



## DIOCESE OF GALLOWAY

### Safeguarding Office

#### **SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT TO PARISHES - October 2020**

At this time of year, every parish in Galloway Diocese usually allocates one weekend for Parish Safeguarding Coordinators to deliver an update on developments in safeguarding within the Catholic Church, both locally and nationally. These updates are important to ensure that everyone in our parish communities is aware of how best to “uphold the highest safeguarding standards in our relationships with people of all ages who are involved in whatever capacity with the Church and its organisations”.

This year looks a bit different.

Coronavirus hit suddenly and shockingly, impacting everything we took for granted and presenting multiple new challenges for everybody. From fear of infection for ourselves and loved ones, to worries about financial, educational and a multitude of practical concerns, to radical changes in the ways in which we spend our days, nobody has been left unaffected this year.

You might think that with our churches having been closed, and most if not almost all parish ministries ceased, there would have been little happening in safeguarding this year. In reality, the impact of the pandemic has resulted in great concern about the most vulnerable in our communities.

It was been well publicised in mainstream media that domestic abuse has risen by an estimated 25% during the pandemic, as victims of abuse have been trapped at home with perpetrators; while online grooming and abuse of children has been estimated to have risen by over 100%. These sobering statistics just hint at how Covid-19 has in a way created a perfect storm which has allowed unsafe situations to develop rapidly.

The requirement to shield has led to elderly people, and people in poor health, being at home, alone and isolated, for extended periods of time. Clergy have been cut off from contact with parishioners. Children have been confined to their homes and deprived of proper education. Young families have had to manage without support from extended family members. Medical treatments have ceased and access to mental health services severely reduced. In other words, people in our communities who were already vulnerable, have become even more so as a result of Covid-19, and many who would not have considered themselves to have been in vulnerable positions earlier this year are now at risk of emotional, mental or spiritual harm.

These realities have been taken seriously by the Catholic Church’s Safeguarding Service, at both a national and diocesan level. A new national Ministry of Welcome was established for the re-opening of churches, which included recruitment and training to ensure that the return to public worship was as compassionate and nurturing an experience as possible. At diocesan level, a variety of protocols had to be developed to manage the risks associated with online ministry and worship. As for everyone else, new ways of working and meeting online had to be developed rapidly while always remaining mindful of the most vulnerable among us.

The months ahead remain very uncertain. There is no doubt that living with Covid-19 is going to be a way of life for the foreseeable future, and that means our Christian duty to care for one another is more important than ever before. Sometimes, caring may mean staying away; sometimes, caring may mean providing practical help; always, caring will mean remaining vigilant about the welfare of those around us as we gather in worship.

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