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The Catholic bishops of Scotland have authorized an independent audit of every diocese in the country to ensure child protection procedures are as robust as possible.

Baroness (Helen) Liddell of Coatdyke, chairman of the Independent Review Group of the Roman Catholic Church, said the bishops had "shown a willingness to submit their dioceses to the utmost scrutiny."

She said that the audits were "a major undertaking, unique in Scotland," but added that they were necessary because self-administered audits had given the review group "real cause for concern."

"There was a willingness to meet basic compliance standards, but little evidence of the requirements of a safer culture," she said in a June 15 statement sent by email to Catholic News Service. "There was also no way to check the accuracy of the results, and a lack of clarity regarding the needs of, and support for, the victims of abuse."

The baroness said there was "a need for greater consistency, independent analysis and professionalism in monitoring progress" and also a reexamination of the processes for whistle-blowing.

"There needs to be a change in culture, in capacity, in capability, and that needs training, learning, reflection, the utmost transparency and it needs leadership," said Baroness Liddell.

"We have found a willingness to adopt that change, but true progress can only come about as a result of deep analysis of strengths and weaknesses," she said.

Two of the eight Scottish dioceses – the Archdiocese of St. Andrews and Edinburgh and the Diocese of Galloway – have already been audited, and the remainder will be audited at the rate of two a year, she added.

"We will also seek to reach out to survivors to learn from them," Baroness Liddell said.

Her statement accompanied the publication of the review group's first report on safeguarding practices and policies in the Scottish Catholic Church.

Bishop Joseph Toal of Motherwell, who has responsibility for overseeing the work of the Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service, welcomed the report.

"We shall take time to give it serious consideration," he said. "Since setting up the Independent Review Group, we have taken steps to improve safeguarding practices in all eight dioceses in Scotland.

"The most significant of these actions include the publication of 'In God's Image' (our manual of safeguarding procedures), a radical revision of the annual safeguarding audit, which is completed in every Catholic parish and, most recently, entirely independent audits of safeguarding practice in two of our dioceses," he said.

"We are determined to apply what we learn ... and to ensure that the highest standards of safeguarding practice are met throughout the Church in Scotland."

Safeguarding practices in the Scottish Catholic Church were first reviewed by the McLellan Commission, set up in 2013.

In August 2015 the commission published a report recommending external and independent scrutiny of polices and practice, and the bishops responded by

establishing the review group in May 2017.

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