NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Irish audits show 'evidence of steady progress' dealing with abuse

Michael Kelly Catholic News Service | Apr. 24, 2013
Dublin

The head of the Catholic church's child safeguarding watchdog said he is encouraged by the latest audits of the handling of abuse allegations by dioceses and a religious congregation.

Ian Elliott, head of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church, said the seven audits, published Wednesday, show "clear evidence of steady progress in developing robust safeguarding structures" in the church.

"The overall picture is a very positive one with the vast majority of the criteria used to assess performance against the review standards as being fully met," he said.

While commending the overall picture, some of the audits are critical of past failings. In the Clogher diocese, for example, the review found that retired Bishop Joseph Duffy "consistently missed" opportunities to prevent abuse.

The review covered the period from Jan. 1, 1975, to last December. It found a line had been drawn "between the practice of this diocese today and some of the practice that existed previously."

The review of the Ferns diocese was also critical of retired Bishop Brendan Comiskey for not handling allegations appropriately. Comiskey resigned in 2002 after his approach to abuse was criticized sharply.

Overall, however, the safeguarding board described the results as "gratifying." Elliott singled out the parishioner-volunteers in every parish who are responsible for ensuring that safeguarding procedures are adhered to.

"Their efforts have been nothing short of heroic," he said.

Of the 121 priests accused of abuse dealt with in the audits, just eight have been convicted. One of the audits, in the diocese of Elphin, noted what the reviewers described as a "significant number of allegations which upon investigation were shown to be unfounded."

The safeguarding board has now begun the next round of audits, which is expected to focus on the remaining dioceses as well as religious congregations and missionary societies. Sixteen of the country's 26 dioceses have been reviewed, while a further 158 religious orders, congregations and missionary societies will be audited.

The audit process was extended to all church institutions after a 2008 review of the diocese of Cloyne found that procedures there were "inadequate and, in some respects, dangerous." Cloyne Bishop John Magee initially stepped aside in 2009 and later resigned in 2010. A 2011 judicial report was highly critical of his mishandling of abuse allegations.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/12/2013 - 13:59*): http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/irish-audits-show-evidence-steady-progress-dealing-abuse