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**Safeguarding Report**

**Joint Diocesan Synods of Tuam and Limerick & Killaloe**

Introduction

I am incredibly grateful to have been given the opportunity to serve the Dioceses of Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe in the role of Safeguarding Compliance Officer. It has been a real pleasure to connect (and reconnect) with so many people across the Dioceses over the past few months and I look forward to continuing to do so in the years ahead.

The responsibility of select vestries

I know from experience how hard it can keep clear in our minds all that needs to be done in terms of compliance and governance in parishes (which includes, but is not limited to, safeguarding). This is especially when parishes are joined together in groups (maintaining separate select vestries) as opposed to unions (sharing a select vestry).

So, as a reminder to us all: according to Part 2 of the Church of Ireland Child Safeguarding Policy (*Safeguarding Trust*), it is the select vestry which is ultimately responsible for compliance with the Church of Ireland’s safeguarding policies in its parish (including the appointment of the parish panel). Therefore, safeguarding is required to be a standing item on the agenda of every meeting of the select vestry.

Practically speaking, this means that for every select vestry: the completed safeguarding declaration of compliance must be submitted to the Diocesan Office annually as part of the Easter Vestry returns; an online safeguarding return must be completed annually; and the Assessment of Harm (necessary to display the essential Child Safeguarding Statement) must be undertaken every two years. In addition, all the policies connected with safeguarding (of which there are currently eight) must be adopted individually by each select vestry and reviewed at intervals afterwards.

If you have any questions related to any of the above, please do not hesitate to get in touch using the details below. I have met with parishes in recent months (either online or in-person) to comprehensively work through all the above for their local context and would be very happy to do so with other parishes if that would be helpful.

Annual online safeguarding returns

Thank you to all those who, on behalf of their parish’s select vestry, submitted the parish’s annual online safeguarding return for 2023 to the RCB by the end of June. This is an essential part of each parish’s compliance with the Church of Ireland’s safeguarding policies (which are enshrined in Chapter XVI of the Church’s Constitution). The returns also record the areas in which parishes require assistance, so that the Dioceses can provide them with the most relevant and effective support.

Diocesan Adult Safeguarding Panel

The previous Tuam Adult Safeguarding Panel and the Limerick & Killaloe Adult Safeguarding Panel have now been amalgamated to form one TLK panel. Those are: **Mr. Bill Fennell, Professor Michael Mulqueen, Canon Kevin O’Brien, Ms. Beverley Stafford and Canon Jim Stephens**. The email address to use to raise a concern or share a disclosure related to adult safeguarding is [adultsafeguarding@tlk.ie](about:blank). Please contact me if you require adult safeguarding panel notices for display in your parish(es).

Parish panel training

By the time this report is published, we will (D.V.) have hosted five in-person training sessions across the Dioceses for parish panel members, delivered by Dr. Niall Moore (Safeguarding Officer for the Republic of Ireland). Panel members are expected to refresh their training every three years but, while many panel members have done so by attending online training, the disruption of COVID-19 restrictions meant that many had not been trained since the last in-person training sessions were offered in Tuam, Killala & Achonry, and Limerick & Killaloe in the early part of 2020.

Worker training

Thank you to **Dr. Catherine Emerson** for delivering training for “workers” (clergy, staff, and volunteers) in an innovative online format, and to Lorna and Heather for their help in organising and promoting these training sessions. While we are very grateful to Catherine for her continuing commitment in this regard, it is important that we recruit and train more people around the Dioceses who can deliver this training. To do so involves attendance at a “Train the Trainer” course delivered by Dr. Niall Moore, the next offering of which will be once the Church’s revised child safeguarding policy which is currently in preparation is published. Please get in touch with me using the details below if you would like to express interest in undertaking this role.

Auditing of parishes

Thank you to **Canon Kevin O’Brien and Mr. Bill Fennell** for their coordination of the auditing of parishes up until now. We are deeply indebted to those who already do the valuable work of serving as auditors, but it would be wonderful to have more, ideally placed around the extent of the Dioceses. Being an auditor is less daunting than it sounds! It could be a pleasant task for someone who is comfortable with administration, as the key job of an auditor is to visit assigned parishes, meeting people, viewing the premises, and working through a given audit form with the parish panel. Please contact me if you are interested in exploring whether this role might be for you.

Compliance → Culture

Finally, we must remember that all we do as part of our compliance is not an end in itself: it should be a means to creating a culture in our churches in which people of all ages and stages of life are safer, so that they can encounter God for themselves. I have started to compile some links have inspired and encouraged me in the work of creating a culture of safeguarding – they might do the same for you! Should you like to dip into these, they can be found at [www.linktr.ee/tlksafeguarding](about:blank). May the Holy Spirit help us to see more and more that safeguarding is not just something which is a box to be ticked, but in fact is an outworking of our discipleship and mission in Christ’s name. It is my privilege to play a small part in making this happen!

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