


SAFEGUARDING MATTERS

in the Catholic Church in Scotland

FEBRUARY 2025



“No time is more pressing for all to learn to weep.”

“*Bishops - including the Bishop of Rome - must now weep.*”

These stark words are found in a book recently published by **Mark Joseph Williams** who is a USA victim and survivor of clerical sex abuse. (The book is reviewed on page 7.)

Remarkably, despite his suffering, and through his journey from victim to survivor, Mark tells of how a theology of healing can be found in the lived experience of those like him *“who have touched a living death on earth and discovered... the loving grace of Jesus.”*

He tells of how he came to experience addiction, depression, suicidal thoughts, bankruptcy, job loss and home loss. Yet, he found the support of religious women, family, friends and some priests, all of whom heard his story and *“never failed to love me.”*

Mark believes that the Church is at a watershed moment in her history. Reflecting that Synodality is intended to give time to listen to all - in and out of the pews - and to discern how to enhance the fruits of meaningful communion, participation and mission, he issues this challenge:

“The Church must listen now to the voices of those it has most hurt through its devastating silence, neglect, and selfish self-interest: the victims of clerical sexual abuse.”



Mark writes to Scotland:

Writing this book took time to put pen to paper for it takes time, sometimes lots of time to heal from the trauma of sexual abuse.

I know many victims do not get there, as it were, but I hope my story and those of others I was blessed to include will offer hope.

The Church that hurt me is the same Church that helped me heal. We all can touch sacramental grace in our Lord, Redeemer. My prayer is that those in and out of the pews who read ‘Torrent of Grace’ across Scotland will find a ray of hope, that together we can walk the synodal road in Christ’s love.

We can, I believe, carry one another’s Cross towards greater healing and make the Church a better sanctuary of justice, peace, mercy and love. A victim can become a true survivor in His grace.

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Looking at Safeguarding Successes . . .

Following on from the initial information we provided in the October 2024 issue of *Safeguarding Matters*, we provide below a more comprehensive update on the findings from the 2023 Safeguarding Self-Evaluation exercise participated in by the dioceses, parishes, religious congregations and Catholic organisations in Scotland.

Responses were received from all **8** dioceses, **377** parishes, **65** religious congregations and **40** Catholic organisations. Overall, this amounted to a very positive **98%** completion rate.

Those who have participated have been significantly more reflective about their safeguarding policies and processes, as evidenced in the qualitative responses provided where necessary. Whilst some minor changes were made to the questionnaires distributed in an attempt to simplify the process and make it less time-consuming, around **53%** of participants thought it was still too burdensome. This will be an area on which we will focus to ensure the audit process is not too burdensome or bureaucratic for practitioners.

SAFEGUARDING COMMUNICATION

It is encouraging to learn that the communication flow around safeguarding within the Church is good, with self-evaluation results showing that:

- ◇ **within parishes**, 77% of Parish Priests met with Parish Safeguarding Coordinators (PSCs) to discuss responding to the questionnaire
- ◇ **within religious congregations**, 80% of Religious Superiors met with Safeguarding Link Coordinators to discuss responding to the questionnaire.

Within parishes, religious congregations and Catholic organisations, ongoing communication around safeguarding was very positive, with regular meetings held within **92%** of parishes, **54%** of religious congregations and **60%** of Catholic organisations.

Within dioceses, meetings of Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Groups (**DSAGs**) and Diocesan Risk Assessment Management Teams (**DRAMTs**) were held frequently, with on average DSAGs being held 3 to 5 times per year and DRAMTs 2 to 5 times per year.

The agenda items listed as being discussed in these meetings showed some commonality but was not consistent across dioceses. Whilst topics of discussion may be dependent on the nature and level of the risk attached to safeguarding matters within each diocese, there may be some benefit in attaching some co-ordination to the timing of DSAG meetings across the dioceses, and some consistency being introduced in respect of the Terms of Reference against which each group is governed.

Overall, the analysis of responses showed that participants viewed communication around safeguarding matters as being very positive.

It must be noted, though, that more consistency is needed within parishes in terms of the arrangements made to observe the **Annual Day of Prayer for those who have experienced abuse** with **only 77% of parishes** reporting that they observed that day.

OTHER KEY HIGHLIGHTS EVIDENCED

- **Commitment to safeguarding:** Most participants expressed a profound commitment to upholding safeguarding standards.
- **Confidence in Continuous Improvement:** 92% of Parishes felt confident they could plan for continuous safeguarding improvement.
- **Awareness and Engagement:** There is a high level of awareness and engagement in safeguarding practices, with many Parishes discussing safeguarding regularly and feeling confident in their ability to handle safeguarding issues.
- **Diocesan Support:** Many parishes reported effective communication with their Diocesan Safeguarding Advisors (DSAs), with dioceses providing tailored support and training to parishes as needed. The analysis highlights that parishes are increasingly confident in their ability to handle safeguarding issues, partly due to the support and guidance provided by their dioceses.
- **Positive Feedback on Training:** 77% of parishes found the safeguarding training provided by their dioceses to be effective or highly effective, indicating that the training and communication from the dioceses are largely meeting the needs of parishes.
- **National Safeguarding Conference:** The positive impact of the annual National Safeguarding Conference has been noted, with many appreciating the opportunity to gain experience from best practices and network with other safeguarding practitioners.
- **Communication and Meetings:** Discussion on safeguarding within Church establishments seems to be good, with regular meetings and communication between safeguarding practitioners.

... and Future Improvements

These positives highlighted on page 2 reflect a good foundation and commitment to safeguarding within the Church. It is critical though that we guard against any complacency, and that we continue to build on these foundations to make safeguarding practices even stronger. Whilst there are positive messages to be found, key areas for improvement have been identified and will require to be considered carefully so that we continuously improve and implement best practice across all Church institutions.

AREAS IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVEMENT

- **Inconsistencies in data collection, recording and reporting:** Some wide discrepancies were found in many of the reported datasets which require to be addressed. Work is also needed to ensure consistency in the adoption of robust risk assessment processes attached to the safe use of Church premises.
- **Central Coordination:** Improved coordination to streamline safeguarding practice, case management, training priorities and resources.
- **Online Safety:** Given the threat posed by abuse being perpetrated online, more training is required to ensure that clergy, volunteers, and employees are aware of those risks and how they might be managed and mitigated.
- **Safe Worship Plans (SWPs):** More understanding is required around the mechanics and processes attached to SWPs
- **Safe Recruitment:** In advance of the introduction of the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020, the roles performed by volunteers should be reviewed to ensure compliance with the new rules attached to membership of the PVG scheme.
- **Defining a Safeguarding Concern:** A review should be conducted to identify the baseline understanding of the definition across the Church and to develop a consistency of approach across Scotland.
- **Visiting Clergy:** There should be more consistency and improved communication between parishes and dioceses in respect of the processes attached to the recording of visiting clergy. A more coherent and consistent policy is required across the Church.

TRAINING

KEY PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED INCLUDE:

- Safeguarding Risk Assessments (SRAs)
- Trauma-Informed Response to allegations
- Safe Recruitment Practices
- Supporting Respondents to Allegations
- Management of High-Risk Offenders
- GDPR and Record Keeping

FLEXIBLE TRAINING DELIVERY REQUIRED:

A combination of online and in-person training options is needed to improve accessibility and accommodate different learning preferences.

AUDIT METHODOLOGY IMPROVEMENTS REQUIRED:

- consideration of implementing a 'weighting' system to assess safeguarding risk more accurately
- a compliance matrix for performance evaluation
- streamlined data collection through database enhancements.

LOOKING AHEAD:

To build on these successes and address key areas for improvement, the SCSSA is committed to fostering a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring that safeguarding efforts remain effective, consistent, and forward-thinking. Anyone interested in contributing to these initiatives should **email:**

comms@scssa.org.uk.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to completing the 2023 self-evaluation questionnaires. Your participation is deeply valued and appreciated and we are committed to ensuring your input will play a vital role in enhancing safeguarding practice moving forward.



Continuous
Improvement

National Safeguarding Conference 2024



A LARGE TURNOUT

The SCSSA's third annual National Safeguarding Conference took place in the University of Strathclyde's Technology and Innovation Centre on Saturday 16th November 2024. Over 250 delegates from parishes, religious congregations and lay organisations across Scotland - including 3 of the Scottish Bishops - gathered in person and online to spend a day networking and learning more about 'Preventing Abuse in Faith Organisations'.

The conference theme signified a change from reactive safeguarding messaging to a more proactive approach to keeping all people safe in our communities, thereby helping to foster what Pope Francis calls a 'continuous and profound conversion of hearts'.



Stuart reminded delegates that only 1 in 8 victims of sexual abuse come to the attention of the authorities at the time. He went on to pose a number of challenges.

"If we are courageous, patient and prayerful as a body and willing to act, could the Church...take social leadership in tackling child sexual abuse?"

"And what if that also included doing everything we can to prevent abuse before it happened?"

Stuart highlighted work being carried out by his organisation to prevent abuse from occurring, which one delegate described as "evidence based, objective, and challenging", while another remarked that the "keynote address was ... relevant, appropriate and took the whole safeguarding conversation up a couple of levels."

After providing a number of practical suggestions to aid the prevention of abuse, Stuart concluded with an invitation to the Catholic Church in Scotland to work alongside the *Lucy Faithfull Foundation* to develop demonstrably effective prevention practices for faith communities - a piece of work which the SCSSA is committed to supporting.

Stuart's [address is available on the SCSSA website, as are a number of short video and audio clips.](#)



SCSSA Board Chair Lady Rae K.C. welcomed all the participants and thanked them for all that they do to keep children and vulnerable adults safe when involved in Church activities.

KEYNOTE

The keynote input was provided by [Stuart Allardyce](#) of the *Lucy Faithfull Foundation* who began by saying that he wanted to concentrate on what the evidence said about the prevention of sexual abuse. He suggested that the research published so far shows that the focus on sexual abuse perpetrated by priests has distorted what sexual abuse *prevention* should look like and that "a wider conversation" was needed.

National Safeguarding Conference 2024

TASTER SESSIONS

Conference participants were able to attend their choice of 2 from the 4 available 'Tasters' provided by various groups.

In the **Safe Online** session, Detective Constable Kasia Owczarek from *Police Scotland* provided some stark facts. (Did you know that 3.6 million internet users simply use the word 'password' to protect their online accounts, while a staggering 23.2 million people use '123456'?)



She played the sobering video '[A Message from Ella: Without Consent](#)' to demonstrate what ill-intentioned people can do with our online activities. Kasia reinforced the message that a child never consents to online abuse yet has to live with the impact.



The **Safe Words** session was led by Lesley Anne Pratchett of *Break the Silence* - a charity that supports survivors of sexual abuse. She sought to emphasise that talking about abuse makes everyone safer.



Referencing Pope Francis, the 'Cross of the Moment' publication, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and Fr. Richard Rohr as well as the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and the NSPCC, Lesley Anne took delegates on a journey through current safeguarding issues in our own communities and the lies we tell ourselves about abuse not happening where we work / live / worship.

She went on to explain why people didn't speak out about the abuse crisis in the Church, what our preconceived biases may be, and what a cultural revolution might look like to achieve a culture of care.

The **Safe Spaces** session was delivered by members of Diocesan Safeguarding Teams. This session aimed to reinforce what 'In God's Image' – the document that governs safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Scotland - requires of parishes to ensure that our physical environments are places where people can be safe from abuse occurring.



Issuing excerpts from 'In God's Image' and Bishops' Conference of Scotland documents, the presenters declared that viewing safeguarding through a 'layering' lens helps potentially harmful situations from slipping through cracks, and gave attendees some scenarios to discuss in groups.



The *Moira Anderson Foundation* delivered an introduction to their **Safe Hands** training course, which seeks to help children identify and express when they are feeling unsafe. It was described by attendees as a "simple yet effective presentation which was delivered with tremendous passion", and many people expressed the wish to know more about the full training course.



Participants in these sessions expressed their gratitude to all the presenters for their preparation and their skill in presenting their material. Delegate feedback from the Conference revealed that 99% of attendees enjoyed the conference overall, with an average 4.4 rating out of 5.

Paul Donaldson (SCSSA Director of Safeguarding) and Helena Rameckers (Head of Safeguarding Training) would like to thank the members of the conference planning committee, who gave voluntarily of their time to help develop and prepare the event.

SCSSA Webinars



To support training and development in Safeguarding, we are providing a number of Webinars which will be of interest not only to clergy, religious and laypeople in different safeguarding roles but to anyone interested in safeguarding in Church contexts. Each webinar will be led by people with relevant expertise in the particular topic(s).

Anyone can register, via the SCSSA website, to attend any webinar "live". Where possible, we shall provide opportunities to ask or suggest questions that will be addressed by those providing input.

Recordings of webinar input will also be made available subsequently on the SCSSA website, whenever possible. It is hoped that these recordings may prove to be useful for training and supporting those with Safeguarding responsibilities in various settings.

THE CROSS OF THE MOMENT

27TH NOVEMBER & 4TH DECEMBER 2024

In the first two webinars, we welcomed Dr Pat Jones and Professor Clare Watkins who were involved in the report *'The Cross of the Moment'* which explores how the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in England & Wales has been experienced by different groups, most notably the survivors and victims of abuse.

Clicking on the webinar title above will link to recordings on the SCSSA website.

SCOTTISH CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS AGENCY

The Cross of the Moment WEBINARS

opportunities to learn from researchers involved in 'The Cross of the Moment' - a study on the impact of clerical child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in England and Wales, exploring how the crisis has been experienced by different groups within the Church, most notably the victims and survivors of abuse

27 NOVEMBER 2024 7 PM - 8.15 PM
04 DECEMBER 2024 7 PM - 8.30 PM

SCAN to register

THE THREAT OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IMAGERY ONLINE

2PM, 17TH FEBRUARY 2025

Staff from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) will lead the input on this subject which will be of interest to all who are committed to keeping children safe when they are active online. It will build on the input provided by Police Scotland at the recent National Safeguarding Conference, in response to many who attended that Taster session and asked for more.

IWF will give an overview of their work and why it's necessary and give advice on things like how to report/remove illegal or distressing content, the types of threats people might be vulnerable to, and some practical advice on keeping safe online.

TO ENROL NOW: scan the QR code on the image or click here: bit.ly/47DzZOp

Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency

Safeguarding Webinar

Becoming alert to the threat of child sexual abuse imagery online

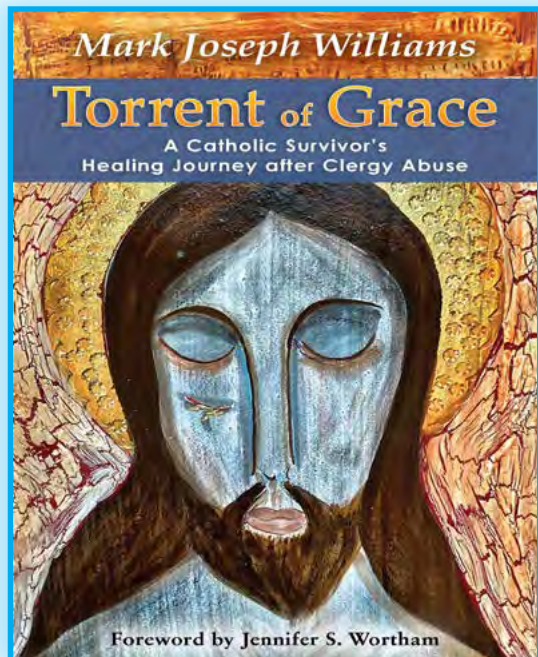
input led by staff from:
the Internet Watch Foundation

17th February 2025
@2pm

When you enrol for the webinar you will be asked to suggest any issues or questions that you would like covered.

ENROL NOW

Book Review



TORRENT OF GRACE

A CATHOLIC SURVIVOR'S HEALING JOURNEY AFTER CLERGY ABUSE

Publisher: Orbis Books, Maryknoll New York, 2024

Mark Joseph Williams. as a survivor, serves as Special Advisor to Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, CSsR and the Archdiocese of Newark including as a member of Vos Estes Lux Mundi Committee ("You are the light of the world" from Pope Francis's Motu Proprio re holding hierarchy to account).

Mark is a member of the Consulting Advisory Committee for Hans Zollner, SJ (Director) and IADC (Institute of Anthropology, Interdisciplinary studies on Human Dignity and Care, Pontifical Gregorian University Rome. He serves on the North America International Safeguarding Committee under USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).

Mark is a forensic psychological clinician and global executive coach. He and his wife Karen have four grown-up children and six grandchildren.

'**Torrent of Grace**' is a powerful testimony to the brokenness and suffering caused by abuse. But it also tells the uplifting story of how Mark Joseph Williams encountered healing in the place few survivors would look – the Catholic Church.

Fifty years on from his own abuse, he calls on the Church to "*listen now to the voices of those it has most hurt through its devastating silence, neglect, and selfish self-interest: the victims of clerical sexual abuse.*"

Mark's growing up in New York City was scarred by his witnessing of alcohol-fuelled violence between his parents and by the premature death of his nuclear veteran father, aged 40. He speaks poignantly of the moral injury carried by his father and by himself, exacerbating his childhood vulnerability which affected the story of his later life.

"A line was crossed. My childhood was lost. My development was stunted. I was afraid. I did not know how to break away. When trust in another was broken, brokenness took root in me."

Soon after the death of his father, he fell victim to the predatory behaviour of two men. At the age of 13 he was groomed by a devout Catholic teacher who plied him with alcohol and raped him. When he was 15, he was sexually molested by a local priest who continued to violate him on other occasions.

For decades he numbed the pain through alcoholism on his journey towards healing, with the support of his family, doctors, AA sponsors and spiritual mentors.

Remarkably, Mark found ways to help other survivors he has encountered. In his book he recounts something of their "tough journeys" towards renewal, some even finding solace and redemption in faith.

"For . . . those whose spirits have been isolated and crushed through abuse, I seek to make things right, to console, and to love."

In late 2018 he struck up a friendship with Cardinal Joseph Tobin, Archbishop of Newark as he then was grappling with revelations of alleged sexual violations by his predecessor, retired Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. As a result, Mark was invited to address a plenary gathering of the USCCB (American Bishops) and, with a small group of survivors, to meet with Pope Francis.

In recent times, he has been supporting the work of Fr Hans Zollner SJ as "*a witness to how those who have been abused as children can heal . . . and an instrument for the healing of others, for change.*"

The astounding story told by Mark Joseph Williams is a sore one to read. His life and dignity were taken from him and he was afflicted by shame, torment and degradation lasting decades.

And yet. . . Through his astonishing perseverance, and with the support of others, he has been able to find "*resurrection in the loving grace of Jesus*" and he calls on his "*broken yet beloved*" Church to become a vessel for healing and for peace.

2025 Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse

The 2025 Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse takes place on **Friday 7th March 2025.**

This day is set aside to provide opportunities for Catholic parishes and communities throughout Scotland to pray for the healing of all those who have suffered abuse.

Prayer resources will be provided by the Scottish National Liturgical Commission for distribution to parishes.

Safeguarding Day for Religious 2025

Have YOU booked your place at this year's Safeguarding Day for Religious?



Theme: Addressing Safeguarding Concerns in an Ageing Population

Date: Friday 23rd May 2025 (10am - 3.30pm)

Place: St Francis Xavier Hall, Carfin Grotto, Motherwell ML1 5AJ

This year's conference theme, chosen by members of the CRSSC (*Conference of Religious in Scotland Safeguarding Commission*), will be of particular relevance to religious communities where many sisters, brothers, clergy and volunteers bear responsibility for caring for and/or safeguarding elderly members of their communities.

[CLICK HERE TO BOOK](#) or [SCAN QR Code](#)



New Appointment to SCSSA Board

Lady Rae is pleased to announce the appointment of [Mhairi Maguire](#) to the SCSSA Board with effect from 1st February 2025. Mhairi is a Scottish solicitor with over 15 years of practice, 13 of which she has spent in the third sector.

After training and qualifying in private practice, where she worked with private clients on areas including Wills, Trusts, executries, and guardianship, she made the decision to pursue a values-based career and left private practice for the third sector.

Over the next 12 years, she held a variety of posts at Enable, working mostly on corporate governance, safeguarding and compliance, together with legal matters, latterly as Director of Corporate Services. In this role, Mhairi supported development of interventions to enhance the delivery of social care support to vulnerable citizens across

Scotland. During this time, she spent eight years on the Board of the University of Strathclyde Students' Association, where she was appointed as Vice Chair for seven years. This provided her with additional expertise in governance matters and strategic operation of a values-based, membership-led organisation.

Mhairi is now an independent consultant, working with third sector clients to deliver training, coaching and advice, and supporting with legal, compliance and governance issues.

