This guidance is intended to help you when dealing with issues of spiritual abuse in relation to Vulnerable Adults.
Notes for guidance only

Definition of Spiritual Abuse

As members of the Church this is something that we feel may be alien to us. The quote “It never happens here” is a dangerous stance. Awareness, Education and good practise is the best prevention.

The house of Bishops document ‘Promoting a Safe Church’, defines Spiritual abuse as ‘An attempt to ‘force’ religious values or ideas onto people, particularly those who may be vulnerable to such practices. Within faith communities harm can be caused by the inappropriate use of religious belief or practice; this can include the misuse of the authority of leadership or penitential discipline, oppressive teaching, or intrusive healing and deliverance ministries, which may result in vulnerable people experiencing physical, emotional or sexual harm.

For guidelines relating to Children see page 12 of the Diocesan Safeguarding Children Policy.

Examples of practical unintentional spiritual abuse

• Keeping a person under 16 with a learning disability in the Crèche because they cannot read.

• Parish Visitor saying if a person prays hard enough God will heal them.

• Including people on the church intercessions list without asking for their consent. Making people feel they are Ungodly if they do not wish to comply with the request for their name to be included in the intercessions.

• Using your position in the Church to make people feel inferior with relation to their walk with God.
• Clergy are sometimes asked to do House blessings and exorcisms. Clergy should always seek advice from the Diocesan specialists in this field if they are unsure.

• Where you are dealing with people who have carers always try to have open channels of communication with them. Some people because of their disability or illness can be over compliant and easily manipulated and power abuse is a real danger within this pastoral situation.

**Golden Rules**

• Beware of your own power even if you sometimes don’t feel powerful. (It is an interesting exercise to find out what you have control over in your Church and faith.)

• Ask for help if you feel out of your depth

• Think before you act

• Listen to your instincts.