



Congregatio  
Annuntiationis O.S.B.

# Safeguarding Children & Vulnerable Adults

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Policy Document

## Foreword



Ministry to children and Vulnerable Adults is a central part of our pastoral mission in our monasteries. I welcome this new version of *Safeguarding Children & Vulnerable Adults*, which values and encourages their participation in our activities. It brings together in a user-friendly and accessible format the different elements of our policy and the guiding principles which underlie our Safeguarding practices. It enlarges upon our earlier policies and resources, includes new information, and updates both policy and guidance. **The contents of this publication apply to monasteries of our Congregation where**

**there are no existing national policies** and covers monks, nuns, staff and volunteers in our monasteries. It is available in electronic format as well as in hard copy, and it includes templates of the forms required, so that these can be made more readily available to our personnel as needed.

This document should be used in conjunction with statutory policies from each region. The monitoring and implementation of this policy remains a high priority for all of us in our Congregation.

Let us make it our fervent prayer that the Lord will bring this good work which we have begun to its fulfilment.

**Abbot Maksymilian R. Nawara**  
**OSB**  
June 2020



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## Policy Statement

The monks and nuns of the Congregation of the Annunciation are vowed to a celibate way of life and mutual respect among persons. The monks and nuns of our Congregation view all forms of abuse or exploitation by its members, employees or associated personnel to be morally reprehensible. Sexual abuse is a crime in civil and church law. In the spirit of the Rule of St Benedict, all guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (RB 53).

When considering sexual abuse or sexual exploitation, our Congregation maintains a primary concern for the Complainant's safety and well-being. Recognising that sexual abuse or sexual exploitation has tragic consequences for those who have been abused. The Congregation of the Annunciation adopts this policy which is **binding on all personnel where there are no existing policies** and will be reviewed by the Abbot President's Council annually. This policy can be used to augment local church and national policies by utilising sections of this policy, or the accompanying Guidance Document as needed.

Links to this policy are available on the Congregation website:

<http://www.annuntiatio.org/>.

**Contacts:** *(To be completed by each individual monastic community)*

**If you are concerned about abuse please contact:**

**Designated Person:**

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Email:

# Chapter 1

## Recruitment and Maintaining Safe Environments

### 1.0 Introduction

To live out this policy in our monasteries we are going to:

- Make our monasteries safe places for children and vulnerable adults
- Commit to identifying and reporting allegations of abuse
- Care for all those who come forward with allegations of abuse
- Deal appropriately with those accused of abuse
- Provide the knowledge, skills and support necessary to uphold this policy
- Communicate this policy effectively
- Be accountable in our governance and implementation of this policy

### 1.2 Safe Recruitment and Vetting Procedure

#### 1.2.2 Selection and Recruitment of Employees and Volunteers

It is important that all possible steps are taken to prevent unsuitable persons gaining access to children. The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that all members of the Congregation and those who minister with us and work with children and vulnerable adults are safe to do so. Safe formation of our members is very important and dealt with in a separate document (see Appendix 3). In monasteries of our Congregation those responsible for recruitment of employees and/or volunteers will first assess the level of contact with children and vulnerable adults and the potential risk involved in each post before recruiting employees or volunteers. In doing so they will follow the steps outlined in the Recruitment Checklist (See 1.3 below).

#### 1.2.3 Declaration Form

All those recruited as employees or volunteers in monasteries of our Congregation will be asked to complete the Declaration Form (See Resource Form 4).

#### 1.2.4 Questions

Establishing a fuller picture of the character and attitudes of an applicant is an important part of the safe recruitment process. During any formal interview, the opportunity will be taken to assess the applicant's values, motivations, abilities, experience and suitability.

#### 1.2.5 Vetting

Police vetting procedures of the state should be utilised (where available) for all employees and long-term volunteers. All monks will undergo re vetting at appropriate intervals, and all applicants to the noviciate will be required to have completed Police Vetting (where available) (See Appendix 3).

### **1.2.6 Staff Formation**

#### *Training in best practice*

All Monks, staff and volunteers shall be given comprehensive training in safe and best practice in working with children, young people and vulnerable adults. This training will include, at the earliest possible stage, the provision of clear information about how to respond if concerns about safeguarding arise.

All Monks, staff and volunteers shall be provided with the name and contact details of the relevant DP(s) (Designated Person(s)) and shall be made aware of the procedures for reporting suspicions or allegations of abuse. They shall be made aware of the commitment of our Congregation's procedures to act in accordance with the principle that the welfare of children is always the paramount consideration.

### **1.2.7 Confidentiality**

As with all personnel records, information obtained through the recruitment process is kept confidential.

## **1.3 Recruitment Checklist**

- Step 1:* Identify the likely contact with children / vulnerable adults
- Step 2:* Define the Role
- Step 3:* Create a job description
- Step 4:* Consider selection criteria
- Step 5:* Application Form or CV requested
- Step 6:* Interview
- Step 7:* References sought
- Step 8:* Declaration form completed
- Step 9:* Police Vetting completed
- Step 10:* Contract of employment
- Step 11:* Induction

## **1.4 Code of Behaviour**

### **1.4.1 It is important that all monks, nuns, employees, volunteers and others in contact with children and vulnerable adults will:**

- treat all children and vulnerable adults with respect;
- provide an example of good conduct you wish others to follow;
- operate within the principles, guidance and any specific procedures provided;
- challenge and report potentially abusive behaviour;

- develop a culture where children and vulnerable adults can talk about their contacts with staff and others openly;
- respect boundaries and help others develop a sense of their rights, as well as helping them to know what they can do if they feel that there is a problem;
- remain visible to others when working with children and vulnerable adults, whenever possible.

**1.4.2 In general, it is inappropriate to:**

- spend excessive time alone with children or vulnerable adults away from others;
- take children or vulnerable adults to your own room/home, or into the monastic enclosure, especially where they will be alone with you (See guidance on one-to-one contact to vulnerable adults – yet to be written).

**1.4.3 Monks, nuns, employees, volunteers and others must never:**

- hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children or vulnerable adults;
- develop sexual relationships with children or vulnerable adults;
- develop relationships with children or vulnerable adults which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive;
- act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child or vulnerable adult at risk of abuse;
- In the case of vulnerable adults, never seek financial profit inappropriately from pastoral engagement.

**1.4.4 Monks, nuns, employees, volunteers and others must avoid actions or behaviour that could be construed as poor practice or potentially abusive. For example, they should never:**

- use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive;
- behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative;
- have a child/children or vulnerable adults with whom they are working to stay overnight away from the monastery unsupervised;
- sleep in the same room or bed as a child/vulnerable adult with whom they are working;
- do things for children/vulnerable adults of a personal nature that they can do for themselves; (See *Intimate Care Policy, Appendix 9*)
- condone, or participate in, behaviour of children/vulnerable people which is illegal, unsafe or abusive;
- act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade;
- discriminate against, show different treatment, or favour particular children to the exclusion of others.

## **1.5 Operating Safe Activities**

If the monastic community operates a school or activities for children, extra policies are required. The school/activities policies in this area is included in *Appendix 8, 9, 10, 11*. These activities should include a risk assessment and parental consent for each activity. Any other body accessing and operating activities for children in a monastery of our Congregation must have its own policies and the monastery must be satisfied that these are in place before agreeing to their presence.

## **1.6 Guidelines for the use of Information Technology**

The Congregation of the Annunciation is committed to best practice in this area and each monastery operates an *Information & Communications Technology (ICT) Policy*. A sample policy can be found in *Appendix 6*.



## Chapter 2

### Procedures for Responding to Abuse

## 2.1 Allegations and Suspicions

### 2.1.1 An Allegation

- a) All allegations or suspicions/concerns that suggest a child or vulnerable adult is being or may have been harmed should be notified to the local Superior and the DP (Designated Person). The Local Superior has the obligation to inform without delay the Abbot President and the Congregational Safeguarding Officer. Where a member has notice of, or believes that a child or vulnerable adult has been harmed or abused, this must be reported. The DP will report immediately to the Statutory Authorities, as required by the law of each jurisdiction. If the concern relates to a child in a school, the Board of Management of the school will also be informed.
- b) Following the conclusion of any statutory investigations, the Superior/DP will conduct initial inquiries which may include:
  - an interview with the person making the allegation (*See Appendix 2*);
  - an interview with the person against whom the allegation is being made;
  - an interview with other knowledgeable persons.
- c) The Local Superior will seek appropriate advice from the Congregational Safeguarding Officer and other knowledgeable persons in the area of safeguarding available to them.
- d) All allegations of abuse of a minor or vulnerable person will be responded to promptly. Based upon the initial inquiries the Superior will take appropriate action:
  - The person against whom the allegation has been made may be required to take immediate leave from any assignments that involve contact with minors/vulnerable persons;
  - All the requirements of civil law will be complied with;
  - The Complainant and the complainant's family will be attended to with compassion and assisted in obtaining counselling and support.

## **2.2 Contacts (To be completed by each individual monastic community)**

### **2.2.1 Services**

#### ***Social Services***

Contact details

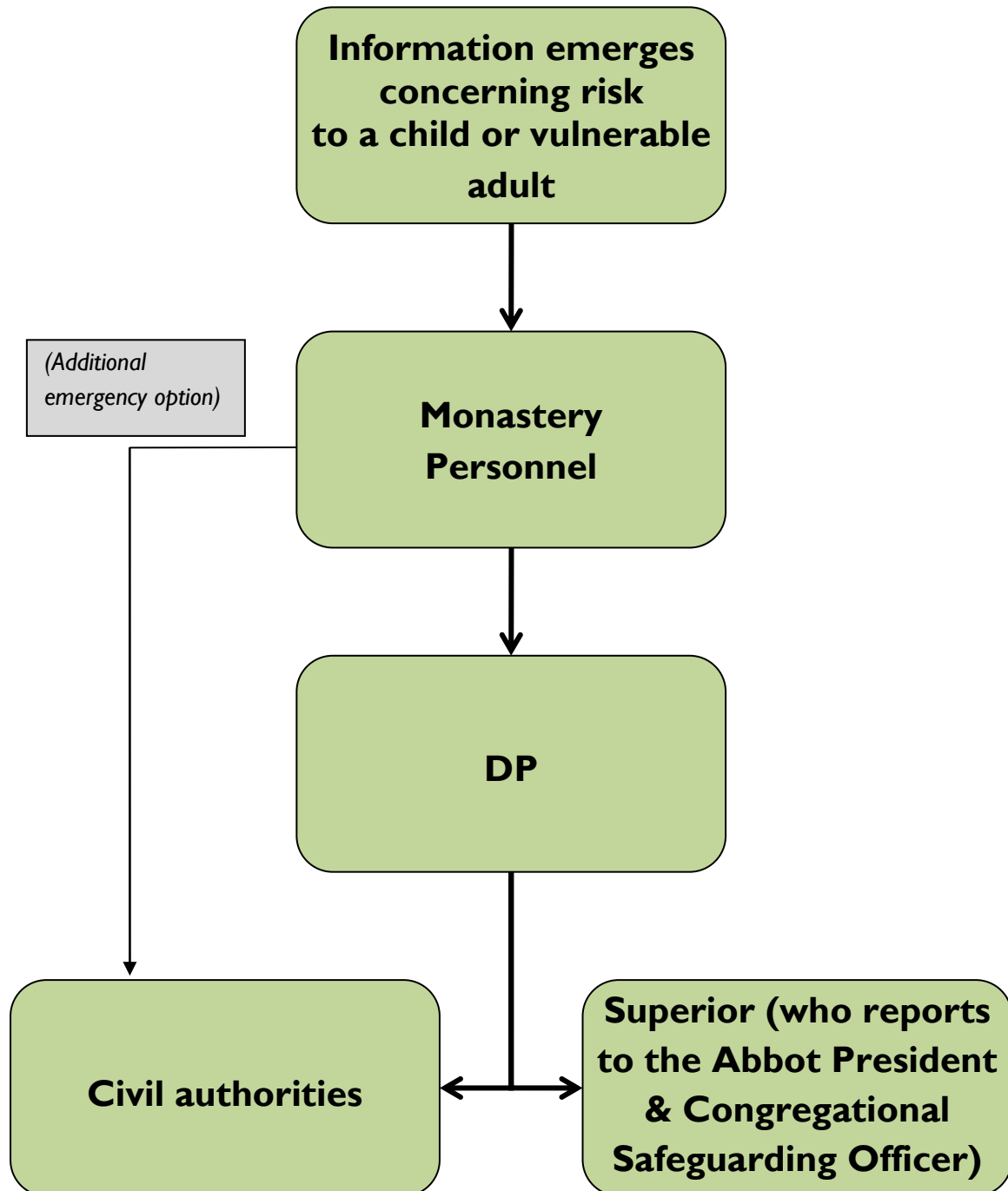
#### ***Police***

Contact details

#### ***Counselling and Support Services***

Contact details

### 2.3 Reporting Procedure



## 2.4 Responding to an Allegation

If a child or vulnerable adult begins to tell you about abuse it is important that you:

### 2.4.1 Do

- stay calm;
- listen carefully and take them seriously;
- ask questions for clarification only if you are unclear what they are saying;
- allow them to continue at their own pace;
- reassure them that, in disclosing the abuse, they have done the right thing;
- tell them they are not to blame for the abuse;
- let them know you will do what you can to help;
- report the disclosure to the DP immediately (or if the disclosure in any way involves one of the DPs, then report the disclosure to another DP or seek advice from the Monastic Superior).

**2.4.2** As soon as possible, write down everything that you were told, using their own words to describe the abuse. Sign and date this record and pass it onto the DP.

### 2.4.3 Do not:

- dismiss the concerns;
- panic;
- probe for more information/ask other questions;
- 'promise not to tell anyone' or say 'you'll keep it a secret';
- make negative comments about the accused person;
- make assumptions or speculate;
- disclose details of the allegation to anyone else – even if the allegations involve them in any way.

**2.4.4** Find an opportunity to explain that it is likely that this information will need to be shared with others and at the end of the discussion tell them what you plan to do next and with whom this information will be shared.

**2.4.5 Remember:** It is important that everyone in the organisation is aware that the person who first encounters a case of alleged or suspected abuse is not responsible for deciding whether or not abuse has occurred. That is a task for the professional agencies following a referral to them of the concerns.

## 2.5 Guidance on the Seal of Confession

### 2.5.1 The Sacramental Seal

All suspicions, concerns and allegations of child abuse must be reported to the statutory authorities through the reporting procedure outlined in this policy. Canon law requires the maintenance of trust in the Sacrament of Reconciliation guaranteeing absolute confidentiality, allowing for no exceptions. This is known as the Seal of Confession and guarantees to the penitent that anything revealed to the confessor will not be divulged to anyone else.

This is outlined in Canon 983, as shown below:

*The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent in words or in any manner and for any reason.*

### 2.5.2 Definition of Confession

Canon law provides a clear definition of what is deemed to be appropriate with regards to the hearing of Confession. This should be used as the definition to clarify when Confession has taken place:

Canon 964 §1: *The proper place to hear sacramental Confessions is a church or oratory;*  
§2: *The Conference of Bishops is to establish norms regarding the confessional; it is to take care, however, that there are always confessionals with a fixed grate between the penitent and the confessor in an open place, so that the faithful who wish to can use them freely;*  
§3: *Confessions are not to be heard outside a confessional without a just cause.*

### 2.5.3 Procedures for a penitent who discloses abuse during Confession

If a penitent discloses abuse during Confession, the confessor should:

In the case of an abused penitent who is a child:

- a) Sensitively reassure the child or young person that they were right to tell you;
- b) Remind them that whatever is disclosed in Confession will not be repeated outside the confessional by the confessor;
- c) The confessor should encourage the child or young person to disclose the abuse to an adult they trust (e.g. a relative, teacher, friend) and to have that person report the abuse;
- d) If the penitent expresses a wish to discuss this issue outside the confessional, make it clear to them that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed regarding issues of child abuse once outside the confessional. The confessor should then follow the procedures outlined in this policy for reporting abuse above 2.1.

In the case of an abused penitent:

- a) Remind the penitent that whatever is disclosed in Confession will not be repeated outside of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by the confessor;
- b) Advise them of the importance of contacting the statutory authorities, who deal with these issues;
- c) If the penitent expresses a wish to discuss this issue outside the confessional, make it clear to them that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed regarding issues of child abuse once outside the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The confessor should then follow the procedures outlined in this policy 2.1.

In the case of an abusing penitent:

- a) Remind the penitent that whatever is disclosed in Confession will not be repeated outside of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by the confessor;
- b) Strongly advise them to seek professional help (e.g. counselling, consultation with their GP) and to go to the statutory authorities;
- c) If the penitent expresses a wish to discuss this issue outside the confessional, make it clear to them that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed regarding issues of child abuse once outside the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The confessor should then follow the procedures outlined in this policy 2.1.

#### **2.5.4 Safeguarding Children during the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

When children attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation, all efforts should be made to provide a safe and open environment, which maintains the sacramental seal.

## Chapter 3

### Supporting the Complainant

#### 3.1. Pastoral Response to the Complainant

##### 3.1.1 Actions taken

- a) Anyone who may have been abused or exploited is encouraged to contact either the local Superior or those designated by the monastery as a DP.
- b) When an allegation is received the Complainant is invited to tell his/her story, not only to ascertain the facts, but also to establish and evaluate the Complainant's needs.
- c) When one of the monastery's employees receives an allegation from a Complainant, the employee immediately communicates the information received to the DP.
- d) After appropriate consultation, the Superior normally encourages the Complainant to seek counselling and support. In exceptional circumstances other supports may be provided.

##### 3.1.2 Support to be offered:

- An independent person is made available to walk the journey with them;
- Pastoral care and support is provided to them;
- Counselling is offered.

## Chapter 4

### Care and Management of the Respondent

#### 4.1.1 Intervention with the Respondent

- a) The Superior, with the DP, will inform the Respondent of the allegation (if the statutory authorities permit), requesting that he/she choose someone as his/her Advisor and inform the Superior who this person is. The Respondent will be advised that he/she may not make contact with the person bringing the allegation or with any person connected to him or her.
- b) The Superior may seek professional assistance at any stage during the inquiry. If there is a semblance of truth to the allegation, the Superior, in consultation with others, decides whether or not to place restrictions on the Respondent in respect of his/her present duties.
- c) Following the civil investigation a church process (preliminary canonical investigation) takes place.
- d) After the conclusion of the church process, if there is a case to answer, the Superior may take the following steps:
  - Have them live at the monastery under a supervised regime;
  - Find some appropriate work or vocational retraining for them which does not involve contact with children;
  - the Respondent may agree to receive professional treatment;
  - When treatment has been completed, the Superior, in consultation with treatment professionals and others, establishes an aftercare programme.
- e) On completion of the recommended treatment and the aftercare programme, and on receipt of a positive evaluation, the Superior, after appropriate consultation, will consider if this monk or nun can minister on behalf of the Congregation.
- f) If at any time the Superior determines that the monk or nun cannot continue in monastic life, he will seek to have them leave the monastery voluntarily. If they do not leave voluntarily, the Superior may initiate a canonical process for dismissal.



## Chapter 5

### Training and Support

#### **5.0 Training and Education**

##### **5.1 Introduction**

The Congregation of the Annunciation is committed to best practice in safeguarding children. It is understood that everyone in the Church who comes into contact with children or vulnerable adults has a role to play in their protection. Training provides individuals with knowledge and skills in safeguarding and the confidence to perform their roles. A training session also provides a forum where individuals are able to seek clarification on a range of issues.

All personnel who minister on behalf of the congregation must take part in the training programme provided by the Congregation, or a similar programme provided by the safeguarding authorities of their region.

## Chapter 6 Communication

### 6.1 Communications Policy

#### 6.2.1 Introduction

Monasteries of our Congregation display Safeguarding Notices in prominent places including the main entrance to the school, the monastery reception, the monastery guesthouse and the church porch. The Notice is a statement of the Safeguarding Policy and contains contact details for:

- The DP
- The local Social Services
- The Police
- Support services

This information is also displayed on the monastery (and school) websites. The websites also provide access to the monastery (and school) policies in this area. This includes the procedure for reporting child protection concerns and information on support services.

#### 6.1.3 The Congregation should communicate its safeguarding message through the following:

- All students in schools belonging to our Congregation are aware of the support services which are available to those who have suffered abuse.
- An age-appropriate leaflet summarising the main elements of this policy is made available to students in our schools.
- All Safeguarding Notices displayed in prominent locations contain information and guidance about where and how to get advice and support.
- The DP will provide information about where and how to get specific help and advice, whether the abused person is a child or an adult and whether the abuse is current or historical.
- Information on how to manage allegation for monks, nuns and front line reception staff.

## Chapter 7 Compliance

### 7.0 Accountability and governance

**A safeguarding committee will be formed to oversee the implementation of these policies and they will perform this task by:**

**7.1** Ensuring that all of our policies, procedures and codes of conduct are kept up to date.

**7.2** To this end the following list has been compiled to facilitate implementation and monitoring of our safeguarding standards:

- Appropriate resources are in place for the implementation of the Safeguarding policy.
- Each monastery conducts an annual review of the implementation of its policy and procedures and updates any changes in legislation and guidance.
- An annual report on the implementation of the policy and any allegations received should be forwarded to the Abbot President.
- A record is kept of training attended by our Safeguarding Officers.
- Personnel are invited to give their views on measures contained in our policy and procedures.
- All incidents, allegations and suspicions of abuse are recorded and stored securely, in line with data protection legislation in each jurisdiction and should be reviewed by the Superior annually.
- The safeguarding practices are reviewed by the Canonical Visitors during each Canonical Visitation.