

13th April 2019

Re: Safeguarding Incidents at the Baths in Lourdes

Dear Group Leaders,

Following a letter received from the Chair of the NCSC which is a national commission mandated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales with responsibility for setting the strategic direction of safeguarding policy and monitoring compliance I am advising you of the arrangements for visits to the baths by any young person under the age of 18 years old and any adult without capacity to make that decision. The NCSC has been informed about a number of safeguarding incidents at the baths in Lourdes during last year's pilgrimages. Following these reports, the incidents were discussed at the latest NCSC meeting and members expressed safeguarding concerns about children and young people being exposed to risk at the baths.

As a result of these concerns, the NCSC has written to all Pilgrimage Directors to strongly advise that children and young people under the age of 18 years are not encouraged to use the baths unless under parental supervision, and to seek reassurance that use of the baths by children, young people and adults at risk is risk assessed. Given that the safeguarding office cannot provide adequate safeguarding measures to mitigate these risks we have advised Fr Michael Jones (Pilgrimage Director) to instruct the pilgrimage committee that no under 18s will be allowed to go to the baths unless under the direct supervision of their parents, to which Fr Michael has agreed.

Moreover, for those young people aged over 18 years old, we would advise that you explicitly inform the young people, parents and guardians (in writing) of the fact that there are no vetting procedures for those working at the baths and that there have been a number of serious safeguarding incidents reported last year; to allow for parents, guardians and young people to make informed decisions. We also advise for college groups that this information is shared with the local authority when completing the required risk assessment.

“Go and drink at the spring and wash yourself there!”

These are the words of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette during the ninth apparition which took place on the 25th February 1858. Being mindful of these words, a bespoke liturgy will be prepared to enable pilgrims to respond to Our Lady's invitation to wash (rather than bathe) in the water.

This letter can be circulated to anyone else it is felt to be appropriate for. If you have any queries or concerns you wish to raise about this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me or a colleague in the safeguarding office.

Yours Sincerely,



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Director of Safeguarding

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