

## **ALL HALLOWS COLLEGE VINCENTIAN CHARISM AWARD**

Speaking Notes of **Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin**, Archbishop of Dublin

All Hallows College, Dublin, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013

"I am very honoured to receive the All Hallows College *Vincentian Charism Award* this evening, but I have to say immediately that I am wary of awards. Church awards rightly wish to identify a person who represents something positive in Church life, but at times they end up putting too much attention on the 'awardee' and not enough attention on the good things that have been achieved.

On Sunday last, I held a Mass in Dublin's Pro-Cathedral to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Dublin Diocesan Child Safeguarding and Protection Office. The aim was simply to register and to recall the immense work that has been done in the parishes and in the agencies of the Archdiocese of Dublin over these past ten years in attempting to make the Church the safest possible place for children.

I know of the anger which was aroused in people, especially parents, by the responses of the past to the horrible abuse of children that took place in the Church of Jesus Christ in Dublin. The fact that so many members of our parish communities committed themselves to tackle a scandal, for which they bore no responsibility, is a true sign of their genuine love of the Church. It is the work of these men and women which has rendered the Church a safer place for children and has helped to restore a climate of confidence which will enable the work of evangelisation to flourish.

The past ten years have seen a real change of culture regarding the safeguarding of children in the Church in Dublin. But Dublin is not an isolated diocese. That cultural change is repeated right across the country in the work of Diocesan Child Safeguarding Offices and in the vital work of the National Board for Safeguarding Children

The Church in Ireland can rightly be proud of what has been achieved in these ten years. But the work is not over. The sexual abuse of children continues in our society. Sexual predators will seek out our weak points and break through the weaknesses of our systems. We cannot afford to let our guard down.

If there is one area where I know we need to do more, it is that of reaching out to survivors, beyond the great work of *Towards Healing*, to create an open door and a safe space for those survivors who have still fear telling their story and who still live alone with their anguish.

Children are the first beneficiaries of all this effort as they now have a greater opportunity to enjoy their childhood in a society where there is so much societal and commercial pressure to turn children all too prematurely in to small adults.

I enjoyed a happy childhood and that was one of the greatest gifts that I have ever received. If I have done anything in this area it is thanks to those survivors who shared with me their stories and their hurt, their frustration and their anger and thus allowed me to have some small insight into what they have endured and what they still endure. I enjoyed a happy childhood; they were robbed of their childhood.