

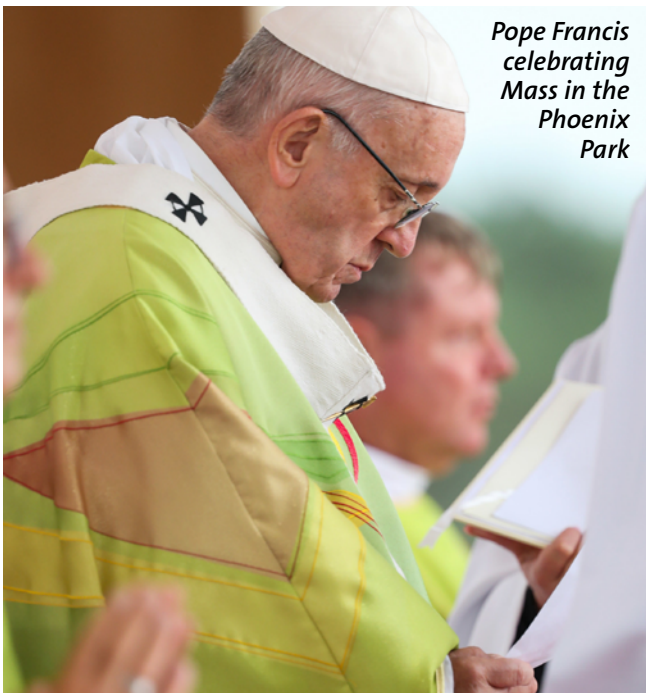


NEWSLETTER

A promise kept: When the late Pope Francis met survivors of abuse during his visit to Dublin

A GROUP OF EIGHT survivors of abuse met with Pope Francis on the first day of his visit to Ireland for the World Meeting of Families. The eight came with a variety of experiences of abuse by priests and religious and/or of abuse in Church run institutions. The arrangements for the meeting were only finalised the day before it took place. The meeting was to last 30 minutes

and each of those invited was advised that they should think of one or two key messages they wished to convey to the Holy Father, as each would only have a very short time to speak to him. Whether or not this had been agreed with Pope Francis in advance is unclear. However, as in many other situations, Pope Francis departed from the script. The meeting worked out rather differently.



***Pope Francis
celebrating
Mass in the
Phoenix
Park***

Two people (one from Towards Healing, one from CSPA) accompanied the survivors to the meeting, though they were not present during it. The group met in Archbishop's House in Drumcondra on the morning of August 25. The City was in lockdown due to the Pope's visit. Gardai drove the group to the Nunciature (residence of the Papal Nuncio on the Navan Road) in two people carriers. The group arrived about 3pm and the meeting was due to commence at 4pm. However, there had been an unfortunate breakdown in communication which resulted in the group initially being refused entry to the Nunciature.

A security man, with limited English, informed the group that there was no meeting scheduled for 4pm and that they would have to leave and come back later. At

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'We ask for forgiveness'

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this point there was no way to contact those who had organised the meeting as they were with the Pope and had their phones switched off. Those accompanying the group and the Gardaí who drove them to the Nunciature attempted to explain the sensitivities of the situation to the security man, but this made little impression on him. During this time, the survivors were still sitting in the cars. The day was hot. They were uncomfortable. It was impossible to disguise what was going on. One of the survivors protested that it was a gross discourtesy to the survivors to invite them to meet Pope Francis and then to turn them away when they arrived at the venue for the meeting. At this point, the prospects for a successful meeting were receding fast.

A further discussion was held with the security person, using somewhat less diplomatic language to explain that Pope Francis would be very displeased with his actions. He agreed to call his boss who clearly had a better understanding of what was at stake. The survivors were ushered into the residence where some young nuns served refreshments. This helped to ease the tension in the group who were understandably upset at having been left waiting in the cars.

The group bonded quickly. Seven of the eight were happy to be identified, but the eighth person asked not to be, a wish that was honoured by the others. They also agreed to meet with the Pope as a group, which made for a much better use of the available time. Pope Francis arrived at the Nunciature at about 5.10 and the meeting commenced within five minutes. There was another meeting scheduled to take place after the meeting with the survivors, after which Pope Francis was due at the Festival of the Families in Croke Park. There was not a lot of time. Pope Francis went into



*Pope Francis
praying before the
Blessed Sacrament
in St Mary's
Pro-Cathedral*

the meeting with the eight survivors and an interpreter.

An hour passed and those waiting outside the room wondered whether this was a good sign or not. Within another ten minutes there was a sound of laughter, which seemed like a good omen. The scheduled 30-minute meeting turned into a 90-minute meeting at the end of which Pope Francis did not rush away but stayed chatting and posing for selfies.

Afterwards, the members of the group spoke about their experiences. They were all very positive and, significantly, no reference was made to what had taken place when they arrived at the Papal Nuncio's residence. A number of themes emerged:

- Pope Francis gave them all time to say what they needed to say
- He did not appear to know all about the various institutions and situations in which abuse occurred. He listened carefully and asked questions in order to clarify what the survivors told him
- He was unambiguous in his condemnation of the abuses they described
- He told them that he was determined to deal with the abuse and those who have covered it up
- He told them he would reflect what they had told

him in the Mass on the following day.

During the Mass in the Phoenix Park the following day, Pope Francis spoke about the meeting. He described those he met as survivors of the abuse of power, of the abuse of conscience and of sexual abuse. He asked for forgiveness for the many forms and instances of abuse and exploitation and for the Church's failure to respond properly when the survivors came forward to tell their stories.

He also said the following:

We ask forgiveness for those children who were taken away from their mothers and for all those times when so many single mothers who tried to find their children that had been taken away, or those children who tried to find their mothers, were told that this was a mortal sin. It was not a mortal sin; it is the fourth commandment! We ask forgiveness.

Pope Francis had been requested to make it clear that those mothers who were searching for their children and those children who were searching for their mothers were not committing a sin by so doing, as they had been told so many times in the past. Four years later, a number of this group met again to contribute to the Synod. In the report of their meeting in June 2022, it states:

Pope Francis, when he was in Dublin, was asked specifically to say that it is not a mortal sin for mothers who were separated from their babies in mother and baby homes to look for them later. He did so at the mass in the Phoenix Park. It was a transformative and healing moment for many people. It lifted a cloud of shame from many of the mothers. It had a practical and immediate impact. There was an 800% increase in tracing enquiries.

Pope Francis brought peace to many troubled souls. May he now rest in eternal peace. ■

Contents of report for the Archbishop

EACH YEAR A REPORT on the activities of the Child Safeguarding & Protection Service is prepared for the Archbishop. It provides a useful means of discerning trends in the number of complaints and allegations of child sexual abuse made against clerics of the Diocese. It also provides data indicative of the Diocese's commitment to the creation and maintenance of safe environments for children and vulnerable adults.

CASE WORK

The Report of the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin (the Murphy Report) was published in November 2009 and over the following two years there were allegations of child sexual abuse made against more than 30 priests or former of the Diocese. While the allegations were new, most related to abuse that had occurred in the past and related to priests or former priests who were deceased or had already been taken out of ministry. Since then there has been a steady decline in the number of new allegations of abuse.

Every so often, however, we are reminded that the issue of child abuse in the Church is part of our present, rather than part of our past. The *Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Schools run by Religious Orders* brought the issue back to centre stage during 2024. During the year CSPS received twenty-one allegations against seven respondents (the person against whom an allegation of abuse is made is referred to as a respondent), as compared with five allegations against five respondents in 2023. The new allegations received in 2024 referred to events that occurred before 2000. None of the respondents are currently in ministry.

Something similar happened in 2018, when the issue of abuse within the Church generated a lot of public discussion in the lead up to the World Meeting of Families and the visit of Pope Francis. There was a spike in the number of allegations in 2018 and the downward trend re-asserted itself the following year.

TRAINING

Fifty-nine safeguarding training sessions were delivered during 2024 and they were attended by 1,500 clerics, religious, employees

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12,000 vetting applications

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and volunteers. This figure is similar to the figures for previous years, though the numbers dipped during Covid. It is remarkable, and hugely encouraging, that the commitment to the creation and maintenance of safe environments for children and vulnerable adults remains a priority for the clergy, religious and laity of the Diocese. There is always a temptation to become complacent, which would be a disaster. So far, that temptation has been avoided.

VETTING

Each year, approximately 12,000 vetting applications are processed. The majority of these relate to ancillary staff of schools under the patronage of the Archdiocese of Dublin. Vetting is also done in parishes, for those whose work involves ministry with children and vulnerable adults, and vetting is also provided for some religious orders and organisations, such as the Legion of Mary. The system that is currently in place is now a largely online one. It works well, due in large part to good cooperation between those submitting the vetting applications, the National Vetting Bureau and the CSPS staff processing the applications.

SUPPORT OF SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

In this Newsletter, we regularly highlight the support provided to survivors of abuse by organisations such as Towards Healing and Towards

Peace. These are services funded by the Church. There are other support services, notably the National Counselling Service (run by the HSE), One in Four and the Rape Crisis Centres (both of which are voluntary organisations). CSPS provides a support service on behalf of the Diocese and also works with these other organisations so that the support provided for survivors is often a co-operative venture, involving more than one organisation.

An example of joint working with survivors is when we, in CSPS, are contacted by a counselling service who have a client who has disclosed abuse by a cleric and who wishes to meet with representative of the Diocese. A member of the CSPS will meet with the person concerned, sometimes with their counsellor, to hear their story. Often these contacts result in a meeting with the Archbishop, which can be a significant milestone of the road to recovery for a survivor.

There are other areas of co-operation between CSPS and other support services. During 2024, team members, along with colleagues from other diocesan offices, participated in training provided by the Galway Rape Crisis Centre. The training focused

on dealing with disclosures of abuse and proved informative and very worthwhile.

The Scoping Inquiry, referred to above, generated interest in Trauma Informed Practice, the methodology employed by those contracted to engage with the survivors as part of the Inquiry. There was a general consensus that this part of the Inquiry was done well. Training in this model is being hosted by the Diocese on May 27, 2025. This is a collaboration between the Diocese, Towards Healing and the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. ■

How to get in touch with the CSPS team

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