

Independent strategic review of child safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

In 2021 the Irish Bishops' Conference (IEC) and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI), in line with best practice, initiated a major and wide-ranging independent external review of child safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Since the establishment of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) in 2008, Church leaders have adopted a 'One Church' approach to safeguarding on the island of Ireland. The strength of such an approach is that it ensures that the same standards and procedures apply across all dioceses and religious congregations. Until 2024, these were based on the policy document *'Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016'*. Revised standards and procedures were implemented in 2024. The Bishops' Conference and AMRI, along with the NBSCCCI, recognise that the monitoring and evaluation of safeguarding processes, both internally and externally, is vitally important so that the most up to date best practice in safeguarding can be maintained.

The IEC and AMRI invited applications from individuals and organisations to undertake the review through an openly advertised tender process. Following this, RSM Ireland was appointed to undertake the review. RSM Ireland is a member of the RSM global network, and is a leader in the provision of professional services and advice to the public and voluntary sectors and the wider business community.

RSM assembled a multidisciplinary team to undertake the review, including acknowledged experts in child safeguarding policy, best practice, and evaluation. RSM, at the conclusion of the review stated: "We approached this crucial assignment comprehensively and sensitively but also with robust independence. We believe this is the spirit in which the project was conceived by the Irish Episcopal Conference and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland, and we sought to honour that approach".

The review evaluated all aspects of safeguarding and outreach to survivors, including the impact and effectiveness of the important work done by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) and the two support organisations for survivors, Towards Healing and Towards Peace. The initiation of the review was welcomed by the three organisations.

The review involved desktop research, including a literature review and consideration of safeguarding structures and processes in other countries. RSM also consulted widely with key stakeholders including inter alia, DLPs, Safeguarding Officers, and representatives from other organisations in Ireland dealing with safeguarding issues. It also sought the views of victims and survivors of abuse within the Catholic Church. A summary of these views will be issued separately. As an independent assessment of policies, practices and organisations, its task was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current provision as well as opportunities

for improvement, including in respect of emerging issues such as digital media and legal developments.

The Final Report of the review has now been completed and has been forwarded to the commissioning bodies, the IEC and AMRI. The conclusions and recommendations of the Report will be carefully considered by both bodies, and will be formally shared with the NBSCCCI, Towards Healing and Towards Peace. We thank everyone who took the time to contribute to this review.

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President
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