



SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF THE MISSIONS

Safeguarding Policy

February 2024

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1. Introduction

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it' - 1 Cor 12:26.

'A population that does not take care of the elderly, and of children and the young has no future, because it abuses both its memory and its promise' - Pope Francis.¹

Institute Notre Dame Des Missions Inc. (Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions)

understands that we hold a privileged position of trust in the community. We are committed to providing a safe, inclusive and supportive environment which respects and upholds the human rights and dignity of all people.

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions acknowledges that we are well placed to recognise people in our community who are particularly at risk and in need of care and support. We welcome them into our community.

This policy has been approved by Sr Catherine Brabender, Province Leader.

2. Safeguarding Commitment Statement

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions upholds the dignity of all and is committed to promoting and maintaining safe and supportive environments, particularly for children and adults at risk. All people have the right to be protected from abuse. Inclusivity, which is at the heart of the Gospel, and therefore, our values, shapes our relationship with children, adults at risk, their families, and the community.

We encourage environments that empower children and adults at risk to speak up and to be heard. We recognise the role of families and community in safeguarding children and adults at risk and welcome their input on how to improve the way we relate to them. We are building a culture of care, accountability and transparency upheld in our policies and processes including recruitment, induction, and daily operations. We are actively committed to building prevention and safeguarding practices into everyday practice and implementing governance reforms throughout our Church.

We act appropriately with children and adults at risk with whom we come into contact, including maintaining boundaries and exercising acceptable standards of behaviour at all times. All staff, volunteers and contractors are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the legislative requirements of relevant jurisdictions and our own complaints and safeguarding policies. Any concerns that are identified or brought forward in any way are acted on appropriately, sensitively and in a timely manner.

¹ <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=10334>

3. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to provide information and guidance about how Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions will prevent, identify and respond to abuse and harm towards children and adults at risk. It is approved and endorsed by the Province Leader, Sr Catherine Brabender.

Definition of Children

Children are people under the age of 18. **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** does not provide services or activities that involve directly working with children but has/may have incidental contact with children through attending our partner school assemblies and events.

Definition of Adults at Risk

Adults at risk are people aged 18 and over who are at increased risk of abuse, including those who:

- are elderly
- have a disability
- have a mental illness
- have diminished capacity
- have cognitive impairment
- are experiencing transient risks eg bereavement, relationship breakdown, domestic or family violence, homelessness
- have any other impairment that makes it difficult for that person to protect themselves from abuse or exploitation.

Whilst taking care to not make assumptions or generalisations about individuals, we recognise that other aspects of a person's identity or life experiences may also increase their risk of vulnerability to abuse or harm, eg:

- being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- being a refugee or migrant
- diverse gender or sexuality
- speaking a first language other than English
- the existence of a power imbalance
- experience of living in out-of-home care
- surviving sexual abuse or child abuse

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions may have contact with adults at risk through its [eg pastoral, community outreach and missionary work.

[The Safeguarding Policy](#) applies to all personnel, including sisters and clergy, employees and volunteers engaged by **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions**. It also includes contractors engaged

by **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** to provide services to children and adults at risk. It covers all aspects of service provided by **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** in any location.

The policy complies with the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (the Standards), which outline requirements for Catholic entities across Australia to promote the safety of children and adults at risk through implementing policies and activities to prevent, respond to and report concerns regarding abuse and harm.² The policy also reflects relevant safeguarding legislation in VIC and WA.

The Safeguarding Policy is supported by and should be read together with the following related documents, which provide additional guidance, including procedural checklists and templates:

- Safeguarding Commitment Statement
- [Code of Conduct](#)
- [Risk Management Strategy](#)
- Complaint Handling Policy

Nothing in this policy affects the expectations outlined in other relevant Sisters of Our Lady of the Mission documents or in civil law.

4. Leading and Promoting a Safeguarding Culture

The Province Leader is ultimately responsible for ensuring **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** is a safe environment for children and adults at risk. The Province Leader has delegated the authority for handling child protection and adult safeguarding matters to the Safeguarding Officer. Collaboration across the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** and information sharing is encouraged for consistent promotion and standardisation of best practice approaches to safeguarding.

All agencies and ministries remain directly accountable to the Province Leader for their implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

The Province Leader has established a Safeguarding Committee in accordance with the requirements of the Standards, comprising experts in relation to safeguarding, organisational culture and structure, and policy development which is responsible for overseeing the effective ongoing implementation of safeguarding practices, policies and procedures.³

The day-to-day safeguarding work of the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** is led and managed by the Province Vicar, Sr Madeleine Barlow. This role also acts as the 'Safeguarding Coordinator' as required by the Standards.⁴

The Province Leader and Province Vicar will lead and promote a safeguarding culture by:

² The Standards are based on the child safe standards recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse but include additional 'core components.'

³ NCSS, Edition 2, December 2022, at 1.2.2.

⁴ NCSS, Edition 2, December 2022, at 1.2.3.

- personally upholding and modelling a standard of behaviour consistent with relevant Church documents and civil law
- promoting the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards
- prominently publishing and displaying the Safeguarding Commitment Statement and making sure the Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct and Complaint Handling Policy are readily available to personnel and the broader community
- identifying and taking opportunities to promote whole of community awareness of the dignity and rights of children and adults at risk, and to champion and model safeguarding within the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** community and more broadly (where appropriate)
- promoting an inclusive, respectful and responsive approach to the diverse needs of children and adults at risk
- paying particular attention to the needs of children and adults who may be at increased risk of abuse, discrimination or exploitation
- taking all possible steps to ensure that only people who are safe and suitable to have contact with children and adults at risk are engaged by the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions**.
- empowering all personnel to take responsibility for safeguarding and providing opportunities for them to have input into improving safeguarding practices
- encouraging people to bring forward concerns or complaints about the safety of children or adults at risk (including disclosures of current or historical abuse) and providing appropriate processes by which to do so, including processes that are suitable for children and people with diminished capacity and/or cognitive impairment
- responding to disclosures and complaints in a manner that is transparent, respectful, fair and accountable
- working with survivor advocacy and support groups, where appropriate, to recognise past wrongs where these have occurred and build a safe, inclusive and supportive faith environment
- welcoming and facilitating dialogue with and feedback from the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** community, including children, adults at risk and outside experts, about our safeguarding approach, including when reviewing safeguarding policies and procedures
- ensuring **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** complies with all relevant statutory and legislative requirements
- actively monitoring compliance with the Safeguarding Policy and National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, undertaking annual local self-assessment checks and making publicly available the findings of any audits or reviews undertaken or validated by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Limited.

The Safeguarding Commitment Statement, Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct and Complaint Handling Policy will be published on the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** website. At least once a year, the documents will be proactively communicated to all personnel involved in the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** community at the annual assembly. Safeguarding policies and procedures will be regularly reviewed and the findings of the reviews will be reported to stakeholders.

The Province Leader will ensure that **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** reports any safety concerns about children or adults at risk to the appropriate authorities. The processes by which safety concerns will be reported are outlined in section 9 of this policy and include:

- reporting possible criminal offences (including historical allegations of child abuse) to Police
- making a mandatory child protection report to [insert relevant child protection authority]
- making a notification of reportable conduct [insert relevant reportable conduct oversight body if relevant]
- reporting safety concerns for older people or people with disability to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission and the Disability Services Commissioner VIC and the Disability Services Commission WA.

Safeguarding Implementation Plan

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions will monitor compliance with the Safeguarding Policy and continual improvement of its safeguarding practices through the Safeguarding Implementation Plan⁵ constituted by the following:

- Safeguarding will be a standing agenda item of the Safeguarding Committee to ensure regular discussion of the following:
 - opportunities to promote safeguarding within the organisation
 - relevant legislative or statutory changes
 - reviewing/updating the Safeguarding Policy and/or related documents
 - safeguarding training and support for personnel
 - trends in complaints about the safety of children or adults at risk (without breaching privacy or jeopardising ongoing complaints), and
 - any other relevant matters related to safeguarding.
- The below safeguarding responsibilities are delegated to the Safeguarding Coordinator:

⁵ NCSS, second edition - The safeguarding implementation plans means a documented plan which articulates actions to be taken across the entity to ensure safeguarding practices are in place. It includes actions, strategies, responsibilities and delegations and tracks review and progress. It is overseen by the Safeguarding Committee.

- maintaining knowledge of current legislation, statutory and other guidance in relation to safeguarding and ensuring these are reflected in the Safeguarding Policy and related documents
- acting as a contact person for anyone in the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** community who has questions about safeguarding or concerns about the safety of children or adults at risk
- ensuring the Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct, Risk Management Strategy and Complaint Handling Procedures are regularly reviewed by **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** according to the specified timeframes in each document
- monitoring the currency of Working with Children Checks and other relevant background checks held by personnel
- monitoring participation by personnel in safeguarding training according to the designated schedule
- regularly reviewing complaints to identify systemic issues related to safeguarding, and improving policies and practices as needed, and
- engaging with other relevant organisations and seeking specialist advice about safeguarding good practice, as necessary.

The Safeguarding Coordinator's contact details will be provided to families, carers and the broader the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** community.

The Province Leader retains overall responsibility for the Safeguarding Implementation Plan.

5. Identifying and Managing Risks

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions has appropriate processes in place to identify and manage risks to the safety and wellbeing of children and adults at risk. These processes are documented in the [Risk Management Strategy](#).

As part of their initial safeguarding induction and refresher training, personnel will be familiarised with the Risk Management Strategy and their related responsibilities. The Province Leader has overall responsibility for ensuring implementation and compliance with the Risk Management Strategy.

6. Recruiting Safe and Suitable People

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions is committed to recruiting and engaging people who are safe and suitable to have contact with children and adults at risk. **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** is also committed to ensuring that existing personnel understand their safeguarding responsibilities and are safe and suitable to have contact with children and adults at risk.

The processes in place to support safe recruitment and engagement forms part of the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** overall Risk Management Strategy - see section 4 of the [Risk Management Strategy](#).

7. Providing Safeguarding Training and Support

Personnel will participate in the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards Introductory Session for Leaders, or another suitable course delivered by an individual with relevant expertise, as soon as possible after commencement.

As part of their induction, and as soon as possible after commencement, all personnel will be provided with training that empowers them to understand and implement their safeguarding responsibilities. At a minimum, the training will cover:

- Safeguarding Policy and [Code of Conduct](#)
- providing a culturally safe environment in which diverse circumstances and experiences are respected
- the nature, factors and impact of institutional abuse of children and adults, including abuse of power, exploitation and grooming
- understanding risk factors and managing risks to children and adults
- understanding abusive behaviours by a child towards another child
- e-safety
- responding to disclosures of abuse
- civil (Commonwealth, state and territory) and Canonical reporting obligations
- complaint handling, and
- information sharing and record keeping.

Refresher safeguarding training will be provided to personnel at least every three years.

The Safeguarding Coordinator and the Province Secretary is responsible for keeping records of participation in initial and refresher safeguarding training.

For further details about ongoing professional development for leaders and members of religious institutes in active ministry, and suitability screening in relation to candidates for priesthood and religious life (both before and during seminary formation prior to ordination as well as during times of initial formation prior to professions of vows), together with related training and mentoring - see section 5 of the [Risk Management Strategy](#).

8. Requiring and Upholding Appropriate Standards of Behaviour

The **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** expects all personnel to uphold the human rights, dignity and well-being of all people and safeguard children and adults at risk from abuse and harm.

Personnel will be provided with ongoing supervision and support to meet their safeguarding responsibilities. Annual performance reviews for personnel will include responsibilities for safeguarding children and adults at risk relevant to their role.

Code of Conduct

All personnel must comply with the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** Code of Conduct. The Code provides clear information about the kinds of conduct towards children and adults at risk that are not acceptable, ranging from concerning behaviour that may be a breach of the Code, to behaviour that may also amount to a criminal offence if proven - see the [Model Code of Conduct](#).

9. Identifying and Responding to Safety Concerns

The **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** strives to effectively identify and respond to concerns about the safety of children or adults at risk at the earliest opportunity. While the Province Leader has ultimate responsibility for ensuring **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** identifies and responds to safety concerns, at a practical level this responsibility is shared across the organisation.

During initial and refresher safeguarding training, personnel will be provided with information and equipped with skills to identify safety concerns and potential indicators of abuse or harm; support children and adults at risk to express safety concerns; handle disclosures and meet their internal and external reporting obligations.

The **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** response to concerns about the safety of children or adults at risk will be decisive, timely and consistent with policy and legislative obligations. The safety and care of children and adults at risk will be the primary consideration. The principles of procedural fairness and natural justice will also be adhered to at all times.

Concerns About Children

Concerns about the safety of children may involve the following:⁶

- **Sexual abuse:** an offence of a sexual nature (under any state, territory or Commonwealth law) committed against, with or in the presence of a child.
- **Physical abuse:** a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child or young person. It includes but is not limited to injuries which are caused by excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings, cigarette burns, attempted strangulation and female genital mutilation. Injuries include bruising, lacerations or welts, burns, fractures or dislocation of joints.
- **Emotional abuse or psychological harm:** behaviour (such as excessive criticism, withholding affection, exposure to domestic violence, intimidation or threatening behaviour) that damages the confidence and self-esteem of the child or young person,

⁶ Adapted from <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/reporting-child-at-risk/harm-and-neglect> and https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/1021/Identifying_reportable_allegations.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y

resulting in serious emotional disturbance or psychological trauma. In general, it is the frequency, persistence and duration of the behaviour that is instrumental in defining the consequences for the child or young person.

- **Neglect:** when a parent or caregiver cannot regularly give a child the basic things needed for his or her growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care, adequate supervision, and enough parenting and care.
- **Ill-treatment:** when a parent or caregiver engages in conduct towards a child that is unreasonable and seriously inappropriate, improper, inhumane or cruel, eg making excessive or degrading demands, engaging in a pattern of hostile or degrading comments or behaviour, or using inappropriate forms of behaviour management.

Concerns About Adults

Identifying risks to the safety of adults can be challenging. An adult's vulnerability may not always be readily apparent, and indicators of abuse or harm towards adults at risk may be more difficult to recognise. The right of adults to make their own choices and decisions, and the circumstances in which they may have diminished capacity to do so, are also relevant considerations.

An inclusive, compassionate approach to adults at risk can provide valuable opportunities not only to provide care and support, but also observe and identify any safety or other concerns and connect them with relevant professional services. Personnel will not be dissuaded from seeking to identify, engage and build connections with adults at risk, nor be too 'quick to judge' others who do so. However, personnel should be alert to risks and seek advice as required.

Concerns about the safety of adults at risk may relate to the following:⁷

- **Financial abuse**
 - threatening or coercing re: assets or wills
 - taking control of the person's finances against their wishes and denying access to their own money
 - abusing Powers of Attorney
 - stealing goods, eg. jewellery, credit cards, cash, food, and other possessions
 - unauthorised use of banking and financial documents
 - the recent addition of a signature on a bank account
- **Psychological abuse**
 - pressuring, intimidating or bullying
 - name calling, and verbal abuse
 - treating the adult person like a child

⁷ NSW Ageing and Disability Commission <https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources>

- threatening to harm the person, other people or pets
- threatening to exclude a person from an environment or a practice without just cause
- engaging in emotional blackmail such as threatening to withdraw access to grandchildren, family, friends, services, telephone or placement in an aged care facility
- preventing contact with family and friends, or denying access to the phone or computer
- withholding mail
- preventing a person from engaging in religious or cultural practices
- moving the person far away from family or friends.
- **Neglect**
 - failure to provide basic needs, ie. food, adequate or clean clothing, heating, medicines
 - under- or over-medicating
 - exposure to danger or lack of supervision, such as leaving the person in an unsafe place or in isolation
 - refusal to permit others to provide appropriate care.
- **Physical abuse**
 - pushing, shoving, or rough handling
 - kicking, hitting, punching, slapping, biting, and/or burning
 - restraining: physical or medical
 - locking the person in a room or home or tying to a chair or bed
 - intentional injury with a weapon or object
 - overuse or misuse of medications.
- **Sexual abuse**
 - an offence of a sexual nature (under any state, territory or Commonwealth law) committed against an adult.

Concerns about adults at risk may also relate to ‘transient risks’ due to life circumstances or experiences such as:

- relationship breakdown
- bereavement
- experience of domestic or family violence
- homelessness

- mental illness
- unemployment
- dependency on alcohol or other substance
- pregnancy/early parenthood

Safeguarding training for personnel will include the identification of ‘transient risks’ and additional support needs.

Handling Disclosures

Disclosures of abuse or harm may be received directly or indirectly. A direct disclosure is one by a child or adult who discloses current or previous abuse or harm (including historical abuse experienced as a child). An indirect disclosure is when a third person (child or adult) discloses that a child or adult has experienced current or previous abuse or harm (including historical abuse experienced a child).

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions will ensure that all personnel are advised what they should do if they receive a disclosure of abuse.

The majority of personnel such as a receptionist, administrative or financial staff, should write down the person’s name and contact details and advise them that a person will contact them shortly, providing a name if possible. The person then needs to contact the relevant person with, provide the information collected and ask them to contact the person who disclosed as soon as possible.

All personnel engaged to work directly with children or in leadership or in safeguarding of professional standards receives a disclosure of abuse or harm, they should:

- listen calmly, patiently and supportively, letting the person use their own words
- let the person know they are doing the right thing by speaking up
- address any concerns the person has about their safety, especially if they are worried about the consequences of disclosing
- explain what the next steps will be, including that they may need to tell certain other people about the disclosure to keep the person and others safe, but that the information will otherwise be treated confidentially, and
- ask the person what they need to feel safe and involved in the process for responding to their disclosure.⁸

Reporting Obligations

Any person engaged by **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** who becomes aware of a concern about the safety of a child or adult at risk, whether by a direct or indirect disclosure or any other means, must report it as soon as practical to the Safeguarding Coordinator.

⁸ Adapted from *Complaint Handling Guide: Upholding the rights of children and young people*, p40, National Office for Child Safety.

If the concern relates to the Province Leader, it must be reported to Province Vicar. Those required to make report under legislation, policy or pursuant to any other requirement (reporters) may also contact the National Executive Director, CRA, for general guidance.

The report should include all known information such as the nature of the allegation; when and where it occurred; the subject of the allegation and the alleged victim.

It is not the reporter's role to interview any person or investigate the concern. Under no circumstances should the reporter ask a person for further details or ask leading questions - this has the potential to interfere with the disclosure and may jeopardise any future criminal proceedings that may arise as a result of an investigation. However, the reporter should obtain basic details to assess the person's immediate safety.

Except for the purpose of meeting their reporting obligations, the reporter will treat the matter in strict confidence.

The Province Leader will provide advice and guidance on how the matter should be handled, including whether the conduct is 'reportable' and external authorities need to be notified (see below). The Province Leader may also contact the National Executive Director, CRA, for general guidance about external reporting obligations.

Concerns About Children

Reporting criminal conduct to Police: Conduct towards a child/children which may be a criminal offence if proven will be reported to Police as soon as possible (and before making a mandatory child protection report). The Safeguarding Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the Police report is made.

Criminal Offences

Criminal offences may include:

- **An offence of a sexual nature** (under any state, territory or Commonwealth law) committed against, with or in the presence of a child, eg:
 - sexual touching
 - sexual assault
 - aggravated sexual assault sexual intercourse and attempted sexual intercourse
 - production/dissemination/possession of child pornography using children to produce pornography
 - filming the private parts of a person without their knowledge
 - grooming or procuring children under the age of 16yrs for unlawful sexual activity
 - sexual activity deemed non-consensual on the basis of special care relationships
- **Assault:**

- the intentional or reckless application of physical force without lawful justification or excuse, or
- any act which intentionally or recklessly causes another to apprehend immediate and unlawful violence.
- **Neglect:** Failure by a person with a legal duty of care to provide the necessities of life that causes death, serious injury or the likelihood of serious injury.
- **Failing to protect a child from abuse:** An adult working in an organisation doing child-related work will commit an offence if they know another adult working there poses a serious risk of abusing a child (under 18 years), and they have the power to reduce or remove the risk, and they negligently fail to do so.
- **Concealing a child abuse offence:** All adults are required to report information to the Police if they know, believe or reasonably ought to know that a child (under 18 years) has been abused, unless they have a 'reasonable excuse'. A 'reasonable excuse' is defined by the relevant criminal legislation.

Reporting Children at Risk of Harm: Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or young person or a 'class of children' has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect,. A report should be made to the child protection intake service covering the local government area. The Province Leader is responsible for determining if a child protection report is required and if so, ensuring that the report is made. However, this responsibility does not prevent personnel from immediately making a child protection report. We currently have no ministry with children.

A mandatory reporter has a duty to report, as soon as practicable, the name, or a description, of the child and the grounds for suspecting that the child is at risk of harm. Mandatory reporters are legally protected against retribution for making or proposing to make a report.

Notifying Reportable Conduct

The Province Leader of **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** must notify the Victoria CCYP or WA Ombudsman if she receives a report or becomes aware of a reportable allegation or reportable conviction against any personnel or relevant contractors delivering services to children.

The notification must be made within 5 business days of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions becoming aware of the allegation.

The Safeguarding Coordinator is responsible for determining if a notification of reportable conduct is required and if so, ensuring the notification is made.

Definition of Reportable Allegation/Reportable Conviction

A reportable allegation is an allegation that a worker has engaged in conduct that may be reportable conduct.

Reportable conduct is as listed below

- sexual misconduct
- ill-treatment of a child
- neglect of a child
- an assault against a child
- an offence under section 43B or 316A or the Crimes Act 1900,
- behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child.⁹

NB: Reportable conduct covers the conduct of personnel towards children both in their personal and professional life as per legislation in VIC or WA.

The Province Leader in consultation with the Safeguarding Officer must conduct an investigation or arrange for an investigation to be conducted. The report must be provided to the the relevant oversight body in VIC in WA within 30 days after The Province Leader/Safeguarding Officer receiving the reportable allegation.

The investigation report must include information about the facts and circumstances of the reportable allegation, the findings made by the Province Leader and/or the Safeguarding Officer, and an analysis of the evidence and the rationale for the findings.

The Province Leader can seek guidance from the National Executive Director, CRA about meeting their reportable conduct obligations, including the engagement of an independent investigator.

Historical Child Abuse

Where **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** becomes aware of an allegation of historical child abuse (abuse experienced by a child who is now an adult), it will take the following steps:

- A child protection/risk of harm report will be made to the VIC or WA relevant statutory child protection body if there are grounds for suspecting that a child or class of children are at current risk of harm. (eg. because an alleged offender has current access to children).
- A report will be made to Police in the following circumstances:
 - If **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** knows or believes that a child under 18 years has been abused (sexual abuse, serious physical abuse or extreme neglect of a child) or knows or believes that they have information that might materially assist in securing the apprehension, prosecution or conviction of the offender, unless there is a 'reasonable excuse' for not reporting to Police. A 'reasonable excuse' includes a

⁹ Part 4, *Children's Guardian Act 2019*.

reasonable fear for their own or another person's safety. If the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions knows that an adult working at the Sisters of Our **Lady of the Missions** poses a serious risk of abusing a child (sexual or serious physical abuse).

The Province Leader and the Safeguarding Officer is responsible for ensuring that a child protection/risk of harm and/or Police report is made, if required, in response to a historical child abuse matter in accordance with legislative requirements.

Concerns About Adults at Risk

The Province Leader and the Safeguarding Officer is responsible for assessing if a concern about the safety of an adult at risk should be reported to an external agency such as Police, a health service or adult safeguarding agency. The assessment will have regard to:

- legislative requirements
- whether an alleged offender is employed or engaged by the **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions**
- the views and wishes of the involved adult
- any diminished capacity on the part of the involved adult to make an informed decision
- the seriousness of the concerns, and
- any potential or actual risks to other children or adults.

NB: For information about how concerns are handled relating to the protection of adults at risk which are covered by independent oversight and regulatory arrangements, see the relevant agency's safeguarding procedures.

Criminal Offences

Where the concerns involve a potential criminal offence (eg. physical or sexual assault) by a person engaged by **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** a report will be made to Police as soon as possible. Where the concerns involve a potential criminal offence by any other person, Province Leader will offer to source the support for the alleged victim to report the matter to Police. In circumstances where we identify that the alleged victim has diminished capacity to make an informed decision about whether to report the matter to Police, **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** will do so on their behalf. The Province Leader and the Safeguarding Officer is responsible for ensuring that the Police report is made.

Safety Concerns about Older People or People with Disability

Several cohorts of adults at risk are covered by legislative schemes and regulatory/oversight bodies, these include:

- Safety concerns for an adult in an aged care facility, respite and day care service or support services delivered in the home should be reported to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

- Safety concerns that relate to the provision of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) service should be reported to the NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission
- Safety concerns that relate to the abuse, neglect or exploitation of an adult with disability or older person living in their home (conduct by a member of the person's family, other informal supports, or members known to them from the community) should be reported to the the Disability Services Commissioner VIC and the Disability Services Commission WA.
- The Province Leader and the Safeguarding Officer is responsible for ensuring that a report about the safety of an older person or person with a disability is made, if required.

Concern that an Adult at Risk May Harm Themselves or Any Other Person

In an emergency, **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** will contact Police if a there is concern that an adult at risk may harm themselves or another person.

Other Concerns About Adults at Risk

Where appropriate, **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** may seek specialist advice and/or provide referrals to other agencies that can provide support to adults at risk. To facilitate this, we will ensure that we have access to community-based services, government agencies or other organisations that can offer information, advice and/or receive referrals

10. Responding to Complaints

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions seeks to empower people to communicate their concerns and complaints without fear of retribution. **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** understands that speaking up requires courage and will respond with respect and compassion. **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** will try to resolve concerns and complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Complaint Handling Policy

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions has a robust system for receiving, recording, managing, resolving and monitoring complaints, including disclosures or allegations of current or historical abuse towards children or adults. These processes are documented in the Complaint Handling Policy.

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions will ensure that the processes are communicated in ways that are appropriate and accessible to the diverse needs of our community, including children and adults with diminished capacity/cognitive impairment.

Complaints will be dealt with in a trauma-informed and victim-centred manner that is respectful to both complainant and respondent; prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and adults at risk; and observes the principles of procedural fairness. Where necessary and appropriate, **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** will cooperate with other relevant organisations and seeks specialist advice in resolving complaints, including but not limited to

Police, child protection authorities, and authorities responsible for safeguarding people with disability and/or older people.

As part of their initial and refresher safeguarding training, personnel will be familiarised with the Complaint Handling Policy and their related responsibilities.

11. Record Keeping and Information Sharing

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions is committed to appropriate and lawful record keeping, storage and sharing of information related to children and adults at risk. We recognise that record-keeping and information sharing is a key risk management strategy - see section 9 of the [Risk Management Strategy](#).

12. Confidentiality and Privacy

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions will maintain current knowledge of, and comply with, our legislative obligations to maintain confidentiality and protect personal information and privacy.

- Information and records relating to incidents, complaints, responses and decisions will be treated as confidential except where the sharing or distribution of information and/or records is mandated by statutory requirements or principles of natural justice. In this regard, if the complaint involves conduct that is serious and/or potentially criminal, any legal obligations to report relevant information to bodies such as the Police or child protection services will over-ride confidentiality, or to other prescribed bodies, for example, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing VIC and the Department of Communities WA.

In addition, in certain circumstances the obligation to be fair to the subject of a complaint may completely or partially override confidentiality. **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** will seek to balance fairness and confidentiality requirements and, as far as possible, safeguard the interests of all parties.

When determining what information to release relating to a complaint record, **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** will be mindful of privacy and confidentiality obligations concerning the release of personal information about other individuals, such as a subject of the complaint.

13. Review of Safeguarding Policy and Related Documents

The Safeguarding Policy and related documents will be updated as required and reviewed at least every three years. **Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions** will consult stakeholders as part of reviewing the Safeguarding Policy and related documents. The outcomes of each review will be documented.

Relevant legislation

- Crimes Act 1958 (VIC)
- Crimes Act 1958 (WA)
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (VIC)
- Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)
- Reportable Conduct Scheme (VIC)
- Reportable Conduct Act 2022
- The Worker Screening Act 2020 (VIC)
- Working with Children (Screening) Act 2004 (WA)
- Disability Act 2006 (VIC)
- Disability Services Act 1993 (WA)
- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Act 2018 and the Aged Care Act 1997.

The content of the Safeguarding Policy will be reviewed whenever a breach is identified and at least every three years. The Province Leader and Safeguarding Officer is responsible for ensuring the review is completed.

Safeguarding Policy approved	Province Leader Sr Catherine Brabender	February 2024
Safeguarding Policy reviewed	Province Vicar Sr Madeleine Barlow	February 2024

Glossary

Adults at risk	<p>Adults at risk are people aged 18 and over who are at increased risk of abuse, including those who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ are elderly▪ have a disability▪ have a mental illness▪ have diminished capacity▪ have cognitive impairment▪ are experiencing transient risks, eg. bereavement, relationship breakdown, domestic or family violence, homelessness▪ have any other impairment that makes it difficult for that person to protect themselves from abuse or exploitation.
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	Whilst taking care to not make assumptions or generalisations about individuals, we recognise that other aspects of a person's identity or life experiences may also increase their risk of vulnerability to abuse or harm,
Allegation	A complaint, still to be verified, claiming or asserting that someone has committed an act of abuse against a child. The term is used interchangeably and in combination with "complaint".
Child/ren	Individuals under 18 years of age.
Child abuse	There are different legal definitions of child abuse in Australia. Most commonly, the categories of child abuse include sexual, physical, psychological, neglect, ill-treatment, exploitation and exposure to family violence.
Clergy	The body of those ordained in sacred ministry in the Church. They are either deacons, priests or bishops.
Complainant	Any person who makes a complaint that may include any allegation, suspicion, concern, or report of a breach of the entity's Code of Conduct. It also includes disclosures made to an institution that may be about, or relate to, abuse in the entity's context.
Disability	Means those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (<i>Article 2, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</i>)
Diverse gender or sexuality	Diverse gender or sexuality refers to all the diversities of sex characteristics, sexual orientations and gender identities, without the need to specify each of the identities, behaviours, or characteristics that form this plurality.
Formation/formation program	A program preparing individuals for ordination or profession of vows as well as a life-long journey to the invitation of Christ to proclaim and live the Gospel message within the life of the Church (National Catholic Safeguarding Standards definition).
Leaders	Personnel who are responsible for important governance decisions within a Church entity and/or who lead and coordinate Church improvement initiatives.

Ministry	Any activity within, or delivered by, an entity that is designed to carry out the good works of the Catholic Church.
Personnel	This includes religious brothers, sisters and clergy, employees, volunteers, contractors (and others) engaged by the Church Authority to provide services to children and adults at risk.
Religious Institute	An institute of consecrated life, a secular institute or society of apostolic life, and their provinces or equivalent.
Safeguarding	Measures to protect the safety, human rights and well-being of individuals, which allow people - in this context children - to live free from abuse, harm and neglect.
Safeguarding Committee	A committee established to advise and support the Church Authority on all matters relating to safeguarding, including the development and implementation of a Safeguarding Implementation Plan and coordination of annual self-audits at a local level. Committee members need relevant and varied professional expertise in relation to, but not limited to safeguarding, child protection, organisational culture and structure, policy development, and need to include lay women and men.
Safeguarding Commitment Statement	A commitment statement describing an entity's commitment to keep all, especially children and adults at risk, safe from harm. It informs the entity's culture with respect to safeguarding.
Safeguarding Coordinator	An individual who champions safeguarding and co-ordinates the implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards within an entity.
Safeguarding Implementation Plan	A documented plan which articulates actions to be taken across the entity to ensure safeguarding practices are in place. It includes actions, strategies, responsibilities and delegations and tracks review and progress. It is overseen by the Safeguarding Committee.
Seminary	A centre for the formation and education of candidates preparing for ordination.
Supervision	A forum for reflection and learning, an interactive dialogue between at least two people, one of whom is professionally trained as a supervisor. The dialogue shapes a process of review, reflection, critique and replenishment for personnel. Supervision is a

	<p>professional activity in which personnel are engaged regardless of experience or qualification.</p> <p>Supervision assists personnel in their accountabilities for professional standards (including in relation to maintenance of professional boundaries), defined competencies for their role and understanding and implementation of organisational policy and procedures.</p> <p>For clerics and religious, professional/pastoral supervision assists in the maintenance of boundaries of the pastoral relationship and enhances the quality of their ministry. A cleric/ religious' commitment to conscious and critical reflection on their ministry and ministry experiences is recognised as being important for the wellbeing of the cleric/religious, the people with whom they exercise ministry, the wider Church and the community.</p>
Working with children check	<p>Generic term used in the Standards to denote the statutory screening requirement for people who work or volunteer in child-related work. There is no single national framework setting out requirements for 'working with children' checks. Each state or territory in Australia has its own name, procedures and differences in scope regarding what this type of check entails. They are one part of a Church entity's recruitment, selection and screening processes.</p>