



NEWSLETTER



INVOLVING CHILDREN IN THE LIFE OF THE PARISH

12.30pm Mass on the first Sunday of every month in Gardiner Street Church is a family Mass. On 5 May, the parish priest, Fr Gerry Clarke, was the celebrant. At the Gospel, he invited the younger children to gather around the altar with him. He read the Gospel and then discussed it with them. It was done in an easy, friendly and respectful manner. There were perhaps 15 children on the altar (there were other children in the congregation) and they were clearly happy to be there. Some of the children participated by saying prayers during the Mass. There was a special Eucharistic prayer used and laminated, illustrated copies of it were available to make it easier for the children to follow and give the responses. It was a happy and uplifting occasion and delightful to see so many children participating enthusiastically.

The involvement of children in the lives of our parishes is no longer something that we can take for granted. Some years ago, there was a discussion about this at one of our training days. A parish priest, who was attending, spoke about the secularisation of society and how young parents no longer wish to raise their children in the faith. Some young parents who were present, while acknowledging this, said that the impact on parents of the abuse of children within the Church is to make them unsure whether it is okay for them to allow their children to participate in Church activities. This, they said, was what other parents were telling them.

Gardiner Street is an inner city parish and we often hear from other city parishes that they have no children in their congregations and, therefore, no need for safeguarding measures to be in place. The experience in Gardiner Street suggests two things. It is important to have good safeguarding practices in place to reassure those parents who may wish for their children to be involved with the Church that it is safe for them to do so. Secondly, it is good to welcome the children and provide a liturgy that invites their participation.

The Family Mass in Gardiner Street, which has been running for a number of years, was the initiative of one particular parishioner, a teacher who lived in the area. She was determined that it was possible to engage with children in this way and put a lot of work into setting it up and keeping it going. She has left the parish now but Fr Clarke is equally determined to keep the Family Mass going.



The Easter garden in Gardiner Street Church

It is not inevitable that our churches, even our inner city churches, will no longer be places for children to come and pray. However, in order to reverse a trend away from their presence, there has to be vision, enthusiasm and hard work. It starts with good safeguarding practice and the reassurance this gives to parents that we, the people of the Archdiocese of Dublin, are committed to looking after their children safely and well.



“SMS”

SERVICE - MINISTRY - SAFEGUARDING

I was recently asked by the Parish Priest of Brackenstown, Fr. Paul Thornton, to give a short talk on “safeguarding children and vulnerable adults”. This was to be part of an evening where volunteers were gathering to explore service, ministry and safeguarding in their parish.

The evening started with a reading from St. Luke’s Gospel, an account of the visit of Jesus to the home of Martha and Mary. Fr. Paul reflected on the reading and spoke about the very different roles Mary and Martha played during Jesus’s visit. He compared this story to the work volunteers do in parishes and how we view service and ministry to those around us. This made me reflect on how we view safeguarding in the church in the context of service and ministry.

One of the first questions I ask attendees at every training sessions is: How many of you woke up this morning and said, “I can’t wait to go to this training session today”? Very few people answer in the affirmative. Safeguarding is seen as a response to our recent past and the dreadful crimes committed against children in the Irish church.

Safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in the church is not a modern phenomenon. The protection of the vulnerable is at the core of Christ’s teachings in the Gospels. Consequently, it should also be at the core of service and ministry. The language of safeguarding and our policies and procedures may be new and sometimes hard to accept but the principles have been there from the beginning.

I was delighted to be asked to join with the parish volunteers in Brackenstown in their exploration of service and ministry. This is where safeguarding belongs: at the very heart of our mission as followers of Jesus.

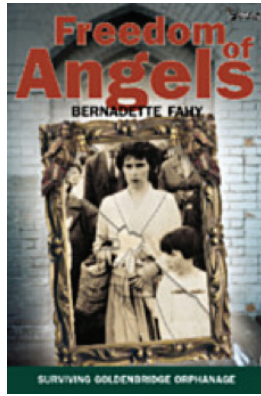
Service – Ministry – Safeguarding - the new “SMS”
Garry Kehoe, Training and Development Officer

BOOK REVIEW: FREEDOM OF ANGELS BY BERNADETTE FAHY

Bernadette Fahy spent ten years in Goldenbridge orphanage. In her book, "Freedom of Angels", the author writes about her experiences there and the impact of these experiences on her life, both at the time and later. The story is one of gross neglect and unspeakable cruelty and the book is, at times, very hard to read.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part tells about her life in Goldenbridge. It ends with a chapter entitled simply: "Why the Cruelty?" In this the author points to the chasm between the values of the gospel and the reality of the treatment she experienced and witnessed in Goldenbridge.

The second part of the book is about the author's recovery and healing process. The journey towards healing and recovery is also a harrowing story. The author details her own attempts to come to terms with her painful past. It was not a straight path. She travels a certain distance, often with the help of others, only to find obstacles to further progress, falls back and then picks herself up to continue her journey. She is remorselessly honest with and about herself. By the end of the book she has reached a point of wholeness.



For this reader, one of the most important things to be learned from the book was about the process of healing and recovery. We sometimes have a naive belief that those who have been through bad experiences can be given something that will make them better, rather like treating an infection with a dose of antibiotics. For those who have been through deeply traumatising experiences, it is never so simple. Healing is the work of a lifetime.

Bernadette Fahy has made a success of her life. She qualified as a counselling psychologist and, with Christine Buckley, established the Aislinn Centre to provide support and services to survivors of institutional abuse. Throughout her professional life she has been advocating for survivors and she continues to do so to this day. Hers is a story of resilience and generosity to others in the face of adversities that would have defeated many people.

Freedom of Angels was published by the O'Brien press in 1999. Hard copies are hard to find but it is available as an ebook from Amazon.



DIOCESAN VETTING POLICY

Recently, we have had a number of vetting applications from parishes returned to us from the National Vetting Bureau (NVB). NVB will not process applications for vetting unless this is done in accordance with the legislation. It is important that parishes submit only those applications that comply with diocesan vetting policy.

The policy of the Archdiocese of Dublin is that all who exercise 'public ministry' and all those working with children and vulnerable adults in diocesan offices, agencies and parishes undergo vetting through the National Vetting Bureau.

Public ministry refers to that section of the legislation that describes: "Any work or activity as a minister or priest or any other person engaged in the advancement of any religious beliefs unless such work or activity is merely incidental to the advancement of religious beliefs to persons who are not children/ vulnerable persons". Those who minister, for example as Eucharist Ministers or Ministers of the Word minister equally to children, vulnerable adults and other adult parishioners and must, therefore, be vetted.

Not every parish ministry is a public ministry. Some people work on behalf of their parish behind the scenes and in circumstances where it would not be apparent to other parishioners that they have a role in the parish. For example, members of parish finance committees who have no other role in the parish, could not be considered to be exercising public ministry. Another example might be flower arrangers or those who decorate the altar at times when other people are not present. Such people cannot be vetted. The Diocese has been advised that it is a breach of data protection norms to hold what is described as sensitive personal information about people it has not collected in accordance with the requirements of legislation.

The diocesan policy document on vetting is currently being updated to reflect the changes brought about by the implementation of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012, which came into effect in April 2016. It will be available later in the year, both in hard copy and on the CSPS website: www.csps.dublindiocese.ie