

DATE: 10 February 2015.

The Franciscan Friars in Ireland (OFM)

The Franciscan Friars in Ireland (OFM) invited the National Board for the Safeguarding of Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) to audit their safeguarding policy and practice in October 2014.

The NBSCCCI has now completed its review, and the Order welcomes the publication of the NBSCCCI Review Report.

The report describes the stark reality of abuse perpetrated by members of the Irish Franciscans over a 45 year period from 1953 to 1998. It relates that three friars were convicted by the courts during this period, and also highlights failure on the part of the Franciscan Order to deal adequately with complaints brought to their attention at that time. We regret that there were significant missed opportunities, as highlighted in the report, in terms of protecting other children from abusive behaviour.

As Provincial of the Irish Franciscans, I apologise unreservedly to each and every survivor for the pain and harm inflicted on those who suffered abuse while under our care. I apologise for the breach of trust, and the suffering victims and their families endured. I also know that no apology can ever be sufficient, and acknowledge with deep shame and sadness that the Franciscan Order failed you.

We are encouraged that the report noted there was a change in safeguarding practice from 2009 onwards. It recognises that over time the Order has put in place enhanced safeguarding structures, further strengthened by a willingness on the part of the leadership of the Order to correct some of the past wrongs, and ensure that current and future practice meets the expected standards.

The Franciscan Friars uphold the safety of children as paramount. In accordance with the recommendations of the NBSCCCI Review Report, the Order has revised its safeguarding structure, updated its policies and procedures, and appointed key safeguarding personnel. The Report notes in conclusion: "The Order now have key experienced and professional people in place to ensure that this Order's safeguarding structures ensure that the safeguarding of children remains a key priority for all."

We renew our commitment to work in partnership with the NBSCCCI and civil authorities to continue to strive towards the highest level of child safeguarding practices in the island of Ireland into the future.

I invite anyone who may have any safeguarding concerns regarding the Franciscan Friars to contact our **Designated Liaison Person (DLP) Mr Tom O'Donnell**: mobile: **087 268 7209**

If anyone is affected by the content of this report please contact any of the following support helplines:

TOWARDS HEALING:

Free Phone Ireland: 1800-303416

UK: 0800-0963318

ONE IN FOUR: 00 353 (0)1 662 4070 (9.30AM to 5.30PM daily).

RAPE CRISIS CENTRE: National 24 hour helpline: 1 800 778888

TOWARDS PEACE: Spiritual Support Service: 00 353 (0) 1 5053028,

Mobile : 00353 (0) 86 771 0533 Email: towardspeace@iecon.ie.

Hugh McKenna, OFM
Minister Provincial
10 February 2015