



## **Archdiocese of Armagh**

### **Guidance for Clergy on writing References or Character References for defendants in Court Proceedings**

On occasion a defendant in a criminal trial asks a Priest or Deacon to write a reference or a character reference; they do so in the hope that, if found guilty, the reference may reduce the sanction of the court. To avoid any further hurt to victims and their families the Archdiocese has written guidance to assist you in making the decision as to whether you write the reference or not.

- You should not write a character reference unless you are fully briefed on the charges facing the defendant; this can be done through the solicitor of the defendant.
- If the defendant has already pleaded guilty and the reference is requested as part of the pre-sentencing report, a reference should **not** be provided.
- If the charges involve the sexual abuse of a minor or a sexual offence involving an adult, or any form of abuse, you should **not** provide a character reference.
- If you decide to write a reference, then it should be done in a personal capacity, and not as a Priest or Deacon of the Archdiocese of Armagh.
- Any reference must only provide factual information. You should not offer any opinion on the relative merits of the case or the defendant.
- As a Priest or Deacon, you can provide pastoral support to the defendant.

If you have any doubts about the appropriateness of providing a reference or character reference, then you should discuss it with the Archbishop or the Director of Safeguarding before you undertake a task that may be incompatible with your role as a Priest or Deacon of the Archdiocese.

*Approved by the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee of the Archdiocese of Armagh  
on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018*