



INSTITUTE OF THE RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PROCEDURES RELATING TO MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

**Approved by the Institute Leadership
Council Date 7th May, 2020
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MESSAGE FROM INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

In his letter of 2 February 2015, addressed to the Superiors of Institutes of Religious Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Pope Francis encouraged the Church, at all levels, “to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the protection of minors and vulnerable adults and to respond to their needs with fairness and mercy”.

Our Mission as Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary is “to know and love God, to make God known and loved, to proclaim that Jesus Christ has come in order that all may have life.” (*Constitutions* 7) In response to the Gospel and in the tradition of our founders, Père Jean Gailhac and Mère St. John Pelissier Cure, we are called to “place ourselves and our resources at the service of those who are most in need of justice, enabling the powerless, the deprived, the marginalized, the voiceless to work effectively for their own development and liberation.” (RSHM Mission Statement). Believing that children and vulnerable adults have a fundamental right to be respected, nurtured, and safeguarded by all, we are resolutely committed to ensuring that all the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary and associated people value, nurture and safeguard them and defend their rights.

In accordance with our mission, we have developed a formal document on an Institute level that reaffirms our belief that any form of abuse against minors or vulnerable adults is unacceptable. The document sets forth clear procedures for preventing and reporting such abuse.

This Institute Safeguarding Policy applies to all the Sisters of the Institute, employees, trustees, staff, collaborators, volunteers, and others who are engaged in any way with the work of the Institute. Area Leadership Teams and directors of ministries, programs, projects,

and services are to ensure that all personnel under their jurisdiction are aware of and in compliance with it.

This Policy is the “umbrella” that covers any Area of the Institute that doesn’t have one and any Area that does, but whose policy might not include all the elements of the Institute one. Each Area of the Institute or ministry that already has a safeguarding policy must confirm that its policy aligns with this Institute Policy. Although adaptations to local and national realities and laws may be necessary, these adaptations cannot be at odds with this Institute Policy.

In the case of abuse or suspected abuse, an immediate and professional response, in accord with this Policy and the legislation of the country and internationally, is mandatory.

The Institute Leadership Council, in collaboration with Area Leaders, will lead and support effective implementation of this Policy.

We thank you for your commitment to ensuring that the rights of every minor and vulnerable adult are respected, promoted and defended.

Margaret Fielding
Institute Leader

Maria Aparecida Moreira
Institute Councillor

Ana Luísa Pinto
Institute Councillor

Sipiwe Phiri
Institute Councillor

INSTITUTE OF THE RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY

SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PROCEDURES RELATING TO MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

PREAMBLE

1. The Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM), an international apostolic institute of women religious, has as its mission “to know and love God, to make God known and loved, to proclaim that Jesus Christ has come in order that all may have life.” (*Constitutions* 7) In fidelity to the Gospel and in the tradition of our founders, Père Jean Gailhac and Mère St. John Pelissier Cure, we affirm our profound respect for and our commitment to upholding the human rights of all people.

2. Our RSHM Mission Statement calls us “to place ourselves and our resources at the service of those who are most in need of justice, enabling the powerless, the deprived, the marginalized, the voiceless to work effectively for their own development and liberation.”

3. The *Charter of the United Nations* (1945) and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), affirm the principle that human beings shall enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms. *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* ([UNCRC](#)) dictates that “in all actions concerning children. . . the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.” (General Assembly Resolution 44/25 November 20, 1989)

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol* (2006) and the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) reaffirm that all persons must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination.

4. Abuse of any person, but most especially of a child or vulnerable adult, is abhorrent and contrary to the mission of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. Therefore, in accordance with our mission, these guidelines enhance our commitment to protect minors and vulnerable adults from any form of abuse in all programs, activities and structures of our Institute.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

5. This Policy of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary has, as its primary goal, the welfare, safety and health of all persons. In particular, it commits us to protect from harm and promote the fundamental rights and freedoms of all minors and vulnerable adults with whom the Institute comes into contact and, in the case of children, to promote their development in ways appropriate to their gender, age and culture.

6. This Policy applies to all Sisters, and all persons associated with the Institute, including but not limited to employees, trustees, collaborators, volunteers, and others who are engaged in any way with the work of the Institute.

7. The Policy details responsibilities related to prevention, reporting, and responding to safeguarding concerns or allegations.

8. This Policy is also intended as a guideline for dealing responsibly and pastorally with both the alleged victim and the person against whom an allegation has been made.

9. This Policy serves also as an appropriate guideline, in handling situations where the accused is deceased or no longer a member of or in association with the Institute, if an allegation is made about conduct during the time of membership or association with the Institute.

POLICY STATEMENT

10. The Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Immaculate Virgin, in accord with Gospel values and the Mission of the Institute, is committed to protecting and promoting the dignity, wellbeing and fundamental human rights of all persons, especially minors and vulnerable adults.

11. For this, we ensure that no person who comes into contact with the Institute should ever face abuse because of the conduct of our Sisters or associated people.

12. We have established procedures that are aimed at ensuring that the Institute is doing its best to prevent, report, and respond to any concerns or allegations of abuse.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, the following terms apply:

13. “Child” or “minor” means any person under the age of 18, or who is considered by law to be the equivalent of a minor.

14. “Vulnerable person” means any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, even occasionally, limits the individual’s ability to understand or to resist the offence.

15. “Harm” means any infringement of an individual’s rights—physical, sexual, psychological, emotional.

16. Types of abuse:

- Physical abuse: Includes but is not limited to hitting, pushing, kicking; also unlawful or inappropriate restraint or isolation.
- Psychological or emotional abuse: Includes but is not limited to humiliating and degrading treatment such as constant criticism, belittling, rejection, bullying, threats. It is usually a component of other types of abuse though it may also occur alone.
- Sexual abuse: Unwanted sexual activity or behaviour that occurs without understanding or consent. Sexual abuse can also occur without direct physical contact as in the case of the production, exhibition, possession or distribution, including by electronic means, of child pornography, as well as by the recruitment of or inducement of a minor or a vulnerable person to participate in pornographic exhibitions.
- Neglect: Includes failure to meet basic needs such as food, warmth, medical care or protection from danger.
- Discriminatory: harassment or hate crimes or abuse based on an individual's race, gender, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation.

17. "Institute", and "RSHM", refer to the Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary.

18. "Associated People" and "people associated with" refer to, among others, employees, trustees, collaborators, volunteers, and others who are engaged in any way with the work of the Institute.

PREVENTION

19. Responsibilities of Institute and Area Leadership:

- Ensure that all Sisters and people associated with RSHM know, understand, and commit to their responsibilities within this policy;
- Ensure that risks of abuse are carefully considered and mitigated in the organization and carrying out of all ministries and projects, and in the use of communications materials;
- Apply stringent safeguarding procedures in the acceptance of new members into the Institute and in the recruiting and hiring of associated people;
- Ensure that all Sisters and people associated with the Institute receive training on safeguarding at a level that is appropriate to their role within the organization;
- Respond to reports of safeguarding concerns in accordance with RSHM policy, the Church's legislation and civil laws, and with compassion for all concerned.

20. Responsibilities of Sisters and associated people while the individual is engaged with work or visits related to the Institute:

- Support and uphold the Institute's Safeguarding Policy and all the efforts it makes to protect children from any form of harm;

- Sign and abide by the Code of Conduct, including the intent of the Code, for actions or situations that may not be explicitly delineated;
- Report any concern or suspicion regarding Safeguarding violations by any of the Institute's Sisters or associated people;
- Carry out all assigned safeguarding responsibilities.

21. Training in safeguarding

In order to raise awareness about the seriousness, the risks of abuse and the safeguarding procedures, all the sisters and persons associated with the RSHM Institute commit themselves to participate, on a regular basis, in the updating sessions in safeguarding.

REPORTING

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22. The Institute will ensure that safe, appropriate, and accessible means of reporting safeguarding concerns are available to all Sisters, associated people and the communities with whom they work. Any Sister or associated person reporting concerns or complaints through formal channels will be protected by the Institute's policies.

Structure

23. At all levels of the Institute's administration, a Designated Liaison Person is appointed to whom all concerns or allegations should be reported.

24. At all levels of the Institute's administration, a Safeguarding Committee is established to assist the Leaders of the respective levels in their responsibility to take effective and proper actions related to safeguarding concerns and preventions.

Process

25. Person making a report:

- Any concern should be immediately reported and care taken to ensure that the child or vulnerable adult is safe.
- Report the concern to the person responsible in the ministry or community situation or directly to the Designated Liaison Person of the Area. If for some reason this is not possible or desirable, report to the Area Leader or Councilor.
- If a report is made to the person responsible in the ministry/community situation, that individual should immediately report it to the Designated Liaison Person.
- While or after making the report, the concerned individual, or the person responsible in the ministry/community situation, should not discuss it with others or pursue an independent investigation.

26. The Designated Liaison Person will manage the concern or incident according to the Area's locally adapted reporting procedures and civil law:

- Inform the Area Leader;

- Complete the formal report (See Appendix II-Notification Form);
- Send the formal report to the Institute Safeguarding Committee;
- Ensure that the accused is informed of the allegations and is aware of procedures that will follow;
- Report to civil and church authorities as appropriate;
- Follow up the investigation and record actions taken;

27. The Institute Safeguarding Committee will:

- Receive the report from the Area Designated Liaison Person.
- Inform the Institute Leadership Council.
- Determine, with the Institute Leadership Council, whether further action or support is needed in managing the allegation, making a decision, or determining appropriate disciplinary action.
- Maintain in the Institute's Generalate House a record of the process and actions.

28. Support for the child or vulnerable adult:

- The alleged victim and/or family will be offered pastoral, emotional or therapeutic support, regardless of the credibility or outcome of the allegation.
- According to Article 16 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, all children have a right to privacy. However, the Convention also states that children should be protected from abuse and that their best interests should be prioritized when making decisions that affect them. This means that, if children are at risk of harm, it is in their best interests for an adult to pursue reporting procedures, even without the child's consent.

29. Support for the accused Sister or associated person:

- The individual will be assisted in receiving any support s/he needs.
- The individual will be treated fairly and honestly, kept informed of the progress of the investigation, the outcome and any consequences.
- During the time of investigation, the accused person will not be permitted to engage in ministry or work related to the Institute.
- If the allegation is determined to be false, the individual may be allowed to return to ministry or work.

30. Confidentiality will be maintained at all stages of the process of dealing with safeguarding concerns throughout the Institute. All information will be shared on a strictly need-to-know basis and will be kept secure at all times.

HISTORIC ALLEGATIONS

31. Sometimes a Safeguarding complaint may be reported much later than when the concern took place. The Institute will always take such a complaint very seriously and will investigate every case according to the evidence provided. The Institute will act in a way that is sensitive and fair to the complainant, to witnesses, and the subject of the

complaint, but will always act in the best interests of the child / vulnerable adult, and the care and wellbeing of the survivor and victim.

BREACH OF THE SAFEGUARDING POLICY

32. All Sisters and people associated with the Institute have a responsibility to know and comply with this Safeguarding Policy, with regard to both the Code of Conduct and the responsibility to report concerns.

33. Failure to comply with this policy and expectations may lead to serious disciplinary action, including dismissal from active ministry or from the Institute, or termination of employment, or other forms of contract with the Institute. In addition, the Institute will report the situation to the relevant civil and ecclesiastical authorities as appropriate.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY

34. The Policy will be communicated widely throughout the Institute, its communities and ministries, and to any external collaborators. The Institute Leadership Council is ultimately accountable for this Policy and has to ensure that it is adequately implemented at all levels of the Institute.

This policy, as approved by the Institute Leadership Council on 08 December 2022, will be reviewed annually and regularly adjusted in accordance with the updated Church legislation and civil law.

Margaret Fielding
Institute Leader

Maria Aparecida Moreira
Institute Councilor

Ana Luísa Pinto
Institute Councilor

Sipiwe Phiri
Institute Councilor

Reviewed February 2023

Appendix I

INSTITUTE OF THE RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY

CODE OF CONDUCT REGARDING SAFEGUARDING

I, _____, in my role of (sister, employee etc.: please specify) _____ within the (specific / local area, ministry, etc.: please indicate) _____ of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary in (country, place) _____, agree that I will:

1. Treat all children and vulnerable adults with respect regardless of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, disability, birth or other status.
2. Not subject any child or vulnerable adult to physical, emotional, or psychological abuse, or neglect through language or behavior that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate.
3. Not engage any child or vulnerable adult in any form of sexual activity or acts, including paying for sexual services or acts.
4. Wherever possible, ensure that another adult is present when working or dealing in the proximity of children or vulnerable adults.
5. Not invite unaccompanied children or vulnerable adults into my home or place of residence, unless they are at immediate risk of injury or in physical danger.
6. Not use any computers, mobile phones, or video and digital cameras to exploit or harass children or vulnerable adults, nor access child pornography through any medium.
7. Not engage in any commercially exploitative activities, including child labor or trafficking or offer or imply an offer of money, employment, goods, or services for any form of sexual activity.
8. Comply with the Institute Safeguarding Policy and civil and canonical law.
9. Immediately report concerns or allegations regarding safeguarding violations in accordance with appropriate procedures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have read and understood the Safeguarding Policy, procedures, and Code of Conduct outlined in the Policy. I agree with the principles and expectations contained therein and accept to implement this Safeguarding Policy while working or representing the Institute as a sister or associated person.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

Please return a scanned copy of this signed page to Safeguarding Designated Individual of your Area.

Appendix II

INSTITUTE OF THE RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY

SAFEGUARDING REPORTING FORM

Complete this form listing your concerns as soon as possible after the abuse is disclosed and the appropriate actions have been taken to ensure the immediate safety of the child or vulnerable adult. Please complete this form including as much information you know, without any further discussion or investigation on your part.

Your details

Full name	
Phone number	
Email address	
Postal address	
Date of concern or incident	

Whom are you concerned about? Fill in as much as you know without asking additional questions of the alleged victim.

Full name	
Gender	
Age at time of incident	
Place where incident occurred	
First Language	
Present location of alleged victim	
Contact information of alleged victim	

Describe your concerns: Write a brief factual description of what happened, including what was said, seen or reported or any specific information that supported your decision to make this report.

(continued)

Details of the person against whom the allegation is made:

Full name	
Gender	
Relationship to the alleged victim	
Position held in the congregation	

Details about any witness or third party involved, other than the alleged victim or accused:

Full name	
Phone contact	
Email Address	
Postal Address	

Immediate action(s) taken: In addition to ensuring the safety of the alleged victim, to whom have you reported this incident e.g. person responsible in work/community situation, Designated Individual, Area Leader, local authority (police)?

Next steps:

- Save this form in a secure manner and forward a copy to the Safeguarding Designated Individual in your Area.
- The Safeguarding Designated Individual should, in turn, forward a copy to the Institute Safeguarding Committee.
- Although prompt communication is necessary, please be aware that email is not necessarily a secure way to forward this information.