



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice**

**in the**

**Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd**

**undertaken by**

**The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the**

**Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board)**

**Date of Review Report: April 2024**

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## **Background**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church Ireland (National Board) was established in 2006 to provide advice, services and assistance in the ongoing development of safeguarding children within the Roman Catholic Church on the Island of Ireland; to monitor compliance with legislation, policy and best practice; and to report on these activities. This is comprehensively set out in the Memorandum of Association of the Company.

Church authorities who have entered into an agreement with the National Board through signing a Memorandum of Understanding have committed to following *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*.

In order to assess compliance, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of The Good Shepherd invited the National Board to undertake a review of practice, which took place in February 2024.

The National Board for safeguarding children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board) was established in 2006 to:

- Provide advice, services and assistance in furtherance of the development of the safeguarding of children within the Roman Catholic Church on the island of Ireland.
- Monitor compliance with legislation policy and best practice; and
- Report on these activities as comprehensively set out on the memorandum of association of the company.

The Congregation was previously reviewed in 2016 under the Safeguarding Children Standards and Guidance of the Catholic Church in Ireland 2008. The report of the first review can be found on the National Safeguarding Board website at: [www.safeguarding.ie/publications](http://www.safeguarding.ie/publications).

### **Recommendations of the 2016 Review:**

| <b>Recommendation</b>   | <b>Implemented or not</b> |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. The province leader in conjunction with the designated officer should ensure that all complaints of abuse are notified to the civil authorities, An Garda Síochána, Tusla and the NSBCCCI in a timely fashion  | <b>Yes</b>                |
| 2. The province leader and relevant personnel must attend induction training for the Catholic churches new policy and standards in 2016 and attend regular national child safeguarding training relevant to their roles. The province leader should also ensure that all personnel who hold safeguarding roles within the province, including members of the safeguarding committee receive recognised training and support for the role they hold. | <b>Yes</b>                |
| 3. The province leader should consider formally joining the NSBCCCI's national case management committee for independent advice on the management of cases.   | <b>No</b>                 |
| 4. The province leader should formally establish the child safeguarding committee and the role of safeguarding coordinator.   | <b>Yes</b>                |

This report on implementation was shared with the reviewer in February 2024 by the Province Leader, and progress has been made in each of the areas as will be reflected in this review report, except for recommendation 3. The Province Leader confirmed that they will continue to seek advice and guidance from the NSBCCCI as required but have decided not to join the National Case Management Committee (NCMC).

The purpose of the second round of reviews is to assess child- safeguarding practice against the Catholic Church in Ireland's current standards as detailed in *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*. The Review took place in February 2024 and seeks to evaluate the quality of evidence to provide:

- (i) Public confidence that the church body is safe for children.
- (ii) Affirmation to child safeguarding personnel that they are doing the right things well.
- (iii) Confirmation to the church authority that what they wanted to be done is in fact being done.
- (iv) Independent verification of self-audit or correction and/or improvement of self-audit.
- (v) Opportunities for learning.

### Introduction

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, also known as the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, was founded in 1835 by St. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier in Angers, France, has its origin in the Order of Our Lady of Charity founded in Tours, France, 1641.

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity was founded in 1641 by John Eudes at Caen, France, in response to the needs of many girls and women he met on his missionary travels throughout France, who were exploited and wished to escape from situations of poverty and oppression. The mission of the Order was to offer new possibilities to these women. To stress the importance of this work, St. John Eudes gave the sisters a fourth vow of Zeal, by which the sisters committed themselves to holding on to the belief in the dignity and potential of each individual person.

After the French Revolution, St. Mary Euphrasia joined the Order. It subsequently began to receive many requests to establish new foundations worldwide. To enable this expansion to happen, St. Mary Euphrasia recognised the need for a Generalate. This new initiative resulted in the founding of the new Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, with over a hundred foundations established in her lifetime.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, and the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, existed side by side for more than one hundred and fifty years, retaining their individual entities and sometimes collaborating on common programmes and projects. Both remained faithful to the shared vision of their founders.

### **Order of Our Lady of Charity**

The first Sisters of Our Lady of Charity arrived in Dublin in 1853, at the invitation of Fr. John Smith. They were asked to run St. Mary's Asylum and Hyde Park, Drumcondra, which provided care for women who were destitute or were deemed to be in 'moral danger.' This and another home for women in Sean McDermott St were the two main projects run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity during their first 100 years in Ireland.

Over the years, additional services were developed in Dublin, which included: Refuges, Reformatories and Industrial Schools, adolescent residential services, childcare, transitional care, counselling services and pastoral ministry.

### **Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in Ireland:**

The first sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd came to Ireland in 1848 and began their work in Limerick. Additional houses were founded in Waterford, New Ross, Belfast, Cork, Derry Newry, Dunboyne and Dublin.

The Good Shepherd Sisters are an international apostolic religious institution of Pontifical Rite. The sisters choose to commit themselves to either an Apostolic lifestyle or Contemplative lifestyle. Historically the services provided in Ireland included: Industrial Schools, One reformatory school, St. Mary's Centres for women and girls and Mother & Baby Homes.

Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, and Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, both have over one hundred and fifty years of history in Ireland. Both were, with other female Congregations, the subject of a report commissioned by former Senator Martin McAleese. This report sought to determine the level of State involvement in routes of entry to residential institutions with a "laundry" component for women and concluded that more than a quarter of all official referrals were made by the State. The last of these facilities was closed by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in 1996.

### **Merger of the two Congregations - known now as: Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, also known as Good Shepherd Sisters.**

In 2006, a consultation process was begun internationally to explore the possibility of integrating the two Congregations. This unification involved the merging the Order of Our Lady of Charity into the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd. This was canonically formalised in June 2014. The merging of properties took place in 2022, the TUPE of employees in 2022 and investments in 2024. It is envisaged that the final closure of the charity of The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity will take place this year.

### **Governance and current reality in the province**

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd holds a Chapter every six years, whereby the Province Leader and some members, both apostolic and contemplative, are elected on to a Leadership Team, with some members appointed. Their mandate is for six years.

The Province Leader, with the support the Leadership Team, addresses the day-to-day management of the Congregation in Ireland but also has strong links to the international dimension of the Congregation.

The Irish Province currently comprises 62 sisters, the average age being 82-83 years. Ten sisters reside in Nursing Homes and one sister serves internationally.

Over the past years the Sisters have handed over their corporate ministries to other charities. Today Sisters work mainly with other organisations, in a voluntary capacity. As a Congregation, the Sisters no longer have direct ministries with children.

Following the last Safeguarding Review in 2016, a Safeguarding Committee was formally established, with lay personnel – Coordinator and DLP – working alongside the sisters. This Committee has enabled the sisters/employees to keep safeguarding a constant priority in our lives.

The Congregation gave evidence to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (ROI) in July 2004, and was subsequently a party to the Residential Institutions Redress Board. In January 2017, the Report of the Northern Ireland Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse, 1922 to 1995, was published in which a chapter is devoted to the residential services for children operated by the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in Northern Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

There are 62 Sisters in the Congregation, 48 of whom are mandated persons, with some sisters working mainly on a voluntary basis, in various ministries in other Church bodies or external organisations. All of these active sisters comply with safeguarding arrangements in the organisations or agencies with which they work.

The Province Leader and the DLP welcomed the opportunity provided by the Review to explore issues and to consider additional learning to enhance their safeguarding arrangements in accordance with the 2016 Standards, which is commendable.

The Congregation developed a safeguarding section on their website - (<https://goodshepherdsisters.ie>), which carries their Safeguarding Statement and provides a range of safeguarding resources and information.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hiainquiry.org/historical-institutional-abuse-inquiry-report-chapters>

The Congregational Safeguarding Statement pledges that,

As a constituent member of the Catholic Church in Ireland, we recognise and uphold the dignity and the rights of all children, are committed to ensuring their safety and well-being, and will work in partnership with parents /guardians to do this.

We recognise each child as a gift from God, and we value and encourage the participation of children in all activities that enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development. All church personnel (including clergy, religious, staff and volunteers) have a responsibility to safeguard children through promoting their welfare, health and development in a safe and caring environment that supports their best interests and prevents abuse.<sup>2</sup>

The Congregational Safeguarding Policy states that the Sisters wish to develop best practise based on the National Board standards and has been updated in compliance with the Children First Act 2015.

The Congregational Safeguarding Policy commits to,

1. Implementing our policy and procedures,
2. Doing all in our power to create a safe environment for all to ensure that children/vulnerable persons' welfare is paramount.
3. Cooperating fully with the civil authorities in all aspects of safeguarding.
4. Fully reporting all allegations, complaints, disclosures, suspicions, or concerns (current, historical, or anonymous) to the civil authorities without delay.
5. Welcoming, listening to and supporting anyone who presents with a report, concern, suspicion, allegation, complaint, disclosure (whether historical current or anonymous).

### **Safeguarding structure:**

The Congregation has a DLP supported by a Deputy DLP. The DLP acts as the Safeguarding Coordinator for the Congregation and is a member of the Safeguarding Committee. The DLP also acts as a Trainer and has successfully completed National Safeguarding Board 'Train the Trainers' course. The DLP is accountable to the Province Leader, and she has been in the post since March 2022. She works between 2 and 4 days per month, depending on the workload.

The first lay Coordinator was appointed in 2018 and a lay DLP was appointed in January 2019.

A member of staff undertakes the vetting arrangements and coordinates this activity on behalf of the congregation.

The roles and responsibilities of the Province Leader, DLP, Safeguarding Coordinator, Support Person, Advisor. Local Safeguarding Representatives, and Safeguarding Committee are clearly set out in the policy.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://goodshepherdsisters.ie>

**Process of Review.**

The congregation no longer have a direct ministry with children consequently the reviewer met with staff on site at the Congregation's Headquarters, based in Dublin.

The reviewer met with the DLP, Province Leader, advisor and members of the Safeguarding Committee. The Reviewer notes that the Congregation are actively recruiting a Support Person.

The Congregation identified two (2) case management files for review. One of the respondents is deceased, and the other respondent is elderly and infirm.

Complainants are supported by providing counselling services, through Towards Healing mainly, for which the congregation pays. In general, complainants come to the attention of the congregation through the complainants' legal advisors. The Province Leader advised that reaching out, due to legal constraints, is a challenge. A database provided by the congregation highlighted the involvement of sisters in reaching out to complainants, which included travelling abroad and invitations to holiday in Ireland. The Congregation recently initiated contact with one complainant, not through the legal process, but the offer was declined.

Apart from making notifications to the Statutory Authorities, the Congregation has no active interaction with these bodies as they have no open cases.



### STANDARDS

The Standards are a level of practice required to ensure good child safeguarding arrangements.

Each standard is self-contained and supported by indicators to evidence if safeguarding arrangements and practice meet the required standard. The National Board has produced detailed Guidance, which is accessible on its website at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/guidance>.

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd agreed to adopt *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016* as its child safeguarding policy through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Board. The adherence of the Congregation to the Policy and Standards is confirmed on its website, at <https://goodshepherdsisters.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2019-Safeguarding-Children-RGS-Policy-2019.-Contact-data-updated-Nov.-2022.pdf>

The seven Standards are:

Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments

Standard 2: Procedures for responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations

Standard 3: Care and Support for the Complainant

Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe

Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Standard 7: Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards

This Review concentrates on practice through evaluating written records, interviews with Church personnel and information from complainants and respondents.

An assessment of practice under each Standard is set out below.

## Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments

*Church bodies provide an environment for children that is welcoming, nurturing, and safe. They provide access to good role models whom children can trust, who respect, protect, and enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development.*

The Congregation no longer has direct involvement with children and young people as part of their overall ministry; consequently, no children's groups access their facilities. All groups who make use of the congregation's facilities are provided with copies of the congregations safeguarding documentation and requirements.

Several Sisters however do participate in various programmes, which are independently managed by the agencies for which they work.

For example, one (1) Sister in Cork volunteers with a charity, where she interacts with children. She has signed the form 'Working with External Organisations', a copy of which is retained in the - Safeguarding file in the Province Office.

The congregation has produced a document titled, 'Living Together with Respect and Dignity', (May 2023), which outlines codes of conducts for all Sisters, both within the congregation and whilst working with children and vulnerable adults. It is a comprehensive and readable document, which is commendable as it adopts a wider understanding of safeguarding.

The congregation has a detailed Safeguarding Policy, which the reviewer examined as part of the review process. The policy is titled Safeguarding Children 2019, which was amended in March 2022 to update contact data.

The policy confirms that

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, and its journey of legal, moral, and spiritual obligations as an entity of the Church and is an important factor in the humanitarian development field, has as a priority the safeguarding of children and persons in vulnerable situations. For this reason, every unit, community, administrator, and facility with the congregation must comply with the safeguarding policy and procedures that are consistent with the highest international human rights standards.

[Congregational Safeguarding Policy, March 2022]

The 62-page document contains information on the purpose and scope of the policy statement, as well as the guiding principles behind it, and clarification of roles and responsibilities.

The document is comprehensive and sets out procedures for recruitment, and written guidelines on expected standards of behaviour from adults towards children. The policy also outlines ways in which the Sisters can raise concerns about unacceptable behaviours. They have also developed a comprehensive risk assessment process that can be utilised if working with children, which includes information technology usage.

The Congregation also has a Whistleblowing Policy, which defines Whistleblowing as raising concerns about wrongdoing or misconduct, which was made available to the reviewer.

The Congregation developed a pro-forma form to capture whistle-blower information and to provide guidance to those who wish to make a complaint. The Congregation is compliant with Indicator 1.6.

The Congregation has a policy on Social Media, the publication of images, and care in the use of marketing tools, and the use of official congregation social media channels requires appropriate approval. The policy outlines a set of principles, which include respecting the dignity of the individual, and seeking permission before taking photographs.

The Congregation also has an extensive Data Protection Policy, which is currently under review by a consultant to streamline some of the language whilst retaining the core principles contained within the policy. Sisters, staff, and volunteers who work for the congregation have been vetted by police and undergone appropriate safeguarding training.

The reviewer was asked to sign into the Congregation's Office during the fieldwork visit to the headquarters, and was provided with clear instructions on the exits, Health and Safety, and which rooms could be accessed, and which were private.

**This standard is met.**

## **Standard 2: Procedures for responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations**

*Church bodies have clear procedures and guidance on what to do when suspicions, concerns, knowledge, or allegations arise regarding a child's safety or welfare that will ensure there is a prompt response. They also enable the Church to meet all national and international legal and practice requirements and guidance.*

The Congregation appointed a Lay Coordinator in 2018 and a Lay DLP in 2019. The current DLP/ Safeguarding Coordinator, who was appointed in March 2022, has extensive experience in the personal social services, as well as having worked as a Safeguarding Coordinator and Trainer in an Irish Diocese for a number of years. She has responsibility for overseeing safeguarding arrangements within the congregation. The DLP role is outlined in the policy and procedures, along with her contact details, which are also on the safeguarding posters.

The Safeguarding section of the congregation's website can be accessed at <https://goodshepherdsisters.ie>.

The Congregation acknowledges that the work of safeguarding is an ongoing process. Their policy document is in accordance with the Church National Standards. The role and responsibilities of the DLP are defined as,

- (i) Hearing child protection concerns
- (ii) Passing on child protection concerns to the statutory authorities.
- (iii) Managing cases and all associated documents.
- (iv) Liaising with the support person, advisor, and the Church Authority. Passing on child
- (v) protection concerns to the NBSCCCI.
- (vi) Conducting internal inquiries.
- (vii) Contributing to upholding the seven standards in practice and behaviour.
- (viii) Complete an annual report regarding compliance with standards 2, 3 and 4 for the Church authority.
- (ix) Monitoring respondents or, with the Church authority appointing a suitable person to carry out this role.

There is information in the policy on how to report a concern with the DLP. Contact details for the Gardaí and Tusla in the Republic of Ireland, and for the PSNI and HSCT's in Northern Ireland are also provided.

The Congregation provided two (2) case management files to be reviewed. Each file was redacted in accordance with legal advice sought and received by the Congregation regarding GDPR. The files relate to the Republic of Ireland only. The files that had been presented to the Historical Abuse Inquiry in Northern Ireland were not available for review in accordance with legal advice sought and received by the Congregation.

The following table sets out the abuse concerns reported to the Congregation in the period under review.

**Table 1: Allegations, complaints and concerns of abuse reported to the Congregation since the Review of January 2016**

| <b>Case and current status of respondent Sister</b> | <b>Number of complaints</b>   | <b>PSNI/Garda notified within required period</b> | <b>HSCT/Tusla notified within required period</b>                                | <b>National Board notified within required period</b> | <b>Appropriate canonical processes initiated</b> |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| Case 1  | <b>2 People</b><br>Person 1 Physical abuse<br>Person 2 Physical abuse | Reported to the Order by the Gardaí               | 6 weeks<br>6 weeks   | 6 weeks<br>6 weeks                                    | N/A<br>N/A                                       |
| Case 2  | <b>1 Person</b><br>Physical and sexual abuse                          | 2 weeks   | Case reported to Tusla by Towards Healing, who in turn reported it to the Order. | Same day  | N/A  |

In the first case, the Gardaí contacted the DLP in 2021 to advise that allegations had been made by two former residents in a residential service managed by the Congregation, which dated back to the 1970s. Tusla was notified within six weeks, as was the National Board. Tusla subsequently advised that there was insufficient information provided to support opening a case.

In the case of the second allegation, a report was received by the Congregation in 2018. It came from Tusla, who had received the information from Towards Healing. The congregation notified the National Board on the same day that it received the report and notified the Gardaí two weeks later.

The Province Leader referred to the Congregation’s International Safeguarding Committee, which receives information on all safeguarding cases.

As three of the allegations relate to physical abuse, they do not meet the threshold for investigation under Canon Law. In Case File 2, regarding sexual abuse allegation, it was deemed that there was insufficient information provided to the Congregation to establish if a canonical process was required.

In accordance with their legal advice, the Province leader and DLP had redacted files (in line with data protection legislation). Whilst accepting this position, the reviewer discussed with the Province Leader and DLP his inability to clarify some information in the redacted files. He was able however to establish that in both cases, allegations had been appropriately reported to the civil authority agencies and to the National Board.

**This Standard is met.**

### **Standard 3: Care and Support for the Complainant**

*Complainants who have suffered abuse as children receive a compassionate response when they disclose their abuse. They, and their families, are offered appropriate support, advice, and pastoral care.*

There were two case management files reviewed as part of this review process. In line with the Congregations legal advice (for data protection reasons, which was agreed with the National Board prior to the review process taking place), the identity of the complainants was fully redacted.

A notice of the upcoming Review was placed on the Congregations website some weeks prior to it taking place, stating that if anyone would like to talk to the reviewers about any concerns or issues, they could do so. This information was also relayed to all the communities within the congregation.

In case file 2, as the complaint was received through third parties (Towards Healing and Tusla), the complainant advised that they did not wish to be contacted by the congregation. Reference is also made on the file that the complainant was not willing to proceed with a formal police statement. The complainant chose to remain unidentified, which limited the extent to which criminal law and canon law investigations and child safeguarding assessment could be conducted. The Congregation advised Tusla, in writing, of their willingness to offer pastoral support and meet with the complainant should they so wish.

The Congregation confirmed that in general, complaints come to their attention from the complainant's legal advisors. The Province Leader reflected that this can be at times challenging, as several institutions could be named on a single complaint. She advised that the Congregation is always willing to meet and offer pastoral support to complainants if they are open to contact. She shared a database, which highlighted the involvement of sisters in recent years, in reaching out to complainants, which included travelling abroad and invitations to holiday in Ireland. Recently contact was initiated with one complainant, not through the legal process, but they declined the offer. The Province Leader also advised that the Congregation provides financial support to the 'Towards Healing' counselling service, from whom complainants receive counselling and support, and the reviewer was provided with a financial breakdown of the contributions from 1996 to 2022.

The Congregation had a very active Support Person in place in the past. Since then, as most communication from complainants has been through their legal advisors, there has been limited opportunity for a Support Person to be accessible. However, the Congregation recognises that they ought to continue the practice of offering support through their solicitor when deemed appropriate to the complainant. To that end, they are now recruiting a new Support Person.

The Reviewer considers that **this Standard is partially met** and that the appointment of a Support Person who reaches out to complainants will assist the Congregations practice in this area.

**Recommendation 1**

The Province Leader should recruit, train and support a suitably qualified person to offer support to all complainants, irrespective of the source of their complaint. The Support Persons' details and available service should be communicated in response to complaints received through solicitors letters or through statutory agencies.

#### **Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent**

*The Church authority has in place a fair process for investigating and managing child safeguarding concerns. When the threshold for reporting has been reached, a system of support and monitoring for respondents (cleric or religious) is provided.*

The first DLP was appointed in 2019 and the present DLP was appointed in March 2022. Her role is defined in the policy and procedures developed by the congregation. She is directly accountable to the Province Leader and is supported by the Deputy DLP.

The DLP is responsible for all case management. As previously noted, there were two case files made available for review, and neither of these cases were subject to a risk assessment or risk management plan. The congregation advised that one of the sisters had died. The other Sister is described as being quite frail and elderly.

The name of the respondent in Case File 2 is redacted on the case file, as agreed with the National Board prior to the review. In a letter on file, the respondent Sister stated that she felt hurt by the allegation and had experienced disbelief when she was informed of it. She wrote that the allegation had been badly handled by the congregation. The sister availed of support that she felt she needed at the time. Reviewer was verbally informed that the sister is now deceased.

In the case of Case File 1, the Province Leader confirmed that the sister is being cared for by the Congregation as she is elderly and frail and is not in active ministry. There is no indication of whether any restrictions were placed on her earlier (the report was received in mid-2021), or if a risk-assessment had been considered not to be necessary at that time.

As part of this Review, the reviewer met with the Advisor. She confirmed that she is actively involved with one respondent Sister and provides support on both a planned basis and as when required. She spoke of the protracted nature of some of the investigations and the impact of delays on both the respondents and complainants. This is a function of an Advisor, and further clarity is required about differentiating the role of Support Person and Advisor.

As there was limited evidence of risk assessment on file, the reviewer considers that **this Standard is partially met.**

#### **Recommendation 2**

The DLP should assess the risk posed by respondents against whom there have been allegations and develop an interim management plan based on this assessment. If a management plan is not required, the reasons for such a decision should be detailed and retained in the case management file. In the case of an allegation of sexual abuse, the Province Leader should consider initiating a preliminary investigation under canon law, suspend this to allow criminal inquiries to proceed and then determine whether there is a case to answer as required by canon law.



## **Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe**

*Church personnel are trained and supported in all aspects of safeguarding relevant to their role, to develop and maintain the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to safeguard and protect children.*

The Province Leader confirmed that all relevant personnel attended induction training on the 2016 Standards, and she provided assurance that they continue to ensure that all relevant personnel avail of safeguarding training and keep this updated. There was evidence of Sisters and staff attending training, and additional training is facilitated by the DLP who also acts as the Congregations Trainer. Training Logs were made available to the Reviewer. She also advised that the congregation had sponsored one employee to undergo training with the National Board to qualify as a registered Trainer, and that they are currently planning internal training at a provincial level. The congregation require all Sisters and staff to adhere to training requirements, which is monitored by the Safeguarding Committee and is covered in the Annual Report.

All training provided by the Trainer is National Board compliant.

The Congregation conducts an annual training needs analysis, and a plan developed to address these needs for the year. In addition, those with safeguarding roles are assisted by attending additional training, which was evidenced in supporting information (Training Logs) provided by the congregation.

All Sisters currently working in parishes or other organisations avail of the safeguarding training provided with their employing organisations.

The Province Leader also confirmed that all those who provide safeguarding roles are supported through team meetings, and that they can access additional advice and guidance should that be required from the Safeguarding Committee or through attendance at Conferences. The Congregation also has access to the International Safeguarding Committee with some members attending international conferences facilitated by that committee. The DLP also advised that she could contact a senior Garda officer to seek advice should it be required.

The DLP confirmed that following the attendance at a recent conference, a senior Garda officer advised that he would be willing to provide additional advice and guidance to the DLP on issues relating to safeguarding. The reviewer suggested that this arrangement could be formalised, and that building stronger links with the statutory sector would be beneficial in enhancing safeguarding systems.

The DLP has undergone appropriate training to fulfil her function/roles in supporting the congregation in the execution of its safeguarding responsibilities.

The DLP confirmed that she has access to support from the Province Leader, and this was evident throughout the Review.

The reviewer met with the Safeguarding Committee members, and it was clear that they had undertaken appropriate training facilitated by the DLP, a National Board registered Trainer.

The reviewer is satisfied that the congregation has an up-to-date training schedule, and it is a priority for the Safeguarding Committee to monitor the implementation of the Training Plan.

The Safeguarding Annual Report for 2023 outlines the training that was provided during that year. This training included refresher training for staff facilitated by the DLP, and a National Board training event, *Embedding a Culture of Safeguarding*.

The Training Plan for 2024 outlines the various target groups, which includes Sisters in Ireland, Sisters returning from overseas provinces, staff, including new staff, Support Persons, Advisors and the DLP. The plan details the type of training required, including attendance at conferences and annual update refreshers sessions, which are to be delivered by the National Board. New staff are required to attend full safeguarding training during the year. The Leadership Team and Safeguarding Committee have committed to attending the National Board's Safeguarding Conferences.

**This standard is met.**

## Standard 6 - Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

*Church bodies appropriately communicate the Church's child safeguarding message.*

The Safeguarding Committee Annual Report outlines the Communication Plan, which was made available during the review, for 2024 with target groups including staff/volunteers, leadership, and external groups. The plan template indicates how information will be communicated, including by hard copy, on the Congregation's website, through information sessions, posters, and the Safeguarding Newsletter, all of which were examined by the reviewer. Information topics covered in the plan include the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, how to report a concern, contact details for the DLP, the Annual Report and Strategic Plan for the congregation, and guidance on the use of property. The plan is comprehensive and can be accessed in the Annual Report of the Safeguarding Committee.

The information posters produced are tailored to both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.

The Congregation's website, [www.goodshepherdsisters.ie](http://www.goodshepherdsisters.ie) carries the Congregation's Safeguarding Statement, and their Safeguarding Children RGS policy and contact data, which was updated in November 2022.

The Congregation also provided notice on its website of the planned National Board Review of safeguarding arrangements for children.

The website provides information on the Safeguarding Newsletters for 2021 and 2023 in an easy-to-read format. The most recent version of the Newsletter outlines the membership and work of the Safeguarding Committee, and information on support to complainants from external agencies.

The policy also includes reference to the following documents:

- (i) Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016.
- (ii) Children First Act 2015
- (iii) Children First National Guidance for the Protection the Welfare of Children
- (iv) Safeguarding Children RGS Policy 2019
- (v) Safeguarding Children RGS Policy 2019 contact data updated November 2022

The website provides contact information for the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. Contact arrangements for the Police and Statutory Social Services in both jurisdictions, and counselling services for, 'Towards Healing' and 'Towards Peace' are all listed.

**This Standard is met.**

## **Standard 7: Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards**

*The Church body develops a plan of action to quality assure compliance with the safeguarding standards. This action plan is reviewed annually. The Church body only has responsibility to monitor, evaluate and report on compliance with the indicators under each standard that apply to it, depending on its ministry.*

The Congregation has a Safeguarding Committee. The role of the Safeguarding Committee is to,

1. Develop a three-year safeguarding plan, including the establishment of the local child safeguarding policies and procedures.
2. Coordinate Local Safeguarding Representatives (LSRs)
3. Ensure that the annual audit is completed, including the correlation of records for training related activities.
4. Ensure the completion of training needs assessments across the various child-safeguarding roles in the congregation.
5. Assure the Province Leader that the appropriate child safeguarding personnel are in place.
6. Uphold the seven Standards in practice and behaviour.

The Committee was established in April 2018 and currently has three members. The reviewer suggested that the congregation consider appointing an independent person to chair the Safeguarding Committee, which could bring a degree of challenge to the decision-making and provide additional insights beyond the congregational skills knowledge base. In response to the reviewer's suggestion, the Province Leader advised the reviewer that a fourth person is in line to come on to the Committee.

Safeguarding Committee reports were made available from the years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, and 2023. It is evident from these reports that the committee has addressed key areas and produced work plans that reflect an effective Safeguarding Committee.

The purpose of the committee is to ensure the current safeguarding practices within and across all ministries are based on the National Standards, to ensure that the congregation is adhering to their own safeguarding policy and procedures, and to develop models of best practice in child safeguarding which shall be applied to all areas within the Irish Province. The Committee is also charged with policy development, the dissemination of policy and procedures, and ensuring that staff and volunteers understand and comply with the policy. They also maintain the training register to indicate training completed, and additional training required across the congregation.

The reviewer did not participate in a meeting with the Child Safeguarding Committee but did meet with the membership. From that meeting, evidence to support the implementation of Standard 7 was obtained.

A key task of the committee is to promote interdisciplinary team approach. The congregation confirmed that this is addressed through working with communities, the statutory agencies, and employers.

The committee engages with the various communities of the Congregation, and with those involved in ministry through Good Shepherd Ireland, in auditing safeguarding practices annually.

The committee meet minimally four times a year and met virtually by video link four times during 2020 (Covid) and in person on one occasion. The Safeguarding Coordinator has a very active role with the Safeguarding Committee and supports them by providing the relevant information to members as required.

The Safeguarding Coordinator/DLP also meets regularly with the Province Leader highlighting any emerging issues or themes, which are then communicated to the Safeguarding Committee. The committee also identifies emergent themes or critical areas that may require additional discussion, which are then logged in minutes and placed in agenda for future meetings.

As evident from the Annual Report, the Province Leader provides advice and support to the DLP and acts as the main link to the Sisters from the Congregation.

The reviewer is satisfied that the Child Safeguarding Committee has a clear focus and is mandated by the Congregation to ensure that safeguarding remains a priority within and across the congregations' various facilities.

The committee produced a Communications Plan, a Training Needs Analysis and a Safeguarding Plan for 2024/2026.

The DLP also ensures that self-audits are carried out and that an Annual Audit Report is submitted to the National Board. The DLP conducts visits to the various facilities, which has been monitored by the Safeguarding Committee. The congregation did note that there was no Annual Audit completed for 2022, due to the ongoing HIA in Northern Ireland, which was communicated to the National Board at the time.

The DLP analyses information from the annual self-audit returns and shares conclusions with the Safeguarding Committee. The committee then reviews recommendations for future safeguarding arrangements and actions that may be required.

The Reviewer commends the positive working relationship between the Province Leader and the DLP on the commitment to safeguarding practises across the congregation.

The Congregation promoted this National Board Review through a notification on the congregation's website at – [www.goodshepherdsisters.ie](http://www.goodshepherdsisters.ie).

**This standard is met.**

## **Conclusion**

The reviewer acknowledges the significant work that has been undertaken since the previous Review and commends the working arrangements between the DLP and the Province Leader.

Arrangements have been put in place to promote a culture of safeguarding, supported by the introduction of significant policy and procedures, which are available in various hard copy and electronic formats.

The reviewer is assured by the very caring approach and commitment of all those involved in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, which is evident in the DLP and the Province Leader, both of whom provided an open and transparent engagement throughout the Review process.

There is further improvement required to be more compliant with Standards 3 and 4.