An Open Letter to Victims / Survivors of the Spiritan Congregation
June 2025

Since the emergence of serious and widespread abuse in Spiritan schools, the Spiritans in Ireland have worked to develop a plan that is answerable and accountable for those responsible for the crimes of sexual assault and abuse of children and minors within our care.

As Provincial of the Spiritan Congregation in Ireland, and like my predecessors since 2006, I wish to express publicly and without reservation or equivocation, our profound sorrow for the abuse of children perpetrated by some members of our congregation and some of our employees. This apology extends to everybody who was abused while in our care, some of whom are deceased, and also to the families and friends of the abused.

I am reminded constantly by those who suffered that words and apologies are of little value without concrete action. We realise that for those awaiting announcement of a redress scheme that time is of the essence. We acknowledge that the pace of putting in place the necessary framework for overhauling and restructuring the assets of the Province, has been slow. However, there has been a constant focus and strong co-operation of all aspects of the Province (including Spiritan schools, the overseas programmes, the migrant support services in Ireland, the Spiritan parishes, our spirituality and renewal centres, and the communities of retirement for the sick and elderly) to make meaningful progress. All of the wider Spiritan community eagerly support just outcomes for those who suffered harm as children.

Nevertheless, it has been very frustrating for victims/survivors, and their advocates, who have shown immeasurable patience, and it is important to acknowledge that it is the cooperation and commitment of such advocates that has guided and shaped a 'victim centered' restorative process including a just formula for redress to those waiting.

The primary challenge causing delays has been the inability to readily access the adequate funding for redress. However, recognising the urgency and the prolonged wait endured by survivors, the Province has accelerated our efforts by establishing a dedicated financial taskforce, the Finance Advisory Team, with the expertise to lead a strategic restructuring of the Province's assets. This taskforce is working to fast-track the development of sustainable funding streams, including immediate and medium-term provisions for redress.

Over these last three decades we have engaged with victims/survivors who came to us seeking to have their story heard. We provided counselling and therapeutic supports, and we established the Spiritan Safeguarding Office staffed by professional lay people in adherence with State and Church requirements in Ireland. For those who requested monetary redress we engaged through what we understood to be the standard mechanism available – legal negotiations conducted between legal representatives for the Spiritans and the persons making the legal claims. However, it was not an adequate response for those seeking safe and healing space for victims/survivors. Advocates and victim-led representations have taught us that a different Redress Scheme was needed – one that was victim centred, less adversarial and faster.

Notwithstanding the Government's role and the Scoping Inquiry that resulted in a proposed Commission of Investigation with a pledge of redress for victims and survivors of sexual abuse in Irish schools, we Spiritans believe we have a moral and collective obligation to respond to and offer atonement in some measure to those whose lives were severely impacted by the crimes of those Spiritan members and employees who committed them, the inaction of some others to stop them, and demonstrate our collective acknowledgement of past wrongdoing.

With the help of Restore Together, One Voice, and other significant advocates and individuals who were abused in our schools and other contexts, who have engaged directly with us, we have reached a new place in our efforts. Together we have designed a Restorative Framework which we hope can help all to arrive at a different place in this painful and difficult journey, one that acknowledges the abuses, failures and omissions of the past, refocuses on the present needs of those who suffered and those carrying pain and allows all to look to and find peace and a different and better future where humanly possible. We thank all involved in this initiative.

The agreed Restorative Process Framework contains a number of constitutive elements. Each element may have its significance for a person at different times.

1) **A facilitated encounter** with the representative of the Spiritans allowing for recognition and acknowledgement of what happened, and apology offered both verbally and in writing if requested.
2) **Therapy and counselling** is offered with a service of the individual's choice, or through the Restorative Process led by Mr Tim Chapman or the Spiritan Safeguarding Office
3) **Testimony and Truth Telling** is deemed necessary by all. What happened must be told and acknowledged.
4) **Redress** as a victim centred non-adversarial process.
5) **Memorialisation** in the form of remembrance into the future that acknowledges the suffering endured by those in different schools. Spiritans will memorialise the atonement of their congregation.

While recognising that all elements of the Restorative Justice Framework interact with each other, the Redress Scheme is but one part of our sincere endeavour and commitment to be accountable at this time for what happened in another time.

Child sexual abuse is a devastating crime. It shatters the lives of victims and causes deep and lasting harm to families and friends.

It also profoundly affects school communities. I want to publicly acknowledge this impact and offer apology and empathy to the current principals, staff, students and parents of Spiritan schools. Too often, you have found yourselves having to respond to situations in which you had no involvement and over which you had no control. I of course extend this apology to the volunteers and employees of SET (Spiritan Education Trust) the body that runs Spiritan Schools.

Finally, to anyone who is suffering from the effects of sexual abuse in childhood. There are safe and confidential places to be unburdened, to be believed and to be listened to. The Spiritans have engaged the services of Mr. Tim Chapman and his team to be available and have an open door for whoever may want to talk timchapman@rjteam.net . Alternatively, people can contact the Spiritan Safeguarding Office john.moore@spiritanplt.ie or the various advocate groups for the victims/survivors of Spiritan Schools, or indeed any of the national services for child abuse. The Gardai Dedicated Sexual Crime Unit, and Tusla offer a sensitive and practical listening and guidance as to any assistance required.

Whatever perspectives we have on institutions, church or state, of the actions and inactions of the past, no one who suffered the misery of sexual abuse as a child should be left alone in bearing the consequences through life. We thank victims/survivors for breaking an uncomfortable silence.

It is my sincere hope that I will be in a position by the end of the Summer to provide a further, more detailed update of the progress we are making in forging new paths to create a just redress scheme.

Brendan Carr C.S.Sp.

Spiritan Provincial