

CSAS

Safeguarding Matters

Welcome to the 17th issue of Safeguarding Matters

This is the bi-monthly Newsletter that CSAS releases to all those within the Church with some responsibility for safeguarding vulnerable groups. Please note the last issue was an extraordinary release in June 2010 following Home Office announcement re. halting of ISA. Should you have any comments—please email Sally Robinson (sally.robinson@csas.uk.net)

SAFEGUARDING & THE PAPAL VISIT

The recent visit to England and Scotland by Pope Benedict was remarkable on many levels not the least of which were the Holy Father's many references to safeguarding and particularly child abuse.

His first comments on the matter were made on the plane journey to Edinburgh. He noted that the Church had not been vigilant enough or fast enough in responding to cases of sexual abuse involving clergy and religious in the past.

"These revelations were for me a shock and a great sadness. It is difficult to understand how the perversion of priestly ministry was possible."

Pope Benedict continued to address the issue of abuse of children in subsequent public and private forums.

In Westminster Cathedral he stated that:-

"I think of the immense suffering caused by the abuse of children, especially within the Church and by her ministers. Above all, I express my deep sorrow to the innocent victims of these unspeakable crimes, along with my hope that the power of Christ's grace, his sacrifice of reconciliation, will bring deep healing and peace to their lives. I also acknowledge, with you, the shame and humiliation which all of us have suffered because of these sins; and I invite you to offer it to the Lord with trust that this chastisement will contribute to the healing of the victims, the purification of the Church and the renewal of her age-old commitment to the education and care of young people. I express my gratitude for the efforts being made to address this problem responsibly, and I ask all of you to show your concern for the victims and solidarity with your priests."

In a private meeting on the same day with a group of survivors of sexual abuse the Holy Father prayed that all the victims of abuse might experience healing and reconciliation and be able to overcome their past and present distress with serenity and hope for the future.

Later that day Pope Benedict held an unprecedented meeting with a small group of those involved in safeguarding including a Parish Rep, a Safeguarding Co-ordinator, a Commission Chair and representation from the NCSC and CSAS.

Key points from this meeting with the Holy Father included :-

That our approach in England and Wales is that safeguarding flows from the gospel. A culture of safeguarding enables people to have a fulfilled life in Christ in the Church based on trust and that's particularly important for children and for vulnerable adults.



Safeguarding & the Papal Visit *continued*

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We explained the system in England and Wales

That each parish has a representative - a volunteer, a lay person - who takes responsibility for implementing safeguarding practice in the parish.

Within each diocese, there is a Safeguarding Officer - sometimes more than one - who is usually professionally qualified. Each diocese has a Safeguarding Commission made up of people drawn from relevant professions such as the police; the probation services, social services, health and the law. The Commission has an Independent Chair. Religious Orders have similar structures.

Nationally, we have the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission (NCSC) with the job of setting the safeguarding policies of the Church and monitoring compliance. The Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (CSAS) is the Church's national office with people who are experts in safeguarding, training and development.

In England and Wales, the policies and procedures apply to the whole Church, not just to the dioceses, but also to religious orders. The NCSC is mandated by the Conference of Bishops and the Conference of Religious. This is a very important feature of the approach that we take in England and Wales. The presence of Sr Jane Bertelsen FMDM, Vice Chair of NCSC at the meeting highlighted the English and Welsh one Church approach.

We report all allegations to the police or social services; depending on the nature of the allegations. We work in co-operation with the statutory authorities throughout the procedure - this brings a clear element of independence into the whole process.

We invest time and energy in promoting safeguarding and training people. We have very robust selection processes to try and ensure that people who are working in the Church, whether in full-time ministry or as volunteers, are appropriately vetted before they work with children and with vulnerable adults.

The Pope spoke very warmly of the work that we are doing and he was very interested in our key principles:

- ◆ Independence at every stage – involvement of independent people.
- ◆ The bringing in of professional expertise.
- ◆ Close co-operation with the police and statutory authorities.

He was extremely positive about the work that we are doing.

Finally the Pope addressed the Bishops at Oscott saying

"Another matter which has received much attention in recent months, and which seriously undermined the moral credibility of Church leaders, is the shameful abuse of children and young people by priests and religious. I have spoken on many occasions of the deep wounds that such behaviour causes, in the victims first and foremost, but also in the relationships of trust that should exist between priests and people, between priests and their Bishops, and between the Church authorities and the public. I know that you have taken serious steps to remedy this situation, to ensure that children are effectively protected from harm and to deal properly and transparently with allegations as they arise. You have publicly acknowledged your deep regret over what has happened, and the often inadequate ways it was addressed in the past. Your growing awareness of the extent of child abuse in society, its devastating effects, and the need to provide proper victim support should serve as an incentive to share the lessons you have learned with the wider community. Indeed what better way could there be of making reparation for those sins than by reaching out, in a humble spirit of compassion, towards children who continue to suffer abuse elsewhere? Our duty of care towards the young demands nothing less."

On each occasion, the Holy Father said that the Church must respond better to those who are victims of abuse - that is the challenge for the Church in England and Wales. We've done well on the policies and procedures; we've done well on the structures that we've set up – although there is never any room for complacency because we always need a culture of vigilance - but we need to look for improvement in our response to survivors of abuse. There is a determination within the NCSC and CSAS to increase the dialogue with survivors; the conversation has already started, but it needs to receive more focus.



The Government announced on 22nd October that the Terms of Reference for the review of Vetting & Barring and CRB have been agreed and recommendations arising from the review are expected to be released in the New Year.