

Diocesan Safeguarding Day, 2021

Letter from Archbishop Farrell

Sunday, 26 September, is Diocesan Safeguarding Day. This year our focus is on safeguarding in a time of pandemic.

Our Safeguarding Day poster, which is available to download on www.csps.dublindiocese.ie draws attention to some of the ways we have tried to protect each other during this time: by observing social distancing guidelines; by wearing face masks; by caring for the poor as we see two people putting together hampers for distribution to poor families at Christmas. When we refer to safeguarding we think of the steps we take to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse. Our recent experiences of Covid-19 remind us that this is not something new or alien. The terminology may be different, but the activity of protecting the young and the vulnerable has always been central to who we are as a Christian community.

While the term 'vulnerable adult' has a particular meaning within our policies and guidelines, we have all learned a little bit more about what it means to be vulnerable during this time. We have been vulnerable to illness, to the loneliness that goes with social isolation, and to poverty as traditional sources of income dry up. We have experienced this at diocesan level through the very painful experience of letting go of some of our much loved and valued colleagues. We have had to make do with less. However, that opens up fresh challenges and opportunities as we learn to share with each other, across parishes and across dioceses, our time and our expertise in the work of safeguarding.

There have been some changes over the past year. Safeguarding training has been delivered via Zoom, though it is hoped that people will be able to attend training in person again sometime in 2022. The National Vetting Bureau have limited the number of roles for which vetting can be obtained. We, along with others who work with children and vulnerable persons, have appealed against what we consider an overly restrictive interpretation of the legislation. While we await the outcome of a review of the vetting legislation, we must not allow this to weaken our safeguarding practices. We need to explore other means to ensure that those who minister in our parishes do not represent a threat to the safety of children and vulnerable adults. All this is a reminder that there is never just one way of doing things. If one door is closed to us, we must open another.

Some things have changed, but others remain the same. In 2015, Pope Francis told us that: "Families need to know that the Church is making every effort to protect their children. They should also know that they have every right to turn to the Church with full confidence, for it is a safe and secure home". Our safeguarding practices may have to change to adapt to new circumstances. Our commitment to make the Church in Dublin a safe and secure home for children and vulnerable adults remains undiminished.

I ask you to remember in your prayers all those who have suffered abuse.

+ Dermot Farrell