

Letter from Bishop Moriarty to be read at all Masses on 28/29 November 2009 - 1st Sunday of Advent

My dear friends

The report of the Dublin Archdiocese Commission of Investigation has once more confronted us with the terrible truth of child sexual abuse by priests and religious. This is a dark and dispiriting chapter which has scandalised and shamed our Church and I wish to apologise to all who have been hurt.

First and foremost, we think of those who have suffered abuse. We can never forget that the suffering inflicted in childhood remains an often crushing burden in adult life. We must continue to pray for them and for all those in our community who carry such pain, whatever the source. May they find healing and new hope in their lives.

Outrage has rightly been expressed in all quarters, not only that this abuse took place but also very particularly because Church authorities failed over many decades to respond properly to such criminal acts. Past practice in the matter was all too clearly seriously flawed. It is of the highest importance that everyone should now feel assured that, as Pope Benedict has urged, we are taking all necessary steps to ensure that nothing of this kind ever happens again.

I want to make clear what action has been taken to this end in our own diocese. In September, we published a revised 'policy and procedures' document that reflects best practice as identified by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church. Key elements include having independent professional advice and a close working relationship with the HSE and An Garda Síochána.

The fundamental principle of our practice, as already implemented in recent years, is that all child protection concerns must be reported to the civil authorities without delay. Any priest or church worker who is the subject of a child protection concern is asked to step aside from their ministry and duties until the civil and church investigations are complete.

We have fully complied with the recent national HSE audit of diocesan records in regard to clerical abuse. As reported in that audit, there are presently two of our diocesan priests out of ministry due to child protection concerns. Once more, I want to encourage anyone who has been abused to come forward and to assure them that they will be sympathetically received.

In regard to prevention and on-going reporting, we have been working to recruit and train at least one designated person in each parish who will be responsible for promoting best practice and for dealing with child protection concerns. I would like again to commend those who have undertaken this role. Our diocese requires all diocesan and parish staff, including all priests and seminarians, to apply for Garda vetting.

All expenditure in regard to safeguarding children – including settlements, counselling and training – are recorded each year in the diocesan financial statement, which is displayed in every church.

This coming week, on Thursday 3rd December, a special diocesan service – a **Liturgy of Hope** – will be celebrated in all our churches at 8pm. Everyone will be most welcome. In this time of economic, social and personal uncertainty, this prayer service is an opportunity to show solidarity with one another and to reaffirm that together we are brothers and sisters in the Lord, each precious in his sight.

In Advent we seek the light that the coming of Christ brings, knowing that his gentle love can give hope even to the darkest corners of our lives. As scripture says, Christ is the ‘light that darkness could not overpower’. In all that we are facing, in all our brokenness, it is this truth that leads us forward.

May the grace of the Advent season be with you all.

Jim Moriarty

Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin