

SAFEGUARDING MATTERS

in the Catholic Church in Scotland

JUNE 2024



Why we all need to develop

by **Helena Rameckers**, SCSSA's *Head of Safeguarding Training*



to undertake their safeguarding roles effectively. Most significantly, research highlights the need to continue to listen to the experience of victims and survivors of abuse in the Church - and we do so humbly.

Informed by this research, and in response to the feedback given at various conferences, training events and through the annual self-evaluation exercise, we have already made significant changes to the Induction Training which is mandatory for all those who are responsible for safeguarding.

Our Safeguarding Training Advisory Group (STAG) has brought great experience and expertise to support this key area of our work and they are now turning their attention to other training.

CPD (Continuous Professional Development) for everyone involved in safeguarding within the Church is necessary to ensure best practice and to provide the safest environments for activities involving children and vulnerable adults.

Since COVID, the instances of online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) has increased significantly, and the advent of new technology, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), has exposed children and vulnerable adults to greater dangers online. So, it is critical that our safeguarding training keeps fully up to date with the increased risks.

Our determination is to make sure that safeguarding training is seen by all to be vital, informative and responsive to your needs. We can do this with YOUR help. The next time you are asked to complete "yet another" evaluation form at a training event, please remember that YOUR feedback will affect how we go on to improve the training that we provide.

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Research published in recent weeks has offered some significant insights into the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church globally¹, as well as nearer home, in England & Wales². Some of these insights are already informing our approaches to the training we are developing for those responsible for safeguarding across the Church in Scotland.

Both investigations indicate clearly that there have been improvements in safeguarding practice across Church jurisdictions. However, they also make it clear that much more still needs to be done to ensure that everyone is equipped with both the knowledge and the confidence

¹ ['The safeguarding capability of adults in Catholic Church ministries: a global perspective'](#)

² ['The Cross of the Moment'](#)

What Research is telling us

1 - SAFEGUARDING IS A WORK IN PROGRESS.

In the July 2024 issue of the journal 'Child Abuse & Neglect', a group of researchers report on how they investigated the safeguarding capabilities of a range of people with different roles within Catholic Church ministries in various countries¹. The 184 research participants included lay people, religious men and women, school staff, safeguarding officers and tertiary students associated with the Catholic Church with data collected across seven different countries.

¹ ['The safeguarding capability of adults in Catholic Church ministries: A global perspective', Child Abuse & Neglect, Vol. 153, April 2024](#)



BACKGROUND

Researchers acknowledged that the recommendations of independent inquiries investigating reports of child sex abuse and the publication of direct Papal instructions have resulted in Catholic institutions in various countries taking up new measures to prevent, investigate and mitigate the impacts of Child Sex Abuse (CSA).

They report that most of the safeguarding policies developed by Church bodies have improved the expectation of good safeguarding practice in accordance with a variety of child-focused rights and values. However, what is less evident in these Catholic safeguarding initiatives is the required capabilities of leaders, clergy, practitioners, and Church communities to implement policy, meet standards and better safeguard children, young people, and vulnerable adults from CSA.

RESULTS

Researchers found varying levels of awareness, confidence, attitudes, and knowledge regarding sexual abuse prevention and safeguarding. They pinpointed the significant differences in three of these domains (*confidence, attitudes, and knowledge*) between people with different roles in the church worldwide, but also between the countries from which participants came from. (There was a significant difference between those countries where there had been independent inquiries investigating reports of wide-scale abuse, and those countries where no such inquiries had taken place.)

CONCLUSIONS

People in various countries and roles within the Church are at different stages of their safeguarding journey. Some are still understanding their roles (*attitudes*), some are still learning about how it is operationalised (*awareness*), and others are acquiring skills that will prepare them for enacting safeguarding policies (*confidence*).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers make some key recommendations for different groups:

CLERGY should

- be encouraged to own and acknowledge the Church's record of past failures to create safe environments for children
- through seminary training and ongoing formation be equipped with knowledge and implementation of situational prevention strategies, even where there might be high levels of confidence to act
- build their awareness and knowledge of how to identify and mitigate risks, based on situational or contextual prevention strategies.

LAY PEOPLE should:

- build their capacity to report inappropriate behaviour and situations, grooming, and abuse
- develop their awareness of policy and procedures, attitudes to prevention and agency of children and young people, and contribute to building a positive organisational culture of safeguarding.

SAFEGUARDING OFFICERS should:

- adopt strategies to increase their knowledge and awareness
- build awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities by creating a collaborative network to increase positive attitudes to safeguarding practices across roles
- improve communication about the importance of children, their right to safety, and the role that church ministries have in prioritising and supporting actions to keep children safe.

What Research is telling us

2 - SAFEGUARDING IS “THE CROSS OF THE MOMENT”.

Published in April 2024, ‘The Cross of the Moment’¹ reports on the impact and implications of clerical child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It explores how the abuse crisis has been experienced by different groups within the Church, most painfully by victims and survivors of abuse and their families, and also affecting parish communities, laypeople, priests, deacons, bishops, religious communities and others. The authors’ concern is not just with the impact of the abuse itself, but also with how it has been handled and mishandled by institutional figures and processes and how this has affected confidence and relationships in the Church. (While based on research in England & Wales, many of the issues raised are relevant to Scotland.)

¹ [The Cross of the Moment, a report from the Boundary Breaking Project, Durham University Centre for Catholic Studies.](#)



“We are all part of one body; we cannot behave as though it does not matter if the abuse or mishandling is less prevalent in our own parish, diocese or community when across our broader Catholic community there are multiple cases and unknown numbers of victims and survivors.”

Focus

The focus of this research was to listen to the voices of victims and survivors of abuse and their families. It also listened to others either directly or indirectly affected by the abuse crisis including parish communities, laypeople, priests, deacons, bishops, religious communities and safeguarding staff. The report presents theological reflection on the experiences described.

The report invites groups across the catholic community to listen more deeply to the voices of those directly and indirectly affected and consider what may need to change in Catholic culture and theological understanding.

It responds to Pope Francis’ proposal that to move forward, the Catholic community needs “a continuous and profound conversion of hearts attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the church”.

MAIN FINDINGS

Although the report recognises that progress has been made in safeguarding practice and in finding more compassionate ways to accompany and support victim-survivors, it concludes that more work is needed.

While the authors suggest that habits of ‘clericalism’ are changing and that accountability within the Church’s structures is improving, they recommend learning from restorative justice and healing circle practices to find ways to heal relationships between victim-survivors and the Catholic community.

INVITATION

The report invites readers to:

- explore how the issues raised point to aspects of Catholic faith and culture which might need re-thinking
- listen to the voices presented in the report
- consider the issues and questions raised by their experience
- reflect on what resonates with or challenges your experience and what you can learn from prayerful listening
- explore how the issues raised point to aspects of the Catholic faith and culture which might need re-thinking
- ponder what is asked of the whole Catholic community in responding to the abuse crisis.

GUIDE TO READING

The report is a long text. For some people, it will not be easy reading. It is important to take time and consider what would work for you.

You do not have to sit down and read it from cover to cover. However you choose to read it, you are encouraged to use the text as a resource and to explore the sections and themes which draw your interest.

[On the SCSSA website, we provide some further guidance and suggest some pathways for reading it.](#)

Safeguarding Training News

SAFEGUARDING TRAINING ADVISORY GROUP

STAG was established "to support the development of a framework of nationally agreed safeguarding training to meet specific training needs identified by various groups - bishops, clergy, religious, employees, and volunteers. This is intended to promote consistent practice across all Church jurisdictions in Scotland." (IGI 7.2.1)

STAG consists of fifteen members who meet online every two months, and in person each August for a development day. Every diocese is represented, as are Religious and clergy. Members are required to hold experience of safeguarding responsibilities within the Church, and/or relevant professional experience. In reality, most members possess both considerable Church safeguarding experience and a professional background including education, psychology, healthcare or social work.

One STAG member provided this comment on the group's work:

"The group has brought together volunteers from over Scotland and different backgrounds in safeguarding. Helena chairs the group brilliantly and I like the fact we all get a chance to put our views across. Helena makes sure every one of us has a voice and is heard. Its a great group to be part of."

Another member offered her thoughts on the development of 'virtual learning' in safeguarding:

"When Covid struck in 2021 and lockdown prevented meetings of any kind, we developed a very basic form of remote learning, initially using Skype or Facetime, eventually evolving into Zoom and Teams, but we managed to deliver safeguarding training to many volunteers from the length and breadth of the Diocese as far north as Orkney and Shetland, to the Highlands, Moray and Aberdeenshire. The development of virtual training has been a true Godsend, a gift to us, which has facilitated the induction into the world of safeguarding of volunteers who might never have had access to it."

INDUCTION TRAINING

The first major task for STAG was to update mandatory safeguarding training for Induction. This was necessary due to a number of factors, not least the revision of **IN GOD'S IMAGE**, advances in best practice in a post-Covid climate, and changes in legislation.

In developing the training, different learning styles were taken into account so that the new training contains group work, resources to read, and videos, as well as trainer presentations.

Induction Training aims to cover the basic safeguarding information that everyone in ministry needs to know, including reinforcement of mandatory reporting, safe recruitment, and our Listen/Respond/Record/Refer protocol, including guidance on the best way to respond to a disclosure and self-care afterwards.



STANDARD THREE LISTEN-RESPOND-RECORD-REFER

LISTEN

- Take the person seriously.
- Acknowledge the information about allegations or concerns sensitively.

RESPOND

- Ensure the immediate safety of the child or vulnerable adult.
- In an emergency, where someone is at immediate risk of harm, contact Police / Social Work / Medical Services immediately.

RECORD

- Briefly note the key points of the allegation: Who? What? When? Where?
- **DO NOT INVESTIGATE** the allegation.

REFER

- Pass all information to the bishop or major religious superior via the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (or religious Safeguarding Link Co-ordinator) who will refer the allegation to the statutory authorities.



TAKE ACTION

"CHRIST HAS NO BODY BUT YOURS"

The famous prayer by St. Teresa of Avila is used to end the Induction Training session as a reminder that, when we carry out our ministries safely and with compassion, respecting the dignity of those with whom we work, then we are truly instruments of Our Lord doing His work.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN INDUCTION TRAINING

Whether you need to attend an Induction session as a new volunteer for the first time, or as a seasoned volunteer requiring a refresher and update of our key safeguarding messages, **please contact your diocesan safeguarding office for information on when to attend.**

Safeguarding Training News

INDUCTION TRAINING TAKE-HOME RESOURCES

To supplement Induction Training, we have created some take-home resources, which can be downloaded from the SCSSA website.

PSC TRAINING

STAG's current major task is to overhaul training for Parish Safeguarding Coordinators. STAG members have identified what they consider to be the most important elements of the PSC role under four subheadings:

1. *Practical Aspects of the PSC Role*
2. *Diary of the PSC*
3. *Responding to Disclosures*
4. *Data Protection (GDPR).*

As PSCs will know, this task highlighted the incredible work undertaken by these very important volunteers. A request in a previous 'Safeguarding Matters' issue for feedback from PSCs revealed a clear need for training to be practical and "hands on". STAG will now shape a new training package for PSCs which will be available in 2025. There will initially be a pilot phase, so if you are a PSC and would like to know more about this, please contact Helena who will be delighted to hear from you by email: helena.rameckers@scssa.org.uk



ONLINE LEARNING FORUM

Work is underway to develop our refreshed website to host learning resources that will support people in various safeguarding roles. One of the first projects will be to create a bespoke Induction Training resource that will allow those unable to access Trainer-led sessions to complete the relevant training online. This will be widely publicised once it is available.

Our website currently provides an online forum for STAG members to share ideas and resources in between meetings. We are planning to add various resources that anyone can access to enhance their awareness and knowledge of various issues relevant to safeguarding roles.

UPCOMING NATIONAL TRAINING EVENTS

- **A Development Day for STAG members** will take place on **Saturday 31st August 2024**.
- **Safeguarding Trainers** will be invited to a **Development Day** on **Saturday 5th October**. It will be led by Tammy Banks of Teye Training. Booking details will be sent to Trainers and DSAs shortly.
- Details of the **National Safeguarding Conference** on **Saturday 16th November** will be published soon.



Safeguarding Day for Religious 2024



115 participants enrolled to attend a Safeguarding Day for Religious in Carfin on Friday 24th May 2024.

They had travelled from across Scotland to reflect on 'Safeguarding in the Context of Catholic Social Teaching', led by the Rev. Dr. Barry O'Sullivan, a priest of Salford Diocese who is a leading proponent of safeguarding in the Catholic Church in England & Wales and who has been undertaking research on Spirituality and Safeguarding.

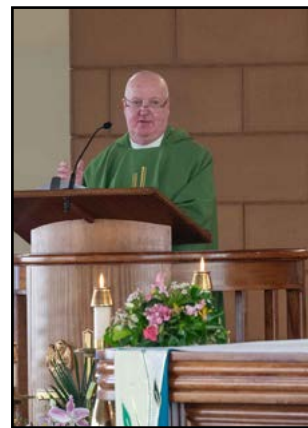
The SCSSA, in collaboration with the Conference of Religious in Scotland (CRS), had invited Fr O'Sullivan to provide his input in direct response to the requests of many Religious who had heard him briefly address the 2023 National Safeguarding Conference.

Spirituality featured throughout the day, with morning and afternoon prayer led by participants. The celebration of Mass was led by Bishop Brian McGee, Safeguarding President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, with the homily preached by Fr Jim Clarke of the Xaverian Missionaries.

Fr Barry acknowledged that he would only have time to touch on some aspects of safeguarding and how it is located centrally in Catholic Social Teaching. He generously provided his main Powerpoint presentation and a complementary set of Catholic Social Teaching resources [which can be found here on the SCSSA website](#).



Rev. Dr. Barry O'Sullivan



Fr Jim Clarke



Bishop Brian McGee



Refreshed SCSSA Website

The SCSSA website has been significantly refreshed with new content and style. It now uses 4 main pages to 'speak to' the various users who browse for safeguarding news, information and advice (see below). We are keen to hear YOUR VIEWS on how the website can be further improved to meet the needs of the wide range of people who contribute to safeguarding in the Church. Please email: comms@scssa.org.uk to provide any feedback.

LISTENING

- ❑ assures abuse survivors that, if they come forward to tell of their experiences, they will be treated with respect and compassion
- ❑ provides contact details of the Church safeguarding personnel who can be contacted if anyone wants to report abuse or a safeguarding concern
- ❑ advises anyone hearing a disclosure of abuse how to respond in the first instance.

We are . . . listening to survivors.

We recognise that those who have been victims of abuse in the Catholic Church can find it very difficult to disclose to anyone. Often they feel angry, betrayed, isolated, marginalised and powerless. They want to be believed and to feel safe.

We are committed to listening respectfully and compassionately to anyone who has experienced abuse as a result of their contact with the Catholic Church in Scotland. We are committed to working with survivors so that their experiences can inform safeguarding practice and help us to prevent future harm.

Our staff and members of the SCSSA Board meet with survivors in different contexts – sometimes individually, at other times in groups. The experience of listening to accounts of the trauma that has been experienced by survivors continues to inform our work.

We are . . . committed to sharing learning about safeguarding.

As expert knowledge and understanding of abuse develops in the light of experience and research, safeguarding systems and approaches across the world are being constructed to improve the protection of children and vulnerable adults in different contexts.

The experience of the Catholic Church in this regard has been particularly troubled and has led Pope Francis to call on all members of the Church to work in solidarity in order to "uproot the culture of abuse" in Church communities. He has called on Catholics, individually and collectively, to undertake "a commitment to a culture of care" in safeguarding.

The SCSSA Board and staff members are very conscious that they have much to learn – particularly from survivors – about abuse, its causes and its effects. They are also on the early stages of their journey to understand how safeguarding standards are being met and how they can best work to assist safeguarding personnel to improve their practice.

LEARNING

- ❑ speaks to the importance of all safeguarding personnel in the Church - clergy, religious, employees and volunteers - continuing to learn about abuse and how to respond to disclosures
- ❑ is intended to become a gateway into various learning opportunities in safeguarding
- ❑ provides links to national training events - booking forms, resources, image galleries.

IMPROVING

- ❑ highlights the SCSSA's primary purpose in monitoring adherence to the Church's safeguarding standards, as set out in the document 'In God's Image'
- ❑ provides guidance on approaches to self-evaluating and improving safeguarding practice.

We are . . . working to IMPROVE safeguarding.

The SCSSA provides strategic leadership and direction in safeguarding to all components of the Catholic Church in Scotland.

We are responsible for promoting and advising on national safeguarding standards, as set out in the Safeguarding Instruction 'In God's Image', published by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland.

We monitor compliance with safeguarding standards through developing effective systems of quality assurance, promoting expertise in self-evaluation and action planning, and supporting the identification of strengths and development needs in dioceses, parishes, religious institutes and Catholic organisations.

We publish recommendations as part of our reports, following completion of audits and other quality assurance checks.

We aim to . . .
keep you informed.

INFORMING

- ❑ explains how the SCSSA communicates with its partners and other agencies
- ❑ will hold published SCSSA reports
- ❑ provides an opportunity for anyone to "keep in touch" with the SCSSA by subscribing to its news updates (see next page).

Keeping in touch with the SCSSA

We recognise that everyone involved in safeguarding is busy with so much other work, especially if they are volunteers who have other jobs, family commitments etc.

Knowing how much news coverage there is that impinges on safeguarding, we are keen to help everyone to keep in touch with the most significant developments that could enhance knowledge and understanding. Our particular focus, of course, is to work with others to improve the safeguarding standards governing the work of the Catholic Church in Scotland.

To that end, we post regular News updates on our website to provide safeguarding news from Scotland and beyond. These News posts are emailed to anyone who has subscribed to receive them from the SCSSA website.

[Disappointment that mandatory reporting will not become a legal requirement in England](#)

SCSSA Comms posted on 13/05/2024 11:37:00



Professor Alexis Jay, Chair of IICSA (the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England) recommended that a new criminal offence should be created for people working in positions of trust who failed to report allegations of child sexual abuse [read more](#)

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More news from SCSSA

WHAT HAPPENS NOW WITH THE SAFEGUARDING EVALUATIONS?

A key stage in the annual Safeguarding Evaluation exercise, following the collection of data from Parishes, Religious Congregations, and Catholic Organisations, firstly involves everyone who has completed their self-evaluation in a **period of analysis and reflection** on what your submission tells you about safeguarding practice in your own setting.

- what improvements are you planning?
- who will be involved in this work?
- what further support do you need?
- how have you communicated these thoughts to your community?



The **SCSSA** will analyse the information that has been provided by parishes, dioceses, religious congregations and Catholic organisations to check compliance with the Church's safeguarding standards, as set out in 'In God's Image'. When analysing these and compiling summary reports for each Diocese, the SCSSA will identify any significant risks, issues or trends that should inform its planning for taking further action and developing training, resources and other forms of support. It will publish the key statistics and comments on any significant national issues in a report.

DIOCESES will use the information from completed Parish Audits, collated in the summary reports provided by the SCSSA, to identify any significant risks or issues that will inform their planning for developing appropriate training and other forms of support. Dioceses will share these plans with Parish clergy and safeguarding volunteers.

The **CRSSC** (Conference of Religious in Scotland Safeguarding Commission) will use the summary report provided by the SCSSA to identify risks or issues that are specific to Religious Congregations and, in discussion with the SCSSA, make plans for relevant training and support. The CRSSC will share these plans with Religious communities.

Catholic Organisations will be invited to participate in SCSSA training events that will be developed in response to the needs that they have identified in their completed self-evaluations.

This newsletter provides information about the work of the SCSSA in monitoring the safeguarding practice of the Catholic Church in Scotland. If you have suggestions for topics to be covered in future issues, please email these to: comms@scssa.org.uk