



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

**Review of Safeguarding Practice  
In the Religious Congregation of  
The Missionary Sisters of St. Columban  
undertaken by**

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

**This review was undertaken at the invitation of the Congregational Leader, Sr. Ann Gray**

**Date: June 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 Missionary Sisters of St. Columban* 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 congregational leader along with any recommendations arising from the findings. The review is not based on a review of case material as during the relevant time period there were no allegations made against members of the congregation that were within the Terms of Reference. There also were no allegations in respect of other forms of abuse within the time period, in respect of deceased and living members of the congregation. The review therefore is primarily based on policies and procedures made available plus interviews with key personnel involved in the safeguarding process within the congregation, particularly in the services run by the congregation.

The fieldwork for this review was conducted on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The reviewer would like to sincerely thank Sr. Ann Gray and her congregational sisters for their warm welcome, generous hospitality and helpful cooperation on that day.

## **1.Introduction**

It was because two people shared a vision and answered a similar call that the Missionary Sisters of St Columban came to be. In December 1917, Fr. John Blowick, co-founder of the Maynooth Mission to China (Columban Fathers), spoke of the urgent need for women collaborators in the new missionary venture in China. This appeal found a ready response in the hearts of many women, one of whom was Lady Frances Moloney who later became Mother Mary Patrick. Dialogue during the years 1917-20 brought clarity as to the nature of the new missionary group and in December 1920 permission was granted, to found a Missionary Congregation of Religious Sisters who would engage in any apostolate which would further the preaching of the Gospel in China.

The first sisters were professed in September 1924, and according to the congregation's website - <http://www.columbansisters.org/from-the-beginning> :

*...the young community was officially incorporated into the Church as a public Missionary Religious Congregation. The Congregation became one of pontifical right with the approval of the Constitutions of the Holy See in 1947.*

The Missionary Sisters of St. Columban (Columban Sisters) now live and serve in Ireland, England, Scotland, the United States, Peru, Chile, Korea, Philippines, Hong Kong, Myanmar, China and Pakistan.

## **2.Past and present role with children**

The Columban Sisters undertake a variety of mission promotion activities in Ireland, including giving talks to parishes at Sunday Masses, making presentations to interested groups, distributing newsletters and magazines (they co-produce *The Far East* with the Columban Fathers) and maintaining a website. They also cooperate with other groups and organizations that work for a more just world order; they engage with individuals and groups that run events to support the mission of the Columban Sisters; and they invite people to consider whether they might themselves take on the missionary life.

As the average age of the Irish Columban Sisters is rising over time, they have had to develop a range of living and accommodation arrangements for older and sometimes more infirm congregational members.

The Columban Sisters as a congregation do not provide any direct services to children and young people in Ireland. However, individual active retired sisters are involved in pastoral activities at parish level, such as leading a prayer group in a secondary school for boys, providing counseling in a secondary school, being on a staff team at a migrant drop-in centre, supporting members of the Irish Chinese community and assisting with local parish liturgies. The two sisters who volunteer in the same school are governed by that school's in-house child safeguarding policies and procedures.

The Columban Sisters own and run a retreat centre called *Bobbio* at their main house in Magheramore in Co. Wicklow. Once a year a local national school brings its Confirmation class to *Bobbio* for a day retreat. The visiting school has to follow good child safeguarding practices during these visits; the sisters simply provide the accommodation.

There has never been a concern, complaint or allegation of the abuse of a child or young person by a member of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban.

The previous Congregational Leader dealt with one safeguarding concern by liaising with NBSCCCI. It concerned information that had come to the attention of the Philippines area, but was not about the Columban Sisters themselves. The matter was properly managed.

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

There are 50 Columban Sisters in the Magheramore convent campus, mostly retired, of which 23 are in adjoining nursing home accommodation. The age range of congregational members in Ireland is from 45 to 93 years, with the majority being over 80 years of age. The congregation has recently closed two community houses in Dublin. The residences that are still in operation in addition to the motherhouse at Magheramore, are three houses in Dublin, in Crumlin (8 sisters), Killarney Street (1 sister) and Ballymun (3 sisters).

### **4.Policy and Procedures Document**

The Columban Sisters have produced the most comprehensive child safeguarding policy and procedures document yet examined during a NBSCCCI review. This 315-page manual is of an exceptionally high standard and was produced by the Central Leadership Team that went out of office in 2011. It is titled *Missionary Sisters of St. Columban – Safeguarding Children Standards and Guidance Document*, and it includes a great deal of very useful resource materials. The central place of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in this document is commended.

This manual includes a section for each mission country titled Local / National Information on Child Protection – (Name of country), with following headings:

1. Legal Resources
2. Criminal Investigation / Prosecution Policy and Judiciary
3. Other Agencies: Health Services, NGOs, Inter-Agency Forums
4. Community

The document also includes excellent examples of training materials being used

The current Central Leadership Team has been producing smaller resource documents from the major Standards and Guidance document that can be used in briefing and training, including:

- *Child Protection* (Initial Formation) in July 2012
- *Child Protection and Community* January 2013
- *SCC Child Protection (Children, Staff and Volunteers)* January 2013
  - *Through the Eyes of a Child*
  - *Child Protection – Staff and Volunteers*

It is interesting to set out the process followed in the development, circulation and implementation of the congregation's policy and procedures, as it shows the careful and effective planning that was involved.

In June 2005 the *Congregational Policy and Procedures Regarding the Protection of Children, Elderly and Vulnerable Adults* was produced by the Columban Sisters. In April

2009 they signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NBSCCCI. The NBSCCCI's CEO subsequently stated in a letter to the Congregational Leader in December 2010 that the congregation's child protection policy and procedures complied with the *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*.

In August 2011, the current Central Leadership Team of the Columban Sisters used the self-audit tool contained in the *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* to indicate what next steps they needed to take in the development of child safeguarding. In September 2011, they then sent out a draft plan to each Area Leadership Team, and asked that they all develop an Area Implementation Plan. These plans were back with the Central Leadership Team by November 2011.

In January 2012, pro-forma Case Recording and Data files were sent to each Area Leadership Team. In February 2012, all Designated Officers, Pastoral Advisors and Members of Safeguarding Teams for each area were appointed. In April 2012, the draft template of the policy and procedures was sent out by the CLT to the new Designated Persons, followed in August 2012 by a detailed index to the manual to assist the new Area Safeguarding Teams to negotiate the document.

In September 2012 the new congregational policy of taking images of children was sent to all Area Designated Officers. This is an excellent document.

Between January and December 2013, training and education materials for the Congregation, for initial Formation and for staff / volunteers was distributed to areas; area timetables for the implementation of policy and procedures were finalised; training needs were identified; and a review of the templates for the Local Child Protection Policy was conducted.

As the *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* of the NBSCCCI is currently being reviewed and revised, it has been suggested to the Columban Sisters to postpone their own scheduled review of their own child safeguarding policy and procedures that was to be undertaken in April 2014.

The Columban Sisters are continuing their child safeguarding initiative by preparing the roll out of training across areas. They will be applying to *Misean Cara* for financial support for this initiative. They have identified January 2015 as when they will review the training needs in each area. Some areas work with NGOs such as *World Vision*, *Save the Children* etc. in providing training. The CLT has encouraged the areas to make the policy and procedures template and training materials more culturally sensitive and locally relevant.

This rational and structured approach to the planning and implementation of good child safeguarding is commended.

Sisters Ann Gray, Congregational Leader and the Designated Person said that while they attempt to have safeguarding policy made culturally sensitive at area level, the situation on the ground in some parts of the world is not conducive to reporting to the statutory authorities and/or there is no support structure or services provided by the State or indeed the local Church. For instance, Sister Ann conveyed to the reviewer that the treatment of allegations in other countries and one particular named country had to be considered in the context which pertains in that country. Sister Ann indicated that the formal delivery of a complaint to the civil authorities in a particular named country could lead to fatal consequences. There is also

an acceptance of physical punishment of children in some countries where her Congregation operates. It is also noted that instead of reporting allegations of sexual abuse to the local police, the sisters have arranged to report the matter to a local Elder, which they considered in the context of that country to be a safer and more effective approach.

## **5. Structures**

Each area in which the Columban Sisters live and work has its own leadership. Each area elects delegates to the Chapter, which comes together every six years. The Chapter elects the Central Leadership Team. The Congregational Central Leadership Team of four sisters is also based at Magheramore, Co. Wicklow. This used to be the novitiate for the congregation. The congregation's novitiate is now in Korea. The current Central Leadership Team (CLT), which is in post for six years, is comprised of a Scottish sister, an Irish sister, a Korean sister and a sister from the Philippines. They meet formally every month and safeguarding is discussed as required, more so when the Child Protection Policy was being rolled out. The CLT are supposed to visit each area at least twice during their term of office, but they can do so more than that. The Congregational Leader Sr. Ann spoke about a process of reconfiguring the congregation worldwide, which is the main focus of the CLT currently.

Each area has a Designated Person, and a Safeguarding Team. The Irish Designated Person has attended training with the NBSCCCI in Maynooth. There was a Child Safeguarding workshop held in 2011 for the delegates to the Chapter. There is a three-person Irish Safeguarding Team to advise on the management of child safeguarding concerns, but this has not been convened as there have been no concerns.

## **6. Management of Allegations and liaison with the statutory authorities**

The Columban Sisters have not had to manage any allegations and so have not needed to develop working relationships with the statutory child protection authorities. There is correspondence on file seen by the reviewer between the HSE Project Manager of the National Audit of Religious Orders, and Sr. Ann Gray, Congregational Leader, between March and July, 2013. All materials requested have been sent to HSE, including the policy manual and training materials. A statement on which sisters in Ireland have any involvement with children and young people has also been made to the HSE.

Contact was made with TUSLA who advised:

*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. Of the 72 members in Ireland as of 31.03.2013 a total of three Sisters are involved in ministry involving young people - counselling teenagers and teaching of catechetics.*

*The Missionaries Sisters of St Columban child protection policy has yet to be reviewed as part of our process. In the meantime we have no concerns about this Religious Order.*

*Contact was also made with the Gardai, who have no record of the Columban Sisters.*

## **8. Conclusion**

The Missionary Sisters of St. Columban have clearly demonstrated a commitment to the safeguarding of children and young people, both in Ireland and elsewhere. They have put a great deal of thoughtful work into the development and promotion of their policy and procedures and have backed this up with a systematic approach to training.

## **Review of Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland**

### **Small Religious Congregations**

#### **Terms of Reference (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 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.

**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 NBSCCCI 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.