



St. Patrick's Missionary Society



A Safe & Welcoming Church
Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards
for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024
(Summary Booklet)

St. Patrick's Missionary Society
Kiltegan, Co Wicklow
www.spms.org

Message from Regional Leader...

During 2023 and early 2024, the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland completed a comprehensive revision of the Church's Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards. The new policy, titled *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024*, has been formally approved by both the Irish Episcopal Conference (IEC) and the Association of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI), coming into effect on June 11, 2024.

In consideration of the specific needs of our Society, the Regional Committee determined that a summary version of the policy would be more applicable for our use. This dedicated booklet contains essential information on the Code of Conduct, Garda Vetting, and Ministry with external organizations. These three areas will prove particularly informative and beneficial to all members of the Region.

Those engaged in pastoral or chaplaincy activities under the auspices of Dioceses etc., whether on a part-time or full-time basis, will find this booklet valuable. However, it is important to note that this is not a complete overview of the entire policy. Members are encouraged to keep themselves informed of all relevant standards and policies by attending induction sessions and safeguarding training led by the Diocesan Safeguarding Office. These efforts contribute to creating "a safe and welcoming Church" for everyone, and I encourage you all to continue working towards this goal to ensure our Church remains a place where everyone feels safe and welcome.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Regional Safeguarding Committee, which meets quarterly to review safeguarding efforts within the Irish Region. I am also deeply grateful to Sandra Neville, our Designated Liaison Person, for her dedicated work in this critical area. I encourage all members to read this document to ensure they are up to date with all safeguarding policies and regulations, in order to protect the children under our care.

Pat Murphy
Regional Leader,
Irish Region

<https://www.spms.org/safeguarding>

THE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN POLICY STANDARDS

There are three core standards to the Church's Safeguarding Children Policy (the three standards are linked, and no standard is more important than another).

- Leadership, Governance and Accountability
- Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding
- Responding Pastorally and Reporting According to Civil and Canon Law



Standard: Leadership, Governance and Accountability

The Church Authority embodies and imparts the Catholic Church's vision, principles and values, which are reflected and apparent in the child safeguarding culture, structures and practices at all levels and in all ministries with children. Engaging in systematic review of practice (including undertaking annual self-audits and external review of practice) to enable learning for continuous improvement.

The following measures should be in place to assist implementation of this Standard:

- The Church authority demonstrates his/her personal commitment to safeguarding children through open and transparent communication in relation to safeguarding matters by delivering sermons, pastoral letters, addresses to meetings and newsletters, and through face-to-face meetings and personal engagement. This requires the Church authority to be personally available and to listen with openness, humility and compassion.
- In recognition of the decision-making responsibilities and potential isolation of the safeguarding role, mechanisms need to be developed to support Church authorities. These will include training for leadership, induction training in safeguarding, and continuous professional and personal development to include skills and knowledge for leading in safeguarding challenges. Church authorities should have access to mentoring and support and a body of experienced personnel to support best practice.

Standard: Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding

The creation and maintenance of a culture of safety which includes a safe church environment welcoming of children.

The church will create and maintain environments that uphold children's rights and that create nurturing, caring conditions where children will flourish in faith and love.

The following measures should be in place to assist implementation of this Standard:

- Induction and safeguarding training for all involved in Church ministry.
- Procedures for managing external contexts, including lay associations of the faithful; visiting clerics and male and female religious; those ministering in external organisations; and groups using Church property.



Standard: Responding Pastorally and Reporting According to Civil and Canon Law

The Catholic Church is committed to reporting all allegations, responding with support and care to complainants of abuse and their families, and ensuring appropriate accompaniment for respondents.

The following measures should be in place to assist implementation of this Standard:

- The Church authority ensures that all reports of child safeguarding suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations are in line with civil and canon law requirements.
- The Church authority ensures access to appropriately trained and supported staff whose role it is to respond to allegations and report to the statutory authorities (without delay – see ‘Timeframes for reporting’ in Appendix A), canonical entities and the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland.



CODE OF CONDUCT

It is important for all personnel to:

- ✓ Treat all children with respect and dignity;
- ✓ Treat all children equally;
- ✓ Model positive, appropriate behaviour to all children they come into contact with;
- ✓ Be aware of the Church's child protection and child safeguarding policy;
- ✓ Challenge and report abusive and potentially abusive behaviour;
- ✓ Develop a culture of openness, honesty and safety;
- ✓ Develop a culture where children have permission to tell and to talk about any concerns or worries that they may have;
- ✓ Respect each child's boundaries and support them to develop their own understanding and sense of their rights;
- ✓ Be aware of their responsibility for the safety of all children in their care;
- ✓ Work in open environments;
- ✓ Help children to know what they can do if they have a problem.

Adults must never:

- X Hit or otherwise physically assault or abuse children;
- X Develop sexual relationships with children;
- X Develop relationships with children that could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive;
- X Act in any way that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse;
- X Use language, make suggestions or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or abusive;
- X Do things for a child of a personal nature that they can do themselves;

CODE OF CONDUCT

- X Watch or supervise a child undressing, or assist a child undressing e.g. in swimming pools or on international Pilgrimages, such as Lourdes baths;
- X Condone or participate in behaviour that is illegal, unsafe or abusive;
- X Act in any way that is intended to intimidate, shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade;
- X Engage in discriminatory behaviour or language in relation to race, culture, age, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation or political views;
- X Consume alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs while having responsibility for or in the presence of children/ young people.



In general, it is inappropriate to:

- X Take children away or to your own home, especially where they will be alone with you;
- X Involve children in one-to-one contact; activities should usually be supervised by at least two adults.

However, there may be two circumstances where this may occur:

I. In a reactive situation, for example when a young person requests a one-to-one meeting with you without warning, or where a young person has had to be removed from a group as part of a code of conduct;

II. As part of a planned structured piece of work (for example one-to-one music tuition).

GARDA VETTING REQUIREMENTS

Garda Vetting is carried out through the National Vetting Bureau under the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016.

The 2012 National Vetting Bureau Act (as amended in the Criminal Justice [Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures] Act 2016) sets out circumstances that require vetting, defined as:

Any work or activity which is carried out by a person, a necessary and regular part of which consists mainly of the person having access to, or contact with, children (and/or vulnerable adults).

Under Schedule 1, Part 1, Paragraph 7, of the National Vetting Bureau Act (as amended by Paragraph 27 of the Criminal Justice [Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures Act] 2016) also requires:

Vetting in respect of any work or activity as a minister or priest or any other person engaged in the advancement of religious beliefs, to children (and vulnerable adults) unless such work or activity is merely incidental to the advancement of religious beliefs to persons who are not children (or vulnerable adults.)

All members in active ministry are required to obtain a Garda Vetting Disclosure Certificate, it is recommended that applicants be re-vetted at least every three years.

EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

It is important that where members are ministering with children in an external organisation or Church body, the Church authority must have agreement from the external organisation or Church body that effective safeguarding policies and procedures are in place.

To do this, the Church authority should have written agreements in place for every cleric who is ministering with children in an external organisation or Church body.

This agreement should include:

- That the organisation for whom the member is ministering has safeguarding policies and procedures in place;
- That the member ministering in this external organisation understands that while they are working for that organisation, the safeguarding policies and procedures must be adhered to.



Safeguarding Children Policy Statement **St. Patrick's Missionary Society**

The Gospel teaches the importance of ensuring that the Catholic Church community is a warm, welcoming and safe place for children.

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Mark 10:14-15)

Children are gifts from God, to be cherished and recognised for the joyful contribution they make as valued members of the Church. Our challenge is to follow the example of Jesus in cherishing them. Safeguarding is key to this important task and should be seen, not as a burden, but as an opportunity to embrace and encourage children's ministry, following the example of Jesus Christ.

St Patrick's Missionary Society pledges to safeguard children and young people from harm and to support them in their development as valued and integral members of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The Church's ministry will be inclusive and will uphold their rights. Consistent with Gospel values, and with civil and criminal law, those who minister will do so with dignity and integrity, honouring their calling to ensure that children and young people are welcomed, cherished and protected, following the example set by Jesus.

This Safeguarding Children Policy will be honoured and complied with by all members and staff of St Patrick's Missionary Society.

If you have a safeguarding concern please contact:

Sandra Neville (Designated Liaison Person)



087 9844779



sandra.neville@spms.ie

Or you can report your concern directly to:

TUSLA (Child and Family Agency) – Tel: 045 920000

An Garda Síochána, Reporting Helpline – Tel: 1800 555 222

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