



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Practice Guidance: Safeguarding in Religious Communities

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Preface

This guidance adopts a 'One Church' approach, which means that the Religious Communities come under the House of Bishops safeguarding policies and practice guidance. As part of this approach, it promotes Religious Communities to make links with the 'host' diocese in respect of safeguarding training and support.

The House of Bishops commends this practice guidance for use by Religious Communities, Dioceses and the National Church Institutions. Failure to implement and adhere to this practice guidance may invalidate your insurance.

I hope you find this helpful.

Yours in Christ's fellowship,

+ *Paul*

Bishop Paul Butler
Bishop of Durham

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1. Introduction and national approach

1.1. The Church of England has approved the following safeguarding policies¹

- *Promoting a Safe Church* (safeguarding policy for adults) 2006
- *Responding to Domestic Abuse* (guidelines for those with pastoral responsibility) 2006
- *Protecting All God's Children* (safeguarding policy for children and young people, 4th edition) 2010
- *Responding Well to those who have been sexually abused* 2011
- *Safeguarding Guidelines relating to Safer Recruitment* 2015

The *Safeguarding Guidelines relating to Safer Recruitment* includes guidance on the use of criminal records checks obtained through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and the roles which are eligible for the checks.

- 1.2. These policies apply to all parts of the church for example, Dioceses, Cathedrals, Parishes, both internally within the organisations themselves, and externally in their pastoral work. The House of Bishops has also approved safeguarding practice guidance statements which can be found on the same website as the policies.
- 1.3. This practice guidance will apply to those Religious Communities registered with the Advisory Council on the Relations of Bishops & Religious Communities (commonly called 'The Advisory Council') but would be open to other communities to adopt if they wished. There are two types of Religious Communities which the Council is able to register.
- 1.4. The **Recognised** communities are those in which the members make vows or promises, share in a common life and live together, and have a Rule and Constitutions which provide for the ordering of their life.
- 1.5. The **Acknowledged** communities vary in their practice and lifestyle. In most cases the members are dispersed. In some communities, all the members are single, with a vow of celibacy, whilst in others members may be single or married. Some members of what is otherwise a dispersed community may have a shared life in one place. This fluidity and variety is encouraged in order to promote growth in community life in the Church.

2. Applying the same approach to Religious Communities

- 2.1. A 'One Church' safeguarding approach. The same safeguarding policies and practice guidance of the Church of England will apply across the whole Church of England including Religious Communities.
- 2.2. Safeguarding applies:
- 2.2.1. Internally (to relationships between individuals (religious and lay) in the Religious Community) and,
- 2.2.2. externally (when ministering to religious or lay outside the Religious Community).
- 2.3. Adopting a local safeguarding policy. Each Religious Communities must adopt a safeguarding policy.
- 2.4. Appointing a designated safeguarding person. Each Religious Communities must appoint a Designated Safeguarding Person.

¹ The Church of England safeguarding policies can be found [here](#)

- 2.5. Local access to safeguarding advice. Each Religious Community must seek advice from the safeguarding adviser for the Diocese, in which the house resides².
- 2.6. Training for the community. Those that require training in the local Religious Community must attend safeguarding training organised by the local Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser³.
- 2.7. Ensuring compliance with the community's insurance policy. Failure to apply safeguarding guidance could invalidate the community's insurance.

3. A 'One Church' safeguarding approach

- 3.1. While recognising the diversity of Religious Communities and their unique contribution, a one church approach requires that the same policies, standards and practices apply across the whole of the Church of England;
- 3.2. Ensures expectations are clear for those who worship and practice inside and outside Religious Communities, and;
- 3.3. Seeks to get things right; but when things do go wrong, they are addressed and resolved.

4. Safeguarding applies internally and externally to the Religious Community

- 4.1. Some might suggest that safeguarding is only relevant in external pastoral work and does not apply to the internal life of the community. However exploitation and abuse is most likely when vulnerability meets power. This can happen both within and outside the community. Some recent key findings from the National Crime Agency research⁴ into abuse in institutional settings are set out here. While the research applies to children and mainly relates to sexual abuse, in many cases the comments made could also apply to adults:

- 1) "Children [*and adults experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect*] in institutional settings are not only at risk from adults who are inclined to abuse them; but also from adults who either fail to notice abuse or, if they do, fail to report it.
- 2) Where institutions put their own interests ahead of those of the children [*and adults experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect*] who engage with them, abusive behaviours are likely to become normalised, potentially leading to abuse.
- 3) The culture within an institution has a strong influence on the degree to which abuse might occur within it. Poor leadership, closed structures, ineffective policies and procedures together with the discouragement of reporting, facilitates a malign climate which colludes with those inclined to abuse children [*and adults experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect*].
- 4) Where institutions are held in high regard and respected by the communities they serve, positional grooming can be perpetuated, whereby offenders conduct social or environmental grooming and mask their actions by virtue of their formal positions within an organisation.

² Unless there have been special arrangements made. For example the Society of St Francis and the Community of St Francis have a Bishop Protector (the Bishop of Chelmsford) who provides all safeguarding support.

³ The provision and cost of training will be a matter of local discussion and determination.

⁴ Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) [Thematic Assessment The Foundations of Abuse: A thematic assessment of the risk of child sexual abuse by adults in institutions](#)

5) Potential risks from those with *abusive* interest in children [*and adults experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect*] who pursue work in institutions can be mitigated by vigilant and effective leadership and management.

6) Intense loyalty and conformity of workers to the mission, norms and values of an institution can inhibit them from reporting concerns.

7) The historic nature of many cases currently exercising media attention, together with developments in safeguarding, might give a false perception that this type of offending can no longer occur. Offenders continue to exploit systemic vulnerabilities where they exist.”

4.2. Abuse that might apply in an institutional setting includes, physical, sexual, emotional (including harassment, bullying and discrimination), financial / legal, neglect, domestic violence and abuse and spiritual abuse – see the full range of abuse in the church policies⁵.

5. Adopting a local Safeguarding Policy and managing safeguarding issues

5.1. Each Religious Community must adopt a safeguarding policy that includes children and adults⁶.

5.2. The safeguarding policy could be one that is adapted from the Religious Community, from the local Diocese or a model policy, based on the Church of England safeguarding policies, shown at appendix 1.

5.3. The safeguarding policy should be readily accessible to those inside and outside the community – religious and lay.

5.4. The safeguarding policy must always indicate how safeguarding issues or complaints will be handled in line with the Church of England safeguarding policies and practice advice. It must indicate who the designated safeguarding person (DSP) is. The role of the DSP is described below.

5.5. The leader of the Religious Community should ensure that the local safeguarding policy is reviewed at least every three years.

5.6. The individual who is in a leadership role in the Religious Community will take lead responsibility for managing safeguarding issues that involve the community in accordance with the Church of England’s safeguarding policies and practice guidance. They must always take advice from the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.⁷

⁵ Abuse of children [Protecting all God’s Children](#) page 11 For adults [Promoting a Safe Church](#) page 39

⁶ A child is a person under 18 years of age. An adult is a person aged 18 or over. The Care and Support Statutory Guidance issued under the Care Act 2014 (14.2) by the Department of Health replaces the previously used term ‘vulnerable adult’ with ‘adults experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect’. However the term vulnerable adult is retained by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in its Guide to eligibility for DBS checks and by the Church of England in its draft Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure. Clause 6 of The draft Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure act (which is not yet in force) defines a ‘vulnerable adult’ as a person aged 18 or over whose ability to protect himself or herself from violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, old age, emotional fragility or distress, or otherwise; and for that purpose, the reference to being impaired is to being temporarily or indefinitely impaired.

⁷ The role of the DSA is set out in [Protecting All God’s Children](#) page 59

(DSA) in matters relating to serious safeguarding situations⁸. They must also advise the episcopal visitor who is the normal court of appeal for the maintenance of the community's discipline about serious safeguarding situations.

6. Community governance and the appointment of a designated safeguarding person

- 6.1. It is the responsibility of the Leader of the Religious Community and the governing body to ensure safeguarding arrangements are in place, to monitor and action them. The Leader and the governing body have responsibility for dealing with complaints.
- 6.2. Each Religious Community must appoint a DSP. The DSP should not be the Leader of the Religious Community. The DSP could be a member of the community, a trustee or someone identified outside the community, maybe in discussion with the diocese, who could take up this role.
- 6.3. The DSP must be trained in basic safeguarding and be aware of the safeguarding policies, procedures and practice guidance of the Church of England.
- 6.4. The role of the DSP is to provide advice and support to all members of the community, leaders, guests and visitors. They must liaise with the local Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser about training and clarification over policy issues when they are not clear. The DSP does not have to be an expert in the area of safeguarding but takes day to day responsibility for safeguarding practice, awareness raising and training within the Religious Community. The DSP should be aware of the role of the episcopal visitor and their involvement in the maintenance of the community's discipline.
- 6.5. The Religious Community must ensure that there is a clear reporting arrangement between the DSP, leaders in the community and the episcopal visitor. In this way the community leaders, their governing body and the episcopal visitor can ensure compliance with safeguarding guidance. The Religious Community and its governing body must make sure that it has adequate insurance (see paragraph 8) to cover its activities and any claim that might arise. The governing body, including the episcopal visitor, should be aware of the need to report serious safeguarding situations to the Police, to the Local Authority Designated officer and to the DSA. Indeed, it is important to cultivate an environment that provides a clear and concise method of reporting any alleged safeguarding incidents and ensure that those that do report are treated with respect and their disclosures given proper consideration.
- 6.6. If communities are charities, there are specific duties in relation to safeguarding vulnerable groups that are imposed on the trustees. They must comply with relevant guidance from the Charity Commission and relevant charity legislation. Paragraph 7 of the Charity Commission's guidance "Reporting Serious Incidents – guidance for trustees"⁹ states:-
- 6.7. "Trustees of charities which work with vulnerable groups and children have a duty of care to their charity which will include taking the necessary steps to safeguard and take responsibility for those children and vulnerable adults. They must always act in their best interests and ensure that they take all reasonable steps to prevent any harm to them. So it is vital that they develop, implement and monitor effective safeguarding policies and procedures."

⁸ [Responding to serious safeguarding situations relating to church officers and other individuals](#)

⁹ Charity Commission Reporting [Serious Incidents - guidance for trustees](#)

6.8. The Charity Commission states that charities that work with vulnerable groups must put safeguards in place to protect vulnerable people from abuse and prevent abuse happening in the first place. For instance, by:-

- 6.8.1. Making trustees, staff and volunteers aware of what abuse is, how to recognise it and how to prevent it;
- 6.8.2. having a clear system of reporting concerns as soon as abuse is identified or suspected;
- 6.8.3. responding to abuse rapidly and carrying out investigations responsibly and where appropriate, reporting incidents to the police, social services and other agencies, including the Charity Commission;
- 6.8.4. preventing harm and abuse with a rigorous selection and interview process, (including any necessary checks to ensure that individuals who are trustees, staff, volunteers etc. are legally able to act in positions involving vulnerable beneficiaries); and
- 6.8.5. having a policy for safeguarding its vulnerable beneficiaries, which is kept under regular review and if an incident does occur making any necessary changes to policies, procedures and working practices to manage and minimise the risk of a further incident occurring.

6.9. Trustees have a duty to report any serious incidents to the Charity Commission¹⁰.

This is a wide duty and will include suspicions, allegations and incidents of abuse or mistreatment of vulnerable beneficiaries. Trustees have a duty to inform the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) of anyone unfit to work with children or vulnerable adults¹¹. The DSA will provide advice on approaching the DBS.

6.10. It is important to recognise that when an incident occurs and there are poor safeguarding standards at the charity concerned, this will damage public confidence and trust, not only in the relevant charity, but also in charities in general. This will be particularly the case if the trustees did not act responsibly and effectively when dealing with a case and could have, in fact, done more to prevent an incident occurring in the first place. Therefore, the Charity Commission considers safeguarding of critical importance. The Commission states this is why trustees of charities, particularly those which work with vulnerable beneficiaries, should take their duties seriously. Indeed, if trustees have failed to protect vulnerable beneficiaries to the best of their abilities and not carried out actions to minimise the risk of abuse, the Commission may regard this as misconduct and/or mismanagement in the administration of the charity.

7. Episcopal Visitor

7.1. Should a serious safeguarding incident occur the Community Leader should inform the Episcopal Visitor as this might well have a bearing on their next Visitation. It is not the role of the Episcopal Manager to manage safeguarding complaints but it is the role of the Episcopal Visitor to check that safeguarding policies and arrangements are in place when they visit.

¹⁰ See footnote 7 above

¹¹ This duty applies to those working in “regulated activity”, please see [Referrals to the DBS service](#)

8. Safeguarding Advice and training

- 8.1. Some Religious Communities have houses in a number of dioceses. Advice on safeguarding and the provision of training should be obtained from the DSA in the diocese where the need for advice, training or a serious situation arises. This is because The DSA will have knowledge and links with the local police and local safeguarding statutory agencies.
- 8.2. The DSA must always be informed about serious safeguarding situations and should be contacted for safeguarding advice. Situations when advice must be obtained are set out in the Practice Guidance *Responding to serious safeguarding situations relating to church officers*.¹²
- 8.3. The DSP must liaise with the DSA about the availability of Diocesan safeguarding training and plan training for the whole community.
- 8.4. The DSA, as part of their safeguarding role with Religious Communities should check with the DSP who requires training and ensure that they are trained and that the training is refreshed every three years. The DSA can also discuss with the DSP his/her own training requirements.
- 8.5. The appropriateness of training for community members who are inactive, frail or sick should be considered on a case by case basis.

9. Insurance

- 9.1. Failure to apply safeguarding policies, procedures and good practice guidance could invalidate the community's insurance should a claim arise.
- 9.2. Always check with the insurance company about its position in relation to Safeguarding insurance including the death or bodily injury to a third party.
- 9.3. Further advice can be found *Protecting All God's Children* paragraph 5.35.

¹² [Responding to serious safeguarding situations relating to church officers and other individuals](#)

APPENDIX 1

Suggested local model safeguarding Policy for a Religious Community

The following template example can be used as a model safeguarding policy. This template is not intended to be mandatory as it is recognised that a number of Religious Communities may already have their own policies or may choose to adopt the local safeguarding policy of the relevant Diocese. Nevertheless, this model can be regarded as an example of a suitable policy.

Name of Religious Community:

Charity Registration Number (where applicable):

Safeguarding Policy of the Church of England

Every person has a value and dignity which comes directly from the creation of male and female in God's own image and likeness. Christians see this potential as fulfilled by God's re-creation of us in Christ. Among other things this implies a duty to value all people as bearing the image of God and therefore to protect them from harm.

Statement of Safeguarding Principles

We are committed to:

- The care, nurture of, and respectful pastoral ministry with, all children, young people and all adults;
- The safeguarding and protection of all children, young people and all adults
- The establishing of safe, caring communities which provide a loving environment where victims of abuse can report or disclose abuse and where they can find support and best practice that contributes to the prevention of abuse

To this end:

- We will carefully select, support and train all those with any responsibility within the Church, in line with the principles of Safer Recruitment.
- We will respond without delay to every complaint made, that any adult, child or young person may have been harmed, cooperating with the police and local authority in any investigation.
- We will seek to offer informed pastoral care and support to anyone who has suffered abuse, developing with them an appropriate ministry that recognises the importance of understanding the needs of those who have been abused, including their feelings of alienation and/or isolation.
- We will seek to protect survivors of abuse from the possibility of further harm and abuse.
- We will seek to challenge any abuse of power, especially by anyone in a position of respect and responsibility, where they are trusted by others.
- We will seek to offer pastoral care and support, including supervision, and referral to the appropriate authorities, to any member of our church community known to have offended against a child, young person or adult who is vulnerable.

In all these principles we will follow legislation, guidance and recognised good practice.

The Church of England has approved the following safeguarding policies¹³

¹³ The Church of England safeguarding policies can be found [here](#)

- *Promoting a Safe Church* (safeguarding policy for adults, 2006)
- *Responding to Domestic Abuse* (guidelines for those with pastoral responsibility, 2006)
- *Protecting All God's Children* (safeguarding policy for children and young people, 4th edition, 2010)
- *Responding Well to those who have been sexually abused*, 2011
- *Safeguarding Guidelines relating to Safer Recruitment'*, 2015.

These policies apply to all parts of the church for example, Dioceses, Cathedrals, parishes and Religious Communities, both internally within the organisations themselves, and externally in their pastoral work.

They are characterised by the adoption of these policies locally and the appointment of a designated safeguarding person, being advised by the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and being engaged in safeguarding training on a regular basis.

Our Religious Community designated safeguarding person is:

Contact details:

Email:

Phone:

The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser is:

S/he may be contacted for advice:

Contact details:

Email:

Phone:

Our formal complaints policy¹⁴, bullying & harassment¹⁵ and whistleblowing policies¹⁶ (there is government guidance on whistleblowing¹⁷) can be found at

This safeguarding policy was adopted by (name governing body)	
It will next be reviewed in (year - three years' time)	
Signed:	
Name (Print):	Date:
On behalf of the governing body	

¹⁴ A handbook of Religious Life 5th Edition 2004 deals with this at page 67

¹⁵ The Church of England's bullying and harassment policy can be found [here](#)

¹⁶ Protecting All God's Children page 38

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing/overview>