

**CONGREGATION SISTERS OF CHARITY
OF OUR LADY MOTHER OF MERCY**



**Guidelines for Safeguarding
of
Children, Adolescents, and
Vulnerable Persons**



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FOREWORD

Dear Sisters, we should be grateful that our congregation continues to thrive. As a congregation or as individuals, we know that the Catholic Church continues to call for pay special attention to the human beings, particularly those who are weak. This message was officially conveyed through the Apostolic Letter issued *motu proprio* by Pope Francis on June 1, 2019 “***on the Protection of minors and vulnerable persons***”.

The apostolic letter explains that the protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message. The Church and all of its members are called to proclaim it throughout the world. Christ himself, in fact, has entrusted us with the care and protection of the weakest and defenceless: “*Whoever welcomes one child such as this in my name receives me*” (Mt 18:5). Therefore, we all have the duty to welcome minors and vulnerable persons openheartedly and to create a safe environment for them.

This apostolic letter is proof that the Church is strengthening institutional and regulatory frameworks to prevent and counter abuse and all forms of violence against

minors and vulnerable persons. This means that the Church pays special attention to the rights and needs of minors and vulnerable persons, by being vigilant in preventing any form of physical or psychological violence or abuse, neglect, abandonment, mistreatment or exploitation that may occur both in interpersonal relations as well as in shared spaces and facilities.

As a member of the Church, the SCMM congregation is also promoting the prevention and countering of abuse and violence against children and vulnerable persons. Our congregation should try, in all earnest, to provide protection to those who are victims. We are all aware that the Church has long called for every ecclesiastical institution to develop guidelines for the protection of children and vulnerable persons. However, as a congregation, we still lack such a policy.

As we celebrate the 192nd anniversary of the founding of the congregation on November 23, 2024, it would be appropriate to have something meaningful to mark this important moment. Therefore, the General Council has developed Guidelines for the protection of children, adolescents and vulnerable persons. The main purpose of those Guidelines is to enable the sisters to prevent abuse

and all forms of violence wherever they serve, and to provide protection for victims of abuse and violence, particularly children, adolescents and vulnerable persons.

Those Guidelines, however, do not provide a detailed description, as we realize that guidelines cannot be equally applied in all parts of the congregation. Thus, it is expected that each province or region will develop more detailed recommendations and adjust them to the situation and conditions of their respective environment.

Our greetings and prayers,

Sr. Sofiani Warasi
Sr. Elisângela Ferreira Belo
Sr. Amy Gitana
Sr. Miranda Situmorang

I. SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND VULNERABLE PERSONS

I make a heartfelt appeal for an all-out battle against the abuse of minors both sexually and in other areas, on the part of all authorities and individuals, for we are dealing with abominable crimes that must be erased from the face of the earth: this is demanded by all the many victims hidden in families and in the various settings of our societies.

(Pope Francis - 24 February 2019)

The SCMM Congregation would like to introduce the following Guidelines for Safeguarding of Children, Adolescents, and Vulnerable Persons to encourage Provinces and Regions and their ministries to counter and respond to the abuse of children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons, by creating their own Safeguarding Policy. The guidelines aim to further develop, in each Province and Region, a culture where the protection of children and vulnerable persons from abuse is embedded

in the daily thinking and practice of Sisters, association members, ministry staff, volunteers, and all those who engage with us. The SCMM Sisters' Guidelines are designed to:

- Prevent the abuse of children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons;
- Promote a culture of awareness of the abuse and protection of children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons;
- Promote the empowerment of children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons in our Provinces, Regions and SCMM Ministries, so that they may feel safe and protected from harm;
- Encourage and facilitate reporting of cases of abuse of children, adolescents and vulnerable persons as they occur; and
- Improve the response to any allegations of abuse of children, adolescents and vulnerable persons.

These guidelines are consistent with the essential principles that govern the approach to the safeguarding of children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons in all SCMM Ministries. The Gospel commandments of mercy, truth, justice, freedom and reconciliation underpin these

Guidelines. The following Guidelines stem from the conviction that the rights of children, adolescents and vulnerable persons should be promoted and protected, that they should be treated equally with love and respect, and that their personal dignity should be preserved. The SCMM Sisters and Ministries are committed to nurturing the well-being of all children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons in their care, respecting their dignity, ensuring their safety, and protecting them from harm, exploitation and abuse.

1. Background to the SCMM Sisters' Safeguarding Guidelines

Guidelines for the Safeguarding of Children, Adolescents, and Vulnerable Persons are new to the SCMM Congregation. While this issue has often been discussed in recent years, particularly by Pope Francis during his visits and audiences, SCMM is still to implement a policy in the area. During the meeting of International Union of Superiors General (UISG) on November 6-10, 2023, in Rome, the topic of safeguarding was seriously examined, with a view to achieving the following objectives:

- To provide formation on the next steps in creating a culture of protection through safeguarding and prevention;
- To provide information on the abuse of children and vulnerable adults, including religious sisters and young people in formation;
- To listen to victims/survivors of abuse who share their stories;
- To learn about prevention of abuse: education, recruitment, importance of policies, and implementation;
- To explore ways of responding to issues related to abuse, including responding to allegations, the place of civil and canon law, care of those affected by abuse, communication with others.

From its very beginning, our congregation has emphasized the provision of services to children and women, especially the poor and marginalized. We have strived to create a safe environment for children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons in our ministry and to minimize the possibility of abuse to date. Along with the emphasis by Pope Francis as the supreme leader of the Catholic Church, and following the meeting of UISG, we are

committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons under our care by doing our best to champion their rights and protect them from all forms of harm, exploitation and abuse. This document provides a set of guidelines aimed at protecting children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons.

2. Guiding Principles

Our Guidelines for the Safeguarding of Children, Adolescents, and Vulnerable Persons reflect the Gospel values of freedom, justice, and respect for all people, especially children and adolescents. These guidelines drive our belief that the rights of all children should be promoted and protected, that all children should be treated equally with love and respect, and that their dignity as human beings shall be preserved. Children are the most vulnerable group in any society and can easily become targets for victimization, exploitation and abuse. Their safety and protection will always be our top priority while under our care. We subscribe to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC – United Nations, 1989) which sets out standards to ensure the rights of all children.

The Convention has been ratified by almost all countries in the world, thus enjoying worldwide recognition and support. We reaffirm our commitment to uphold the rights for all children and to pay special attention to the children under our care in our provincial and regional ministries. Article 19 of the UNCRC clearly states the responsibilities of Governments and other agencies working with children: “Governments (and other organizations responsible for the care, development and welfare of children) shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or torture, neglect or maltreatment, abuse or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parents, legal guardians or other persons having custody of the child.”

3. Scope and Application

The SCMM Congregation Guidelines apply to all SCMM Sisters, SCMM Ministry staff, Provincial and Regional employees, associate members, and volunteers. The Guidelines are formulated in such a way that they are relevant and achievable in each Province and Region. While compliance with these SCMM Congregation

Guidelines is mandatory, the obligations described are based on principles and are designed to be applied flexibly. These Guidelines apply to every Province and Region around the world; however, as each Province and Region operates in a different jurisdiction, it is not appropriate, or even possible, to take a “one size fits all” approach. We therefore recognize that, while each Province and Region, along with their ministries, are required to comply with these Guidelines, their obligations may vary according to their location and the services they provide. There are significant differences in local practices and situations; however, although these Guidelines are adapted to fit the local context in which they are to be enforced, the principles underlying these Guidelines must always be observed, to ensure that children are always protected.

4. Adopting a Definition of Child Abuse

The definition of child abuse and the different legal obligations with respect to reporting child abuse vary according to the Province and Region. In order to respect compliance with local legislation and to avoid conflict or misunderstandings, each Province and Region, as well at

the SCMM Ministries, is free to adopt the legal definitions established in their respective places.

II. THE SCMM SISTERS' GUIDELINES

Guideline 1

Introducing a policy on “Safeguarding of Children, Adolescents, and Vulnerable Persons”

Each SCMM Province and Region shall draft their own policy on “Safeguarding of Children, Adolescents, and Vulnerable Persons”. This is a requirement set down by the Congregation, and this policy must comply with both civil and church requirements. The policy shall define and communicate the expectations and norms required of all those working with minors in the Province and Region. The policy shall require that each ministry within the Province and Region be covered by a safeguarding policy.

Following this Guideline, each Province shall:

- Draft a Policy to be discussed and formally approved by the General Council and to be considered a policy document of the Province and Region;
- Publish the Provincial or Regional Policy and make it available to all Sisters, lay people, workers and volunteers within the respective Province or Region, and promote its content in all Province and Region

ministries that deal with minors and in Sisters' communities;

- Enforce compliance of the Policy adopted by the Province or Region by all Sisters, laypeople, workers, volunteers and SCMM Sister candidates, according to the Congregation's Guidelines;
- Review the Provincial or Regional Policy at the beginning of the mandate of the Provincial and Regional Council (i.e. every four years) and introduce the necessary amendments whenever significant changes to the Province or Region or to local legislation require it;
- Clarify the purpose of the Policy: background, lines of action, implementation and appendices such as a glossary of the definitions of abuse and mistreatment, as set down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Make the Policy available in the official language of each Province or Region.

Guideline 2

Customizing the Guidelines to different settings

Our Province and Region ministries operate in a number of different cultural contexts and hence can have different interpretations and approaches to child safeguarding. Sometimes, there are different interpretations of what characterizes child abuse. The Guidelines should be applied sensibly to each particular culture, always condemning all practices that are damaging to children. Priority must be given to the well-being of the child.

Following this Guideline, each Province and Region shall:

- Require that all ministries be aware of the legal framework, the social context and attitudes regarding the safeguarding of children in their respective places of work;
- Include, in the Policies of the Province, Region and its ministries, relevant articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CDN), ensuring that those are clearly identified as the basis for safeguarding of the children;
- Adopt the principles and values stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the SCMM principles and values as a point of reference for determining what constitutes appropriate behavior in a particular context, and what is not.

Guideline 3

Communicating the ‘keep children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons safe’ message

The policies and procedures laid down by the Province, Region and their ministries to keep children safe will only be effective if people are aware of them and have the opportunity to express their views on how they are working. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the leader of the Province, Region or Ministry to ensure adequate communication, so that everyone in the Province, Region, or ministry become aware of the safeguarding policies geared towards the protection of children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons. This responsibility may be assigned to the delegate in charge of the Safeguarding of Children, Adolescents, and Vulnerable Persons.

Following this Guideline, each Province and Region shall:

- Ensure that information about the commitment to keeping children safe is clearly displayed and accessible to everyone. Consideration should be given to posting this information on the Province, Region and/or Ministry website or other media platforms;
- Ensure that children are listened to and are made aware of their right to be protected against abuse;

- Ensure that information meant to the children and their parents/guardians is made available, including instructions on where to go for help in case of child abuse;
- Ensure that information is made available in a format and language that can be easily understood by everyone, including children;
- Ensure that everyone in the Province, Region and/or respective ministries knows who is responsible for child safeguarding and how to this person can be reached;
- Ensure that contact details on safeguarding services, such as advocacy services, national authorities, emergency medical help and local telephone helplines are readily available to all.

Guideline 4

Education and training for safeguarding of children

This Guideline ensures a series of learning opportunities for Sisters and well as those individuals engaged in Province and Region ministries, in order to acquire and enhance the necessary attitudes, skills and knowledge related to the safeguarding of children. The

Province or Region has an obligation to ensure that all Sisters (except those exempt for health reasons) and lay people in Province and Region ministry dealing with children are duly trained in child safeguarding. It requires that Province and Region ministries dealing with children bear the responsibility for providing training and development opportunities to the Sisters and ministry's staff with regard to keeping children safe.

Following this Guideline, each Province and Region shall:

- Ensure that the Sisters and candidates received holistic on-going formation on sexuality, including the affective, spiritual, psychological and physical elements, as well as education in healthy celibate chastity. This initial and on-going formation should include a “mentoring” program to support our Sisters in their understanding and acceptance of who they are, while sexual beings loved by God;
- Ensure that the Sisters and all those who serve in Province and Region ministries involving children, adolescents, and vulnerable persons receive training in safeguarding, including an introduction and on-going education on policy and procedures in the area of safeguarding of children, adolescents, and vulnerable

persons, including training on how to recognize and respond to concerns of child abuse;

- Ensure that as part of their education, children are provided information on keeping themselves safe. This is the responsibility of the leader of the Province and Region ministry.
- Ensure that all staff members and volunteers who have a responsibility to keep children safe should be provided with the appropriate training in child safeguarding.
- Ensure that training is provided to those responsible for dealing with complaints and disciplinary procedures related to cases of child abuse and inappropriate behavior towards children.

Guideline 5

Ensuring access to advice and support

Child abuse is distressing and can be difficult to deal with. The Province and Region leadership team and its ministry leaders have a duty to ensure that advice and support is available to help people play their part in safeguarding children and vulnerable persons. Children need someone to turn to if they are being abused, as do victims of historical abuse, as they often ignore where to go

for help. The Province and Region, therefore, should appoint a Child Safeguarding Delegate to be in charge of this area. Each local ministry leader may choose to delegate his/her responsibility in safeguarding children to a local child safeguarding coordinator in that ministry. The Province and Region shall provide the adequate training to the Province and Region Child Safeguarding Delegate allowing the Delegate to perform his/her job effectively, including the necessary education and support in responding to allegations of abuse. The leader of each Province and Region ministry shall provide the same training if he/she has appointed a local child safeguarding coordinator. Those are the individuals to whom the children who suffer abuse or are victims of historical abuse can report when they are in need of help and guidance. It is important to stress that, whenever dictated by law and/or by the protocol of the Province, Region/Ministry's Safeguarding Policy, the competent civil authorities are to be notified of any past or current allegation of abuse.

Following this Guideline, each Province and Region shall:

- Ensure that the every Province, Region and their ministries publish the name of the person to whom children and adults can go for help and advice;
- Ensure that all Sisters and/or staff members with responsibilities for safeguarding of children know where to seek expert advice, support and information on child safeguarding;
- Ensure that contacts are established at a national and/or local level with the relevant child safeguarding or welfare agencies that may provide information, support and assistance to children and staff;
- Ensure that appropriate follow-up of the victim and/or those filing a complaint is provided during and after every incident, complaint or allegation of abuse.

Guideline 6

Responding to allegations of abuse

In the process of responding to allegations of abuse, the policies and protocols shall always ensure a victim-focused approach. To ensure this approach in dealing with victims, the 3- step sequence of acknowledgement, apology and compensation is advised. Clear procedures and guidance help guarantee a prompt response to concerns about a

victim's safety and welfare. They also help the Province and Region to meet any pastoral, legal or procedural requirements. Thus, this Province and Region policy outlines what must be done when an allegation of abuse is made (whether the incident is past or present). By establishing guidelines for responding to child abuse, the Province and Region ensure that child-safeguarding procedures are available to everyone (i.e. to all the Sisters and leadership teams of Province and Region ministries that deal with children) and are actively promoted. Consideration should be given to language, different ways of communicating and making sure that everyone is able to easily access information. In every instance, the reporting of a current or historical case of abuse needs to be taken seriously. This Guideline is applicable to all individuals involved in SCMM life and ministry. This includes, but is not limited to, Sisters, associate members, lay staff in ministry, and volunteers. It is also important that, when dealing with cases of sexual abuse, we understand that we are dealing with criminal behavior. Therefore, Provincial and Regional Leaders and their respective councils as well as ministry leaders need to have a clear understanding of their legal liabilities in their respective countries.

Following this Guideline:

Where the reported abuse involves a child who is still considered a minor, each Province and Region shall abide by the laws of the country, particularly where there is a requirement of mandatory reporting. If the country does not have a legal requirement of mandatory reporting of sexual abuse of a minor, the following are required:

- Each ministry should appoint a suitably trained person to assist the individual reporting the case; this person is the Ministry's Delegate for Children, Adolescents, and Vulnerable Persons Safeguarding;
- The role of this individual should be made public. Everyone should know who the Delegate for child safeguarding is;

Every Province and Region should draft and communicate a proper protocol to be followed whenever such an allegation is made.

The protocol:

- ✓ Describes steps to be taken to ensure the safety of the child;
- ✓ Describes appropriate steps to record the allegation that is supportive of the victim and ensures the victim's safety;

- ✓ Ensures that the victim receives the necessary assistance and support to deal with the trauma;
- ✓ Includes reporting the abuse to the parents or legal guardians (if a minor reports abuse in the family, then appropriate steps must be taken to ensure the safety of the child; in this case, it may not be appropriate to report the abuse to the parents);
- ✓ Ensures that records of each allegation are kept confidentially and in a secure location;
- ✓ Ensures that the allegation is followed through in a timely manner, and that the victim and their family are kept informed of the progress.

Guideline 7

Monitoring the implementation of the Guidelines

Once the Province and Region policy has been finalized and communicated to all those involved in SCMM life and mission, the implementation of the policy needs to be monitored. Monitoring procedures are essential to ensure that the policy is being followed. IN order to guarantee that effective monitoring procedures are in place, the Province and Region may need to resort to specialized external expertise. The appropriate provincial and regional authorities monitor the implementation of the Guidelines in

each ministry. This ensures that all guidelines are being implemented by every ministry and SCMM Sister formation house.

Following this Guideline, each Province and Region shall:

- Draw a plan, which includes regular monitoring visits organized by the provincial and regional authorities. The visits should take place at least once every two years.
- Allocate the human and financial resources necessary for monitoring the policy implementation;
- Ensure consultation with children and vulnerable adults to assess how safe they feel in our place of ministry, and to determine what must be done in case of a complaint, as part of the monitoring visit;
- Ensure that each ministry holds regular team meetings (those responsible for child safeguarding in the ministry with the ministry leadership) to provide an opportunity for ongoing review;
- Keep confidential and secure records of the monitoring visits.
- Provide a report on compliance to the ministry and to the provincial and regional leadership, at the end of the visit;

- Ensure that policies and practices are reviewed at the beginning of the mandate of the Provincial and Regional councils and revised as needed, in light of changes in legislation, guidance and practical experience within the Province and Region. In this revision process, the involvement of appropriate stakeholders is necessary.

The above Safeguarding Guidelines shall function as the basis for creating Safeguarding Policies in all parts of the SCMM Congregation and its Ministries. We hope that these Safeguarding Guidelines will enable the Provinces and Regions to secure their own Safeguarding Policies, which may function as a tool to help us to save children, youth, and vulnerable persons victims of abuse wherever we serve. May we be an extension of God's hands in helping and rescuing those who are victims, because they have the same rights as we do to justice, freedom, love, security, and mercy.