

# Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann

## GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

*Ad experimentum*



“With a fatherly and motherly heart, they reached out to the hearts of the “little ones”, accompanied them lovingly and formed in them the Christian spirit, so that they might fully realize themselves and be truly happy” (C 8)

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**Rome – 2025**



## PRESENTATION

*“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,  
to be holy and blameless before Him in love.”  
(Eph. 1,4)*

Dearest Sisters,

I am pleased to offer each of you, ad experimentum, the text of the ***Guidelines for Safeguarding Minors and Vulnerable Adults***, on the Solemnity of the **Immaculate Conception**.

Most Holy Trinity bestowed the gift of the Immaculate Conception to Sts. Joachim and Ann, by making them creators, custodians, and educators of an immense treasure: the Virgin Mary. With their attitude of welcome, respect, and care, we wish to approach every human life, especially those marked by fragility and vulnerability.

Mary leads us to Jesus, who in order to reveal Himself chose the path of the Incarnation, that is, assuming our own flesh that bears the marks of fragility and vulnerability. By choosing this path, He invites us to embrace our own fragility and that of our brothers and sisters, for whom we are called to approach with respect, kindness, and authentic love. Vigilantly monitoring our every attitude and behaviour, we are also summoned to protect and never to abuse them, precisely according to the indications of these Guidelines, which become part of our Proper Law. They are an expression of our own Charism as well as of the path of the Church. Precisely at this time, strongly it calls us to be "*a shining example of virtue, integrity, and holiness.*" (*Vos estis lux mundi*, introduction).

I, therefore, invite you to receive this Document with joy and a sense of responsibility that reminds us of the evangelical, charismatic, and ecclesial values of our consecration and mission. It also provides us with important elements to understand and

concrete guidelines to implement to prevent abuse and know how to proceed if it occurs or has occurred. We earnestly desire to faithfully safeguard the legacy received from our Founders, who **“bestowed their loving care particularly on children abandoned to themselves, marginalised by ignorance and defenceless in the face of dangers”** (C 7).

May these **Guidelines** be made known to all the Sisters, to the Formees, and lay collaborators, in the ways deemed most appropriate by the Provincial /Delegate Superiors, for further evaluation. May the joy of serving the little ones and the poor grow in everyone, and also the awareness of the gravity of any disrespect toward any human being, especially toward any minor or vulnerable adult.

Each reality will subsequently draw up its own Protocol and Code of Conduct for the various works, taking into account local legislation and involving representatives of employees, parents, as well as experts in Canon Law and child protection.

In our own small way, each of us can contribute to creating a unified mentality of protection within the Institute, in fidelity to the Gospel that inspired our Founders: *“See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you, that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 18,10) (cfr. C 4). May the Immaculate Virgin Mary and our Holy Protectors support us on our journey to be holy and blameless before Him in love (cfr. Eph 1,4). With this desire and this prayer, I greet you all fraternally.

Rome, 08 December, 2025

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

*Sr. Francesca Sarcia*  
Superior General

## ECCLÉSIAL SOURCES

The key Magisterial Document that inspires and sheds light on these Guidelines for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults is: Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter issued «*Motu Proprio*» *Vox Estis Lux Mundi* (25<sup>th</sup> March 2023).

Among many other documents, we cite only a few, which we have chosen as reference sources. They are the following in chronological order:

2014 - Chirograph for the Institution of a Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

2015 – Statutes of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

2015 - Circular Letter regarding the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors addressed to the Episcopal Conferences and to the Superiors of ICL and SAL.

2016 - *Motu proprio* «*As a Loving Mother*»

2017 - Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

2018 - Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God

2018 - Address of the Holy Father to the Roman Curia

2019 - *Motu proprio* on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons

2019 – Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons for the Vicariate of the Vatican City

2022 – Audience for the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

2024 - Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

2024 - Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors - Annual Report on Church Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding, October 2024.

2025 – Message of the Holy Father Pope Francis to the Participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

## INTRODUCTION

*Our Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to be a shining example of virtue, integrity and holiness. All of us, in fact, are called to give concrete witness of faith in Christ in our lives and, in particular, in our relationship with others.*

*The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful. In order that these phenomena, in all their forms, never happen again, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church, so that personal sanctity and moral commitment can contribute to promoting the full credibility of the Gospel message and the effectiveness of the Church's mission<sup>1</sup>.*

We are grateful to God for the gift of Pope Francis, a shepherd after His own heart, and for all his initiatives regarding Safeguarding, which stand in continuity with the Magisterium of Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

In communion with the Church, we wish to respond faithfully to the needs of the present time regarding the *Protection of minors and vulnerable adults*. In these Guidelines, we offer what we believe, what we wish to witness to, and what we commit to promote through our being and working as Sisters of St. Ann, adopting and applying the principles and provisions of the Catholic Church.

Article 31 of our Constitutions, entitled, "Instruments of Providence for the Little Ones and the Poor", reminds us that: "Through our specific mission we are called to be *«instruments of Divine Providence»*. We have impressed in our minds and hearts that ***we are destined to glorify God through our educative service to the little ones and the poor***. With an attitude of mercy we meet them wherever they are, **in order to prevent and take care of their**

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter issued as «Motu Proprio» *Vox Estis Lux Mundi* (25<sup>th</sup> March 2023).

**physical and spiritual poverty. *We relieve their unhappiness so as to make the image of the Son of God shine in each one.***"

Faithful to what we are called to be, we try to ensure that our environment, our manner of relationships, and our pastoral, educational and socio-health care services are places of integral growth, where formative processes are promoted that foster the knowledge and experience of true Love, so that *the image of the Son of God may shine in each person* (cf. C 31).

Pope Francis, in 2015, writing to the Episcopal Conferences and the Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, expressed himself as follows:

«Families need to know that the Church is making every effort to protect their children. They should also know that they have every right to turn to the Church with full confidence, for it is a safe and secure home. Consequently, priority must not be given to any other kind of concern, whatever its nature, such as the desire to avoid scandal, since there is absolutely no place in ministry for those who abuse minors».<sup>2</sup>

Our XXXIV General Chapter (2021), reawakened in us the vocation to be a "Family for families." The Final Document, repeatedly, but especially in the 4<sup>th</sup> priority, emphasized the commitment we wish to assume with renewed passion, through our mission in educational, pastoral, and social-health services, reaching out to the peripheries ***to prevent and take care of their physical and spiritual poverty***<sup>3</sup>.

If care and protection are an integral part of the Church's mission in building the Kingdom of God, we must feel the urgency that this vocation be not betrayed by any of us, consecrated women

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life Concerning the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors*, Vatican, 2 February 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Gen. Chap. XXXIV*, Priority 4.

and by the lay persons who collaborate in our mission. Indeed, we desire that, through our work, all those entrusted to us "*be fully realized and truly happy.*"

The General Council has studied and reflected deeply on Safeguarding, drawing from formation offered by the Union of Major Superiors, from experts and from the documents of other Congregations. Thanks to these contributions, the Council has drawn up these Guidelines, which we are presenting so that they may be made known to the Sisters and lay collaborators, in the ways in which the Provincial/Delegate Superiors deem it most appropriate, in order to be subjected to further evaluation.

Once the text of the Guidelines is completed and approved by the General Council, each Province and Delegation will be invited to use it in order to draft its own Protocol and Code of Conduct for each of its ministries, adapting it to the different situations in which we come into contact with minors and vulnerable adults in our mission. Any adaptations made must take into account the local legislations and be reviewed by experts in Canon Law and Child Protection. In any case, it should be kept in mind that the content of these Guidelines offers an essential base of orientations, aimed at establishing a unified and coherent approach within the Institute for the Protection of minors and vulnerable adults.

In one of his last messages from the Gemelli Hospital, Pope Francis reminded the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors that: "wherever a child or vulnerable person is safe, there you serve and honour Christ" and urged: "Continue to be sentinels that keep watch while the world sleeps<sup>4</sup>." In this spirit, we offer our humble yet essential contribution to Safeguarding.

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Message to the Participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, Rome, Policlinic "A. Gemelli", 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

## 1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### 1.1. To the Origins of the Institute: Charismatic experience of Carlo Tancredi and Giulia of Barolo

- ✓ In the history of the civil-ecclesial community of their times, Carlo Tancredi and Giulia of Barolo interpreted their personal and conjugal experience in the light of God who is Providence.
- ✓ They acknowledged in their lives the plan of God who created man and woman in His image, wanted them to be happy and called them to communion with Himself (C 1).
- ✓ They incarnated in their thinking and acting the **evangelical style of welcoming and of simplicity**: “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mt 18:4-5); “Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven” (Mt 18:10) (C 4).
- ✓ They bore witness to the Providence of God through their **solicitous and active charity for the weakest of the society**. They revealed His merciful love that restores to their brothers and sisters the hope and joy of living (C 5).
- ✓ **They promoted the dignity of the person** so that human rights might be upheld. They stooped over human misery in order to eradicate the root of all misfortune (C 6).
- ✓ **They bestowed their loving care particularly on children** abandoned to themselves, marginalised by ignorance and **defenceless in the face of dangers** (C 7).
- ✓ With a fatherly and motherly heart, they reached out to the hearts of the “little ones”, accompanied them lovingly and formed in them the Christian spirit, so that they might fully realize themselves and be truly happy (C 8).
- ✓ **They prevented them from possible future evils**, taking them away from their state of abandonment. **They offered them a homely environment** capable of fostering relationships. They took

care of their all-round development guiding them towards a personal plan of life” (C 9).

The re-reading of the first articles of our Constitutions brings us fully into the heart of what we are called to be, starting from the charismatic experience handed down to us by our Founders, and justifies the need for which “Enlightened by the Spirit, Carlo Tancredi and Giulia, founded our Religious Family in the Church on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1834. They wanted the Sisters to be “*instruments of Providence*” for the little ones and the poor, thus continuing in time their formative mission” (C 10).

Referring to our first Constitutions<sup>5</sup>, in article 332, which speaks of the Boarding Mistresses, we read: “The main purpose of her solicitude must be above all **to be vigilant so that their innocence is not diminished**, and such should be her vigilance, that to achieve this end, neither she nor the other Sisters should ever lose sight of the girls.... She must take care that **they observe great modesty in all their actions**, especially on getting up and when they retire to bed, that **they should never have in their possession indecent books or pictures** etc.”

And in article 384: “Finally it will be always necessary to have before our eyes, **the importance of the mission that God has entrusted to persons in charge of educating the little children**. Having understood this importance, it naturally makes one to ask continual help of our Lord, to gain those tender hearts for Him. Therefore, they should bear with patience and joy the inseparable pains of taking care of the daughters, if **one sees in each one of them a soul of infinite price**, that Jesus Christ loves with an infinite love, and **of whom He will ask an account one day**. They will think often of what the Divine Saviour has said: Let the little children come to me, and they will consider it a great good to be able to help those poor little creatures draw near the divine master”.

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<sup>5</sup> Const. 1846: *Constitutions and Rules of the Institute of the Sisters of S. Ann of Providence*, Per gli Eredi Botta Tip. Arcivescovili, Turin, 1846.

We therefore believe that caring for minors and vulnerable adults, is at the *heart of our identity* and the reason for our existence in the Church and in society. If we want to be faithful to our calling, we must implement all the necessary and effective measures to prevent cases of abuse, towards which we declare **zero tolerance**.

These Guidelines, therefore, aim at reminding everyone of the motivations and reasons that must underlie our choices and actions, in every context in which we work. Even though we continually experience being few and lacking the capacity to respond to all the needs in the various contexts in which we find ourselves, the fundamental thing is that our little be “everything” and for the good of those to whom we have been sent, not in our own name, but in the name of the Congregation and of the Church.

*“«You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden» (Mt 5:14). Our Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to be a shining example of virtue, integrity and holiness. All of us, in fact, are called to give concrete witness of faith in Christ in our lives and, in particular, in our relationship with others”.*

These words with which the Holy Father Francis begins the Motu Proprio *Vos estis lux mundi*, (Rome, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023), addressed to “every believer,” are particularly expressive for us, Sisters of Saint Ann, called to be guided by the Pedagogy of the Heart. With a fatherly and motherly heart, in fact, we are called to draw close to the hearts of the “little ones,” to be instruments for their happiness (cf. C 8).

## **1.2. Protection and mutual care in Fraternal Life**

We are aware that “we must once again learn from the Gospel that **attending to relationships** [...] is the means by which God the Father has revealed Himself in Jesus and the Spirit. When our relationships, even in their fragility, allow the grace of Christ, the love

of the Father, and the communion of the Spirit to shine through, we confess with our lives our faith in God the Trinity”<sup>6</sup>.

*We, Sisters of St. Ann, are women who live our baptismal consecration in its fullness through the profession of Vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. We live fraternal life in Community and fulfil the mission entrusted to us by God through the Church.*

*We let ourselves be guided by the experience of the Spirit of our Founders and of Mother Enrichetta. We walk in the footsteps of Christ Incarnate and Crucified and make of our lives a hymn of praise to the Holy and undivided Trinity (C 19).*

*We form one heart and one soul with the Sisters whom the Lord gives us. We live the “most perfect charity” with joy, in universal and reciprocal love without distinction, through manifestations of benevolence and friendship (C 78).*

*The Superior is the guide and animator of the Community, who exercises her service through listening, dialogue and accompaniment of the Sisters, in order to favour a life of communion which is called to renew itself in fidelity to the Spirit (C 80).*

It is essential that, first and foremost, we experience mutual care among ourselves, especially for our weaker, sick and elderly Sisters. Especially those who exercise a service of authority are called to carry it out with the awareness of being, like Mother Enrichetta, a servant of the servants of Jesus Christ and the poor, in order to promote the integral growth of each Sister (Cfr. C 158 e 159). It is emphasized that each person, within the field of her responsibilities, exercises an authority and is called upon, in different ways and at different levels, to care for others. In every ambit, no type of abuse will be tolerated.

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<sup>6</sup> Final Document of the Synod of Bishops “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*”, 50.

### 1.3. Protection of Young Women in Formation

In our Institute, initial formation is a necessary and precious time for the life and continuity of the Congregation. It is systematically organized in three phases: Postulancy, Novitiate, and Juniorate; it is carried out in a specific community and is entrusted to a Formation Mistress assisted by a team.

“All the stages of formation require a serious, accurate, attentive process of accompaniment that enables the young woman to verify in her daily life her vocational journey and welcome the plan of God in her life. Such accompaniment, while it constitutes a moment of assessment on the part of the young woman, is also so for the Institute, which is called to bear witness responsibly to the Charism, to give continuity and vitality to Community life, to the educational mission and to evaluate the vocational journey of the young woman”<sup>7</sup>.

Particular attention will be paid to ensure that this accompaniment takes place with full respect for the dignity and freedom of the young woman. Any form of abuse is to be absolutely avoided.

### 1.4. Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults

“There is no doubt – our Founder wrote - that **the tenor of the entire life depends, in most cases, on the first impressions, whether physical or moral, received during childhood**”<sup>8</sup>. Right from the early years of their marriage, but especially after moving from Paris to Turin, our Founders, Carlo Tancredi and Giulia, focused their attention particularly on the little ones left to fend for themselves.

The Marchioness Giulia, in 1832, writing to Loewenbruck, regarding the young women who wanted to consecrate themselves to God to dedicate themselves to the education of the children welcomed by her and her husband daily in their palace, expressed

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<sup>7</sup> Congregation Sisters of St. Ann, *General Plan of Formation*, Rome 2014, chap.4 A., Accompaniment and Assessment.

<sup>8</sup> Falletti di Barolo Carlo Tancredi, *On Education of Early Childhood among the poor class*, in *Called to Happiness*, p. 81.

herself as follows: “But have the goodness to inform them that they are undertaking a work of patience, that they will be bound to stay with the children from 8.00 a.m. and perhaps even earlier, until night. I saw a Sister of Providence. established in the countryside. I followed her teaching, she was using a rod to punish the children, **which is absolutely forbidden by us**, and since almost two years I feel comfortable with this system. I think that the Sisters should never change it at all”<sup>9</sup>.

To speak about Safeguarding means promoting dignity and physical and spiritual well-being, recognizing that all minors have needs and rights<sup>10</sup>. All of us, Sisters of St. Ann and those working in our apostolic works, as adults and professionals, assume this responsibility, just as Article 35 of our Constitutions invites us.

Protecting and promoting the well-being of minors and also of vulnerable adults—particularly protecting them from any harm—is the result of coordination between the educational institutions and the professionals involved in educational, socio-health care, and pastoral care, according to their various roles and expertise. It is the duty of the Congregation to adopt all measures to prevent violations and to intervene effectively and responsibly in the event of any behaviour that has caused harm to minors and vulnerable persons. At the same time, the Congregation will work to protect the rights of all those involved in such cases, offering a listening ear, accompaniment and support through all the necessary means, according to the approved Protocols.

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<sup>9</sup> Falletti di Barolo Giulia, *Letter to Loewenbruck*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1832.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989, deposited at the United Nations on 5 September 1991. The Holy See is a signatory of this Convention. We refer especially to the key principles expressed in Articles 2, 3, 6, 12 and 19 of the Document.

## 2. PURPOSE AND RECIPIENTS OF THE DOCUMENT

These Guidelines provide the Safeguarding principles and preventive measures to be adopted in our communities, among ourselves, and also in our apostolic works by all those who form part of the educational/health-care/pastoral Community. In particular, the recipients are:

- all the Sisters of St. Ann, perpetually and temporally professed;
- the aspirants, postulants and novices;
- all the lay members belonging to the lay groups associated with our Congregation;
- the lay people with different responsibilities, even those employed, in any of the works managed by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann;
- volunteers who collaborate in any capacity in the ministries of the Sisters of St. Ann.

The purpose of these Guidelines is to ensure the effective protection of every Sister of St. Ann and those entrusted to us in various capacities, especially the minors and vulnerable adults in our communities and where we carry out our mission, from all forms of abuse or violence. They aim to promote a fraternal, educational, health-care, and pastoral environment that fosters integral, transparent, and positive personal growth. A further specific objective of the Guidelines is to establish clear procedures for reporting any abuse committed against minors or vulnerable persons, by any member of the religious Congregation and/or by lay people who collaborate in any capacity in the works of the Institute of the Sisters of St. Ann. To this end, these Guidelines provide the basis for the preparation of Protocols and Codes of Conduct to be adopted in each Province and Delegation of the Congregation, adapted to local contexts and legislation.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of these Guidelines:

**Minor:** Any person under 18 years of age; also considered a minor is anyone who habitually lacks full use of reason.

**Vulnerable Adult:** Any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence.

**Child pornography:** “Any representation of a minor, regardless of the means used, involved in explicit sexual activities, whether real or simulated, and any representation of sexual organs of minors for lewd purposes or for profit”<sup>11</sup>.

Below is described what the Church, Consecrated Life, and Society mean by “Abuse.”

**Abuse and Abandonment:** Abuse and abandonment are forms of ill-treatment of minors<sup>12</sup>. A person can abuse a child by inflicting harm, or can commit abandonment by failing to prevent the harm. Children can be abused at home, in an institution, or in a community setting

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<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, *Motu Proprio Vos estis lux mundi*, Rome, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023, art. 1, §2.c.

<sup>12</sup> According to the World Health Organization, ill-treatment of a minor is «The abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Child maltreatment includes neglect, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and fabricated or induced illness» (WHO, *Guidelines for the Health Sector Response to Child Maltreatment*, 16 September 2019, p. 4: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-guidelines-for-the-health-sector-response-to-child-maltreatment>).

by acquaintances, or, more rarely, by strangers. They can be abused by one or more adults or by another child or children.

**Physical abuse:** Physical abuse<sup>13</sup> may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, inducing stupefaction with various substances or poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer falsifies the symptoms, or deliberately causes ill health to a child/vulnerable adult they are looking after.

**Emotional abuse:** Emotional abuse is defined as the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child/ vulnerable adult such as to cause severe and lasting effects. It may involve conveying to children/vulnerable adults that they are worthless and unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may involve communicating expectations that presume an age, a development or abilities that do not correspond to those of the child/vulnerable adult. It can manifest itself in interactions that are inappropriate to the current abilities of the child/vulnerable adult, or that lead to excessive protection and a limitation of their opportunities for discovery and learning. It also manifests itself in preventing a child from engaging in normal social interactions.

Emotional abuse can include listening to and watching the ill-treatment of another person or forms of bullying that makes children/vulnerable adults feel terrified or in danger. Exploitation or corruption of children/vulnerable adults are also forms of abuse. Some form of emotional abuse is present in all child/vulnerable adult abuse.

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<sup>13</sup> For the subdivision of the types of abuse, cf. CISV INTERNATIONAL, *Child Protection Policy and Procedures*, 30 September 2019, pp 5-6). The CISV International (Children's International Summer Villages), is a non-denominational and apolitical international organization, affiliated to the UNESCO, which aims to train individuals capable of becoming promoters and active members of a more equal and peaceful society, offering boys and girls intercultural educational experiences. The CISV is present in over 60 countries across five continents.

**Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse occurs when a person forces or induces a minor/vulnerable adult to participate in sexual activities, including prostitution, with or without the awareness of what is happening. Activities may involve physical contact, including penetration (e.g., rape, sodomy, and oral sex), or non-penetrative acts (e.g., groping, fondling, kissing, etc.). Abuse may include non-contact activities, such as engaging minors/vulnerable adults in viewing or producing pornographic images, witnessing sexual activity, or encouraging the minor to engage in sexually inappropriate behaviour<sup>14</sup>.

**Neglect:** is the persistent incapacity to meet the basic physical and psychological needs of a child/vulnerable adult, with the risk of causing serious harm to their health or development. Neglect can also occur during pregnancy due to abuse of substances on the part of the mother. A parent could be guilty of neglect by failing to provide food, clothing, and shelter for the child, excluding the child from the home, or abandoning the child. The same goes for those who take care of vulnerable adults. It is equally serious negligence to fail to protect the child/vulnerable adult from physical and emotional harm and danger, to fail to provide adequate care, and to fail to guarantee appropriate medical care and treatment.

## **OTHER TYPES OF ABUSE**

**Abuse of power:** “It is any intervention by someone who, taking advantage of his or her role of authority, does not respect the dignity and autonomy, freedom and responsibility of another person, especially if in a fragile condition, inducing in him or her, in more or less evident ways, the same way of understanding and wanting, and in fact forcing him or her to act by placing himself or herself in some

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<sup>14</sup> Regarding the definition of sexual abuse, see also: WHO, Responding to children and adolescents who have been sexually abused, October 2017, p. vii, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550147>.

way at his or her own service”<sup>15</sup>. It occurs when someone, in an asymmetrical relationship due to authority (because of a position or office), takes advantage of that position to manipulate the freedom of others, leading them to make decisions contrary to their will. This abuse is often the basis for other abuses.

**Spiritual Abuse:** “Spiritual abuse is every relational manipulation of an emotional type, but with religious-spiritual content (‘in the name of God’), which affects a person's sensitivity towards the divine. Such manipulation contaminates and distorts the person's image of God, disorients and damages their life of faith, and more generally, the person's relationship with their own inner world of values and beliefs<sup>16</sup>. “Spiritual abuse is characterized as a sequence of intentional and manipulative acts perpetrated in the name of God and is configured as a form of violence undertaken by a spiritual leader and by several persons (spiritual guides, confessors, catechists, educators, pastoral workers...) or by a community (movement, association...), either towards an individual or towards a group or an entire community”<sup>17</sup>.

**Abuse of conscience:** “The abuse of conscience, always within the abuses in the area of authority-power, is a form of violation of the privacy of others, consisting in inducing in the other, one's own way of judging and one's own criteria of discernment, or of one's own moral (and penitential) sensitivity”<sup>18</sup>. “Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths.” (GS 16). Abuse occurs when a person,

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<sup>15</sup> Italian Bishops’ Conference– National Service for the Protection of Minors, *Initial formation in times of abuse*, edited by A. Cencini and S. Lassi, February 2021, pg. 52.

<sup>16</sup> CEI – SNTM, *Initial formation in times of abuse*, edited by A. Cencini and S. Lassi, February 2021, pg. 54.

<sup>17</sup> CEI – SNTM, *Spiritual abuse, context and elements for recognizing it*, April 2025, 4.

<sup>18</sup> CEI – SNTM, *Initial formation in times of abuse*, edited by A. Cencini and S. Lassi, February 2021, pg. 56.

often in a position of authority, enters this "sanctuary" of the other to condition and reduce, to the point of nullifying, his freedom of judgment and choice. The abuser replaces the abused in his judgment of conscience, that is, regarding what is right/wrong, what should/should not be done, what is lawful/sinful, what puts eternal salvation at risk, etc.

***Financial and Economic Abuse:*** Financial and economic abuse is a type of violence that occurs when a person uses control of economic resources to exercise power over another. Canon 1376 expands the criminal offenses relating to ecclesiastical property to include, in addition to the crime of alienation, the unlawful removal of property from the person to whom it belongs and the carrying out of administrative acts without the due requirements.

Unjustly endangering patrimony is punishable "with just punishment," even in the presence of grave fault or negligence, regardless of any possible patrimonial damage.

## 4. PREVENTION AND FORMATION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

«May the Lord Jesus instil in each of us, as ministers of the Church, the same love and affection for the little ones which characterized his own presence among us, and which in turn enjoins on us a particular responsibility for the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. May Mary Most Holy, Mother of tenderness and mercy, help us to carry out, generously and thoroughly, our duty to **humbly acknowledge and repair past injustices and to remain ever faithful in the work of protecting those closest to the heart of Jesus**»<sup>19</sup>.

### 4.1. Prevention

The Congregation underlines the importance of prevention in every dimension of life, including moral, spiritual, and social well-being.

“Prevention” means not only avoiding harmful events, but actively **building safe environments** for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults. It includes promoting healthy human development, fostering transparent and respectful relationships, and contributing to a more just and compassionate society through education, formation, and responsible presence in the world.

In order to try to **prevent** the scourge of abuse as much as possible, it is necessary<sup>20</sup>:

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<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, *Letter to the Presidents to the Episcopal Conferences and to the Superiors of ICL and SAL regarding the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors*, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Diocese of Rome - Diocesan Service for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons, *WE HAVE YOU AT HEART! Vademecum for a culture of “care”*, pgs. 10-11.

- ✓ **to take care** of the personal ongoing formation of all those, consecrated and lay persons, who are called to offer a service in the community(ies) and in the places of apostolate of the Institute so that they can handle their affective-relational immaturity/ambivalences in the most conscious way possible and carry out the service entrusted to them with sufficient interior freedom;
- ✓ **to accompany** consecrated women and lay people in specific formation on the mechanisms of abuse, their consequences and methods of prevention and in acquiring discernment tools to detect the early signs of relational distress, before this distress insidiously evolves into some form of abuse;
- ✓ **to educate** to co-responsibility and collaboration, promoting open communication and mutual trust among the Sisters, the Formators and those in formation, among lay people and volunteers, so that concerns can be addressed promptly with truth and charity where abusive behaviour is reported;
- ✓ **to propose** ever more clearly and explicitly the only authentic model of relationship and educational service, which is that offered to us by the Lord Jesus through his life and his teachings in the Gospel.

## 4.2. Formation

### A. Importance of Formation and Methods

Safeguarding in formation is **mandatory** for all members SSA/belonging to the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann and for employees and volunteers working in SSA institutions /of the Sisters of St. Ann. For those who directly and regularly *accompany* minors or vulnerable persons, must receive formation before beginning their service.

The **method** for the formative sessions could be varied: in person, online or hybrid, and each Province/Delegation will determine the **frequency** and practical arrangements.

## B. Responsibility for Formation in Safeguarding

Formation in Safeguarding is the responsibility of the Superior General and her Council, who can count on the collaboration of an International Commission for its implementation.

This Commission will guide the Provincial/Delegations Councils in preparing formation itineraries in Safeguarding, respecting the needs of each reality and availing themselves of the help of competent persons in matters of Safeguarding, at the local civil and ecclesiastical levels.

The formative Itineraries will be appropriately adapted for Initial and Ongoing Formation, suitable for each situation and each recipient, so that they can meet the needs of candidates to religious life, lay people, employees and volunteers who work with us.

For each House of Formation and place of apostolate, appropriate Protocols and Codes of Conduct will be drawn up, consistent with these Guidelines.

## C. International Commission

The **International Commission** will be composed of five members, representing the different realities of the Congregation, with the ability to collaborate and a predisposition to networking. Its work must be based on the principles of trust, subsidiarity, flexibility and sustainability.

The members will be appointed by the Superior General and her Council and will remain in office until further notice. They will work primarily through digital platforms and meet in person when necessary. They will provide a publicly available email address, so that anyone who wishes may use it to file possible complaints.

### 4.3. Formation in our Congregation

The delicate task of leading communities in a spirit of service faithful to the Gospel and the Church's mandate requires great prudence in the criteria for admission to the formative journey and religious profession of candidates to the consecrated life. First and foremost, a profound and rooted spiritual journey is required, shaped by prayer and an encounter with the Word of God. Therefore, pedagogical itineraries are needed that aim at forming in individuals a solid identity and an authentic sense of that particular authority linked to religious consecration, which is the authority of service and compassion; the authority of those who freely place their lives at the service of others<sup>21</sup>.

#### A. Formation of the Formators

No one should carry out, or be entrusted with, a formative role without having received a suitable formation. The call to service in the formation of the Institute's members is a specific ministerial vocation and therefore, a great responsibility that demands total dedication, energy, and specific competencies.

##### *Forming the person*

The specific formation of the formator should equip her, first and foremost, with the ability to *relate to and accompany* the young woman entrusted to her.

Another skill to be developed in the formator is the willingness *to listen deeply, to grasp the other's innermost being*, to lead her toward a deeper understanding of herself and the roots of her dignity and also of her vulnerabilities, so that she can freely choose Christ's sentiments.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. CEI and Italian Conference of Major Superiors, *Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults*, pg. 6.

## *Formation for working as a team*

Teamwork, moreover, will permit those who work in formation to engage in healthy confrontation that preserves from unilateral and subjective perspectives, and will also give an equally healthy feeling of sharing the responsibility of formation, of collaboration between different abilities, of convergence towards a common goal and everything else that can make this task more effective and sustainable<sup>22</sup>.

### **B. Initial Formation**

In Formation houses, in relation to both, the personnel and the organization of the premises, it is necessary to focus on creating a safe and protective environment, promoting healthy vocational growth and preventing abuse and inappropriate behaviour. Furthermore, candidates are to be carefully selected, and offered a loving welcome and qualified accompaniment, which has as its goal an integral formation, taking into account the psychological and spiritual dimensions, and the promotion of a mentality of transparency and responsibility.

The key points to be kept in mind for discernment in formation are listed below<sup>23</sup>.

- ✓ Meticulous attention must be paid to verifying the documentation required for admission to the religious life in accordance with the Universal and Proper Law.
- ✓ Obtain and evaluate information on the real reasons for a candidate's dismissal or departure from another Religious Institute or Society of Apostolic Life who is seeking admission

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. CEI – SNTM, *Initial formation in times of abuse*, edited by A. Cencini and S. Lassi, February 2021, pgs. 118-120.

<sup>23</sup> Many of these points take inspiration from the document: *Protocol of the Province St. Dominic in Italy on the Defence of Minors e Vulnerable Persons*.

- ✓ It is necessary to evaluate the emotional and psychological stability of the candidates, their ability to relate in a healthy way and to handle group dynamics<sup>24</sup>.
- ✓ Those in initial formation should be accompanied to read and responsibly interpret their own life history, identifying situations in which they may have undergone some form of violence or in which they themselves may have assumed the role as aggressor. Self-reflection on their personal life situation, including the sensitive area of sexuality, could be done as a daily review, spiritual guidance, confession, supervision, etc.<sup>25</sup>
- ✓ Constant supervision and accompaniment by expert and qualified formators should be guaranteed, who are able to recognise any early signs of difficulty or discomfort.
- ✓ It is opportune to foster dialogue with the families of candidates, to involve them in the formation process and to create a network of support and guidance.
- ✓ Major Superiors and Formation Mistresses must be equally clear and transparent towards the formation houses of other Institutes requesting information on candidates or Sisters dismissed or sent away from our Institute.
- ✓ It is forbidden to accept any candidate who, after ascertaining the real reasons, has been dismissed or asked to leave an institute of Consecrated life for reasons *contra sextum cum minore*, (against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue) or for other reasons governed by canon 1398, § 1, nos. 2-3 *CIC/83*.
- ✓ During the canonical year of the novitiate and the years of Juniorate, at a frequency determined by the Provincial/Delegate Superior, after consulting with the Formators, extracurricular courses must be included in the following areas: protection of

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, "Punts for reflection", in VV.AA., *Awareness and Purification*, 17, pg. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Manual for the theme of Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults in Ongoing and Initial Formation – ofm 2023, pg. 30.

minors and vulnerable persons, types of child exploitation (child labour or childhood hardships, etc.), types of abuse and personal psychological and emotional awareness. It will be the responsibility of the Mistresses and the Councillor responsible for formation, in agreement with the Provincial/Delegate Superior, to identify experts or professionals in these topics.

- ✓ Candidates for Temporary and Perpetual Profession, in addition to the documentation required by Universal Law, are required to undergo a specialized evaluation conducted by an expert approved by the Provincial/Delegate Superior.

The purpose of this assessment is to reasonably exclude the presence of:

- **sexual disorders or deviations** that compromise affective and sexual maturity;
  - **personality disorders** that hinder sound judgment, emotional stability, or healthy relational dynamics;
  - **other psychiatric conditions** that may diminish the individual's capacity for self-control, particularly in the area of sexual impulses that could, even potentially:
    - predispose the candidate to **inappropriate or boundary-violating behaviour**,
    - place them at risk of committing **acts of abuse**, or
    - lead to conduct that may constitute **sexual offences** under civil or ecclesiastical law.
- ✓ Each newly professed Sister is to be accompanied by a Formator, indicated by the Provincial/Delegate Superior, in order to receive advice and support in her apostolic and personal life.

## C. Ongoing Formation

- ✓ **Dignity and freedom of every person**  
Every Sister of St. Ann is called to exercise whatever ministry is assigned to her by obedience, respecting the dignity and freedom of each person. She must be particularly committed to caring for

and protecting children, adolescents and young adults, and adults in situations of need and vulnerability.

✓ **Mutual Relationships in the Community**

It is the responsibility of each Sister to get to know what are appropriate behaviours in relationships with others and how to maintain integrity in all the relationships related to her service. (C. 79. Family Spirit, C. 83. Harmony in diversity).

It is a fundamental duty of every member of the Institute to promote safe and welcoming communities and places of apostolate, which offer a loving environment, where one is vigilant and informed about the dangers of abuse<sup>26</sup>.

✓ **Constant updating**

It is necessary to offer to the Sisters periodic qualified updates on the best safeguarding practices, on new challenges and on the regulations related to the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.

✓ **Psychological support**

Easy and timely access to psychological support services must be guaranteed for Sisters who need it, for addressing personal problems as well as to prevent risky situations.

✓ **Refresher courses on the Social Doctrine of the Church**

Participation in refresher courses on Safeguarding and the Social Doctrine of the Church should be encouraged, with particular attention to the themes of *human dignity, justice, and solidarity*.

## 4.4. Prevention and Formation of the Laity

In the Institute of the Sisters of St. Ann, we carefully evaluate the availability, the selection and formation of all lay collaborators who, in any capacity, carry out tasks related to our apostolic mission,

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Guidelines of the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults from Sexual Abuse and very kind of Abuse, pg. 3.

or of service in our religious communities. The following points are particularly recommended<sup>27</sup>:

- ✓ Employees must be selected on the basis of their suitability in conformity with the required qualifications, in accordance with the legislation of each country, and with the responsibilities that their job entails.
- ✓ The work environment must foster healthy and appropriate conduct, which establishes responsibilities, procedures and preventative measures to ensure a safe and welcoming environment.
- ✓ All SSA employees, collaborators, and volunteers must know and adhere to these Guidelines, sharing in the collective commitment to the Protection of minors and of vulnerable adults, and must explicitly express their consent by signing the Protocol adopted in their respective Province/Delegation and in the Code of Conduct of the Institution in which they work.
- ✓ To strengthen a mentality of child protection and of vulnerable adults, special attention must be paid to the formation and education of those who work within the Institute.
- ✓ Every community and place of work adopts **policies of zero-tolerance** towards any form of abuse, violence, or inappropriate behaviour, with clear procedures for reporting and disciplinary action.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. CEI and Italian Conference of Major Superiors, *Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults*, pgs. 8-9.

## 5. ORGANIZATION

By promulgating these Guidelines at a general level, and in order to ensure that they bear concrete fruit—we commit ourselves to the following organizational measures:

- a) to establish a Commission at the General level to deal with:
- ✓ **Supporting each Province/Delegation in ensuring safe environments** for minors and vulnerable persons, to assist them in implementing these Guidelines through a Protocol that takes into account their cultural context and the national and local civil and ecclesiastical legislations regarding the Protection of minors and vulnerable persons. This Protocol serves as a tool for Safeguarding all those entrusted to us, implementing Article 32 of our Constitution, which states: "Where situations, circumstances, and events seem to favour a culture of death, with a limpid and courageous gaze of faith, we will do our utmost to give a future of hope. We dedicate ourselves in favour of those who live in situations of injustice and help those struck by misfortune, emptiness and sadness, to discover the presence and plan of God, in which alone lies their true happiness." The General Commission will also have the duty to assist in the drafting of the necessary Protocols, which must be signed by every person in their specific role and responsibility.
  - ✓ **Promoting initial and ongoing formation in Safeguarding** for the members of the Institute, for the lay groups associated with our Congregation, and lay personnel involved in the service of children, youth, and vulnerable adults, or those who lend their services on a voluntary basis, so that everyone can exercise their ministry while respecting the dignity, freedom and integrity of each person.

- ✓ **Periodic evaluation of the Guidelines, Protocols, and Codes of Conduct** recommending updates whenever necessary for greater clarity, effectiveness, and fidelity to Church and civil requirements.
- b) to appoint, for each Province/Delegation, a Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons, or where not possible, at least one Reference person for Safeguarding from among the Sisters.
- c) upon notification of a case, to immediately report it to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and according to their orientation, to contact the Commission for the Protection of Minors of the Province/Delegation concerned, so that, with the support of experts in the legal, psychological and spiritual fields, they can form a team with the aim of, as according to the case:
- ✓ addressing all the complaints of abuse against its own members;
  - ✓ addressing every complaint of abuse against the lay staff and volunteers engaged in activities for which the Congregation is responsible;
  - ✓ offering pastoral care and support to those who have suffered abuse;
  - ✓ offering pastoral care and support, including supervision and reporting to the appropriate authorities, to any member of the Congregation who may have committed abuse against a child, a young person, or a vulnerable adult in accordance with canonical and civil norms.
- d) to maintain confidentiality and discretion, always keeping in mind the distinction between confidentiality and secrecy. The Superior General, however, keeps her Council opportunely informed of the process, according to what is deemed appropriate that Councillors know.

- e) to inform the Congregation if the case becomes public. Every effort will be made to act sincerely and truthfully, while respecting the necessary confidentiality.
- f) to avoid any conduct consisting of actions or omissions aimed at interfering with or evading civil or canonical, administrative, or criminal investigations against a member of the Congregation, lay personnel or volunteers who have committed an offense against a minor or a vulnerable adult.

## 6. PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING CASES

Everyone is required to report suspected cases of abuse, without exception.

It is therefore essential that, for each Province/Delegation, but also in every Institution of health-care or education and in our apostolate environments, must ensure that the contact information (name, address, telephone number, email, etc.) of the members of the Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons, or at least of the Sister responsible for Safeguarding, be made public, so that anyone may submit a complaint in the case of alleged sexual abuse.

### 6.1. Listening to, Welcoming and Accompanying the Victims

The Congregation must commit itself to ensure that ***the Formees, Sisters and the lay people who claim to have been abused***, together with their families, are treated with dignity, respect and compassion, in particular:

1. In our communities, places of work and apostolate, anyone who claims to have been a victim of sexual abuse, as well as their families, have the right to be welcomed, listened to, and accompanied: competent persons must be promptly made available to them.
2. Since any sexual abuse affects the human person as a whole — physical, psychological, relational, and moral—and, above all, can inflict profound and lasting wounds, the Congregation ensures therapeutic, psychological and spiritual support to victims and their families.
3. Every form of support for the victims and for their suffering by the Congregation must be conducted in accordance with principles of legality and transparency, so that it may never be considered a

means of silencing the victims themselves, but rather a means of trying to alleviate their suffering and favour inner healing.

4. All the other persons too, directly involved in any cases of abuse, must be suitably accompanied and supported in processing the abuse that has occurred.
5. Listening to those who claim to have suffered sexual abuse in the ecclesial sphere must continue over time and become a path of protection and care through paths of justice, reconciliation and healing.
6. Sisters who have been victims of sexual abuse or other harmful sexual behaviour at any time of their lives are strongly encouraged to seek professional psychological counselling. Active involvement in the life of their religious community can help victims overcome difficult moments and experience greater support.
7. The Congregation should offer suitable spiritual and psychological support to any Sister who has been a victim of abuse. A Sister who has been a victim of sexual abuse prior to entering the Congregation is encouraged to discuss the matter with the Sister responsible for formation or with another expert, in order to receive the necessary support.
8. The Formees will be helped to recognize the risks of abuse and violations of rights within the religious life and to know how to prevent and/or face them.

## **6.2. Procedures concerning allegations of inappropriate behaviour by a member of the Congregation**

- a) In the case of an accusation of sexual or physical abuse, inappropriate sexual behaviour, or other crime against one of its members, the Congregation must ensure pastoral care of the person making the accusation and the accused Sister, and for the well-being of the entire Congregation. Special attention must be

paid to ensure that all the persons involved are treated according to the evangelical values of dignity, compassion, understanding and justice. It remains firm that in the case of an accusation of abuse or serious misconduct, the rights of all must be protected.

- b) This regulation applies to any allegation of abuse or serious inappropriate behaviour unless the accusation is clearly false or not credible.
- c) This regulation and the procedures indicated herein apply to all Formees and Professed Sisters of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann.<sup>28</sup>.
- d) As soon as one comes to know of an accusation, she will inform the Sister who is the reference point for Safeguarding, who will promptly notify the Superior General. The latter will appoint a Sister as her delegate for this case, who will listen to the person making the accusation, reassuring her and offering assistance in presenting her request to the Congregation. As soon as she is ready to do so, the person submits to the Major Superior a written statement containing the accusation, signed and dated. If the accusation is made by a minor or by a vulnerable person who claims to be a victim of sexual abuse by a member of the Congregation<sup>29</sup>, the Sister delegated by the Superior General for this case, is obliged to:
  - Involve the parents/guardians as soon as possible.

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<sup>28</sup> Following the steps indicated in the local civil legislation, one will proceed promptly to respond also to any complaints of abuse against lay staff and volunteers engaged in activities for which the Congregation is responsible. In these cases, too, opportune pastoral care and support will be provided.

<sup>29</sup> The accusation of sexual abuse could also be made by a Formee against a Sister, or by a Sister against another Sister with whom there is an asymmetrical relationship based on age or role, in which power is exercised and where there is power one is subjected to inappropriate and abusive behaviour.

- Listen to the minor/vulnerable person attentively and respectfully, in the presence of the parents, according to the regulations of the different countries.
  - Ensure the necessary psychological and medical assistance.
  - Record in writing all relevant information about the minor/vulnerable person and his or her version of facts.
  - Encourage the parents/guardians to report the incident to the competent authorities, once the credibility of the accusation has been verified.
  - Reassure the alleged injured party of one's commitment to establish the historical truth and take appropriate action.
- e) The Sister delegated by the Superior General, with the Commission or the Sister who is the reference point for Safeguarding as referred to in points 5. a) and b), meet with the Sister who has been accused to inform her of the allegation and hear her version of the facts:
- To assure her of her rights according to these Guidelines.
  - To offer opportune help.
  - To assure the Sister of her presumed innocence until proven guilty, though with any possible restrictive measures.
  - To inform her of the relevant procedures, including removal from the place where she currently carries out her ministry.
  - To assure her that she has the right to communicate directly with the Superior General (can 698).
  - To inform her that she has the right to remain silent about the charges.
  - To advise and assist her in seeking legal or psychological counselling other than that offered by the Congregation.
- f) The Major Superior, with the consent of her Council, initiates a preliminary investigation, appointing an Instructor and a Notary, to assess the validity and imputability of the crime, assuring discretion while respecting the good reputation of all the parties

involved<sup>30</sup>. She also indicates the appropriate precautionary measures. The Instructor will verify the credibility and solidity of the accusation, listening to the testimony of both the accuser and the accused and conducting the necessary expert assessments. If the case requires, he may interview additional witnesses in order to identify any other potential victims and complete the investigation.

If evidence is insufficient, contradictory or clearly excludes the accused Sister's involvement, the Major Superior, with the consent of her Council, could close the case.

In case the allegation is found to be well-founded, the Superior General, after consulting the Commission or the Sister who is the reference point for Safeguarding, with the consent of her Council, initiates the Administrative Disciplinary Process, in accordance with canons 695-699 of the Code of Canon Law.

In this Administrative Disciplinary Process, the Superior General, with the consent of her Council, appoints the Instructor who:

- presents the accusations and proofs to the Sister accused;
- gives the Sister accused the opportunity to defend herself through a trustworthy or official Lawyer;
- finally sends all the signed acts to the Major Superior;
- and formulates his/her own "votum."

The Major Superior sends all the documentation, signed also by her, to the Superior General.

- g) If it is established that the allegations of sexual abuse or inappropriate sexual behaviour are well-founded, the Superior General asks for the opinion of the Commission or the Sister who is the reference point for Safeguarding, to evaluate the damages of the crime committed and what can be done to repair and re-

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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that, already at this stage, professional secrecy is to be observed. However, it should be remembered that no obligation to keep silence regarding the facts can be imposed on the person making the report, on the person claiming to have been offended and on the witnesses.

establish justice, and with the consent of her Council, establishes the penalty, in accordance with the norms of canons 695-699 and 1394 §2 of the Code of Canon Law<sup>31</sup>. Depending on the case, the following measures may be taken:

- Immediately send away the Postulant and the Novice;
  - Dismissal from the Institute in the case of a Temporarily or Perpetually Professed Sister (can. 699 §1.);
  - Alternative methods that can sufficiently provide for (can. 695 § 1): the correction of the Sister (to be proven through canonical warnings can. 697); the restoration of justice and the reparation for the scandal;
  - The case can proceed legally.
- h) Alternatively, the Superior General or the reference person requests the Sister to undergo a specialized examination in a suitable place, followed by the necessary therapy. The Sister may receive therapy even later and may join a support group after completing therapy. If it is opportune the Sister may resume her service under supervision, and only upon the recommendation of the therapeutic team.
- i) The Major Superior, or the reference person, will inform the Bishop of the Diocese in which the Sister is carrying out or has carried out her service at the time of the abuse, according to the allegation.
- j) A member of the Commission or the reference person notifies the Sister's employer if the Sister is employed and must be withdrawn from ministry. If the abuse occurred in this ministry, the employer must be informed of the allegation.

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<sup>31</sup> According to the Apostolic Constitution *Pascite Gregem Dei* of Pope Francis, the CIC 1398 - § 2 is thus formulated: *A member of an institute of consecrated life or of a society of apostolic life, or any one of the faithful who enjoys a dignity or performs an office or function in the Church, who commits an offence mentioned in § 1 or in can. 1395 § 3 is to be punished according to the provision of can. 1336 §§ 2-4, with the addition of other penalties according to the gravity of the offence.*

- k) In all cases, the laws and the indications of the National Episcopal Conferences and all applicable criminal laws of the country in which the Sister lives are observed. The Superior General, or the Sister delegated by her, will inform the civil authorities within the time frames required by law and is responsible for all public statements regarding the case.
- l) In the case of paedophilia, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith must be promptly informed, in accordance with the provisions of current law.
- m) The Superior General is obliged to inform the Superior elected after her, of cases of sexual abuse. The Superior General prepares a general summary of the case, which is kept in a confidential file in the permanent archive of the Congregation and is transmitted to the next Superior General.

## **7. COLLABORATION WITH ECCLESIASTICAL AND CIVIL AUTHORITIES**

Sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults constitutes both, a canonical offense and a crime, prosecuted by civil authorities. Therefore, cooperation must be extended within the ambit of one's respective competences.

As stated in points 5.c. and 6.2.d., in the case of an abuse committed by a member of the Congregation or by a lay employee or volunteer engaged in activities for which the Congregation is responsible is reported, the case will be promptly reported to the competent ecclesial and civil authority.

Besides, any conduct consisting of actions or omissions aimed at obstructing, interfering with or evading civil investigations or canonical, administrative, or criminal investigations is to be considered unacceptable and contrary to the principles governing Safeguarding (5.f.).

## 8. CONFIDENTIALITY

### Receiving reports and protection

- ◆ Upon receiving a complaint of abuse against a member of the Institute, the Major Superior initiates a preliminary investigation. The Commission for Protection and the appointed Reference Person have the duty to protect the good reputation of every person. However, if the common good is at risk, the dissemination of news relating to the existence of an accusation does not necessarily constitute a violation of that good reputation. As stated earlier, confidentiality and discretion are to be maintained, always keeping in mind the distinction between confidentiality and secrecy. The Major Superior will inform her Council of the process, according to what is deemed appropriate that Councillors know<sup>32</sup>.
- ◆ Should the case become public, the entire Congregation will be informed of it. The Major Superior or one of her delegates will see to the necessary recovery process within the Congregation, particularly in the place where the Sister carried out her service, and/or the lay staff/volunteers involved. Every effort will be made to act with sincerity and truth, while respecting the necessary confidentiality.
- ◆ The Major Superiors and their Councils will avoid any conduct consisting of actions or omissions intended to interfere with or evade civil or canonical, administrative, or criminal investigations against a member of the Congregation, lay staff, or volunteers who have committed an offense against a minor or a vulnerable adult.
- ◆ All persons involved in the investigation must be notified that in the case of judicial seizure or an order to hand over the minutes by a civil authority, the Congregation cannot guarantee the

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Motu Proprio Vos estis lux mundi*, Rome, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023, art. 2 § 2.

confidentiality of the statements made or the documentation acquired in canonical proceedings.

- ◆ The Congregation may use visible communication channels to report abuse, both digitally (website, social media) and in the houses and communities of the Congregation.

## **9. ARCHIVES**

Proper management and preservation of the documents and minutes produced at every stage of the disciplinary process is essential. The General Secretary is responsible for ensuring that everything is preserved in the Archives of the General Council (See Directory 93).

At the Province and Delegation levels, the criteria established by the Superior General together with the Commission for Safeguarding will be followed.

In every Provincial/Delegation Seat, the confidential documents or those related to the process must be carefully preserved in secure, restricted-access archives.

## **10. FUNCTIONING, REVISION AND EVALUATION SYSTEM OF THE GUIDELINES**

The Guidelines are approved by the Superior General and her Council and will become effective upon publication on the communication channels of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann (Acts of the General Council, Website, and Social Media).

The Provincial and Delegation Councils are responsible for drafting the Protocol and Code of Conduct to implement these Guidelines. These documents will become effective only after approval by the Superior General and her Council.

Revision of the Guidelines is the responsibility of the Superior General, her Council and the Commission for Safeguarding at the General Level. They will provide, every three years, or as needed, a systematic procedure to verify the implementation of these Guidelines and evaluate their effectiveness.

## **Enclosure n. 1**

### *CODE OF CONDUCT REGARDING MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This Code of Conduct defines clear standards for all who minister or work in the name of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann. It specifies the behaviour required of every Sister, employee, and volunteer in order to ensure the protection and dignity of minors and vulnerable adults entrusted to our care.—The Superior General and her Council are responsible for ensuring that this Code is known, disseminated, and implemented in every community and apostolic work of the Congregation.

## **A. GENERAL ORIENTATION**

### **1. Mandatory Acceptance**

Knowledge and acceptance of this Code is:

- a condition for admission to initial formation for consecrated life;
- a requirement for employment, volunteer service, and participation in the apostolic works of the Congregation.

### **2. Fundamental Respect**

Every person—and especially minors and vulnerable adults—must be treated with equal dignity and respect. Their efforts should be recognized and they should be encouraged without psychological pressure or manipulation.

### **3. Prohibited Conduct**

- Physical punishment of any kind is absolutely forbidden.
- Offensive, degrading, humiliating, or violent language is never acceptable.

## **B. GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTION AND MINISTRY**

### **4. Use of Space**

Apostolic activities involving minors or vulnerable adults—whether in communities, schools, hospitals, boarding homes, or parishes—must take place in common areas and never in private rooms. Doors to such areas must never be locked during activities.

### **5. Meetings and Conversation**

Conversations with minors or vulnerable adults must occur in:

- public or semi-public places;
- areas with visible access or an open-door policy;
- never in secluded or isolated environments.

### **6. Outings and Travel**

For any meeting, outing, or trip:

- written consent of parents/guardians is mandatory;
- a copy of the itinerary and emergency contact numbers must be provided to them.

### **7. Overnight Activities**

Retreats, camps, pastoral programs requiring overnight stays must be organized in ways that ensure:

- appropriate privacy;
- safe supervision;
- separation between sleeping areas of adults and minors/vulnerable adults.

### **8. Bathrooms and Hygiene**

Assistance with hygiene (toilets, showers) is allowed **only** in:

- emergencies;
- situations of genuine necessity;
- and must follow a prior agreement with the family/guardian when the minor or vulnerable adult is not self-sufficient.

## **C. RELATIONAL AND COMMUNICATION STANDARDS**

### **9. Affection and Boundaries**

All interactions must be:

- professional;
- respectful of cultural norms;
- free from ambiguity or behaviour that could cause misunderstanding or suspicion.

### **10. Language**

Vulgar, sexually explicit, rude, or aggressive expressions are absolutely prohibited.

### **11. Materials**

No films, books, recordings, or media content of questionable moral content may be given or made accessible to minors or vulnerable adults.

## **D. DIGITAL SAFETY**

### **12. Internet Access**

Minors and vulnerable adults must **not** have unsupervised or unrestricted access to the internet in Congregational premises.

### **13. Parental Controls**

Computers used in common areas of communities and apostolic centers must have updated parental-control software.

### **14. Photography and Video**

- Photos or videos of minors/vulnerable adults require written parental/guardian permission.
- Photography or filming is strictly prohibited in:
  - Bedrooms;
  - Bathrooms;
  - locker rooms;
  - or any place where privacy is expected.

## 15. Use of Social Media

Communication with minors or vulnerable adults:

- must be done with prudence and moderation;
- limited to what is necessary for ministry;
- must never include words, images, or videos that could be interpreted in a sexualized or ambiguous manner.

## E. REPORTING, SAFETY AND SCREENING

### 16. Reporting Concerns

If there is reasonable cause to believe that a minor or vulnerable adult is being abused—even within the family—this must be reported to the competent civil authority, having:

- consulted a lawyer and psychologist;
- informed the Provincial/Delegation Superior or the Safeguarding Reference Person.

Great care must be taken to verify facts and avoid acting on unsubstantiated or defamatory information.

### 17. Screening of Lay Personnel

All lay collaborators who work with minors or vulnerable adults—especially in residential or overnight settings—must:

- present a criminal background certificate confirming they have **no record of offences against minors/vulnerable persons**;
- sign the **Declaration of Adherence to the Code of Conduct** before beginning employment or volunteer ministry.

### 18. Sisters and Formees

All Sisters (perpetually or temporarily professed), aspirants, postulants, and novices must:

- sign the **Declaration of Adherence**;
- comply fully with this **Code** in all apostolic settings.

## Enclosure n. 2

### *FORM FOR ADHERENCE TO THE CODE OF CONDUCT REGARDING MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS*

#### **FORM TO BE FILLED IN BY:**

- 
- all the Sisters of St. Ann, perpetually and temporally professed;
- the Aspirants, Postulants and Novices;
- all the lay members belonging to the lay groups associated with our Congregation;
- all employees and volunteers in the apostolic works of the Congregation.

#### DECLARATION OF ADHERENCE

I, the undersigned

---

Born in \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

hereby declare that:

1. I have read and understood the “GUIDELINES FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS” and the “CODE OF CONDUCT REGARDING MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS” of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann.
2. I freely adhere to these Guidelines and to the Code of Conduct in their entirety.
3. I commit myself:
  - to collaborate in creating and maintaining a safe environment,
  - to participate in any required Safeguarding formation,
  - and to act at all times in accordance with the Congregation’s Safeguarding Policy.

4. I acknowledge that the Safeguarding Reference Person to whom I must refer in this institution is:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of Safeguarding Reference Person)

I will contact this person in case of questions, or if I become aware of or suspect any situation of abuse involving minors or vulnerable adults connected to this institution.

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Declarant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the person responsible  
for Safeguarding

*A signed copy of the declaration of knowledge and adherence to the Code of Conduct regarding Minors and Vulnerable Adults must be kept in the appropriate archives.*



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