that vetting of 16 and 17 year olds requires parental consent. One in five applications fails because people do not follow these instructions. This is very frustrating for the applicant and is a waste of time for those in the parish and those working in CSPA.



We wish all our readers a happy and peaceful Christmas



CONTACT DETAILS

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