



Dominican Sisters of St Joseph External Safeguarding Policy

Introduction

The Dominican Sisters of St Joseph (henceforth 'the Sisters', 'we' or 'us') are an active congregation of diocesan right in the Diocese of Portsmouth who serve the Church through a preaching apostolate of adult faith formation delivered both in-person and online. We are contracted to the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) for our safeguarding provision.

In our work, we abide by the following Safeguarding Policy. This Policy is designed to protect children, and vulnerable adults, and all those with whom we come into contact in our apostolic work from all forms of abuse. It also provides the sisters, and those with whom we collaborate, with a clear pathway for the reporting of allegations and incidents.

We are committed to the One Church Approach to safeguarding. We demonstrate that commitment by following this policy, by ensuring a swift and compassionate response to victims and survivors, and by developing and reforming our practice of safeguarding when necessary. In addition, we have an internal policy to ensure the physical and psychological safety of sisters within the community.

This Safeguarding Policy is in accordance with the [CSSA eight standards for safeguarding](#).

Scope

This policy applies to:

- all sisters of the Dominican Sisters of St Joseph, including those in formation
- all those who collaborate with the sisters in work delivered through their apostolate, Light of Truth (henceforth LOT), on either a paid or a voluntary basis.

The abuse referred to in this policy may be physical, sexual, emotional or spiritual abuse, and includes abuse by neglect.

Definitions

A **child** is any person under the age of 18.

A **vulnerable adult** is any person aged 18 or over whose specific physical, psychological or cognitive needs place them at increased risk of abuse or neglect.

In our work, we take into account Vos Estis Lux Mundi's definition of a vulnerable adult as '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 offence' while recognising this is not a legal definition.

Abuse is any act of intentional harm perpetrated against a person on a physical, sexual, emotional or spiritual level, either once or repeatedly. **Neglect** is a lack of care and attention leading to physical and emotional harm. Abuse can be **spiritual** in instances when religious language and ideas are used to coerce, demean or manipulate a person, or financial in instances when a person is coerced into making financial choices that harm themselves or others.

Whistleblowing refers to the disclosure of malpractice and illegal acts or omissions within an organisation which, in our context, refers to both the common life of the convent and also our apostolic work in-person or online faith formation events.

Safeguarding Lead

The Safeguarding Lead for the community is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the safeguarding policy is comprehensively followed
- Implementing agreed changes to the safeguarding policy
- Receiving and promptly responding to safeguarding concerns and allegations
- Giving a regular safeguarding report to the conventual Chapter
- Ensuring the safeguarding training schedule is kept
- Maintaining a secure and up-to-date record of safeguarding documentation

The Safeguarding Lead is a conventual office whose conditions of appointment, removal and duration are the same as other conventual offices.

The Safeguarding Lead is answerable to the conventual Chapter and to the Prioress.

The current Safeguarding Lead is Sr Carino Hodder OP.

Training

The sisters undergo safeguarding training appropriate to their role, provided by the Religious Life Safeguarding Service. The minimum standards for safeguarding training are:

- Prioress: RLG Lead Training
- Safeguarding Lead: Safeguarding Lead Training
- Conventual Council: Trustee Training
- Sisters, including those in formation, actively involved in apostolic work: Advanced Safeguarding Training
- Sisters, including those in formation, not actively involved in apostolic work: Basic Safeguarding Training

These courses will normally be undertaken once every three years, supplemented by yearly refresher training.

In addition, the sisters also undertake regular training related to recognising and responding to spiritual abuse within community life.

Those who collaborate with the sisters through LOT are informed of the key principles of safe conduct as part of their recruitment process and are encouraged to undertake safeguarding training through their parish or diocese.

Apostolic Work

The Sisters deliver both formation courses, primarily our online Certificate in Catechesis, and individual formation sessions. These take place in a variety of locations at the request of parishes, schools, dioceses and other organisations or groups.

In addition, individual sisters undertake work of spiritual direction and accompaniment in the public areas of the convent.

Procedures relevant to the Certificate in Catechesis have been excerpted from this policy and included in the Student Handbook.

Procedure for sisters participating in events outside the convent

Before the event, the sister with overall responsibility for the work will contact the leader/organiser to:

- Ascertain the organisation or group understands that, given the event is taking place on their premises, they have overall responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of attendees (if children or vulnerable adults will be present)
- Liaise with the designated Safeguarding Lead or equivalent role (if deemed necessary)
- If necessary (that is, if the sisters themselves are sharing the responsibility for planning and organising the event with the leader/organiser) request a copy of the risk assessment and safeguarding policy relevant to the event, to ensure compliance

Sisters can also visit individuals in their home to provide accompaniment or formation. Such visits are distinct from informal visits undertaken by a sister in a personal capacity. During such visits, sisters will ensure that:

- Any children present are at all times accompanied by a parent or guardian.
- No personal care is undertaken for vulnerable adults which would usually be undertaken by a carer.
- Any allegations of abuse or maltreatment made by a child or adult in the course of these visits are dealt with according to the reporting procedure set out in this safeguarding policy.
- The purpose of the visit and the scope of the subject matter to be discussed are clearly understood by the person being accompanied and/or formed, so as to maintain appropriate personal boundaries.
- Personal discretion is exercised in determining the frequency and duration of such visits.

Procedure for groups visiting the convent

Before the event, the sister with overall responsibility for the work will contact the leader/organiser to confirm that:

- The organisation/group has viewed the convent risk assessment.
- The organisation/group is aware of the safeguarding requirements with which we expect the group to be compliant.

- The organisation/group accepts that they have overall responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of their members and, in particular, are responsible for supervising any children in their group during breaktimes and mealtimes.

The sister will also provide the group leader with access to a shared file in which names and contact details for the group can be logged. On the day itself, the sister will ascertain and record the precise number of group members.

Procedure for individuals visiting the convent

Individuals can visit the convent for a retreat or a period of vocational discernment, either for a day or for a longer residential stay.

During their stay, retreatants will be the responsibility of the Guest Mistress, who will liaise with the Safeguarding Officer in individual cases if necessary.

Potential guests who may pose a risk to others or who are particularly at risk themselves will have their visit risk assessed by the Safeguarding Officer. If a potential guest's needs or likely risk are judged to be disproportionate, or unable to be accommodated by the convent, the Prioress has the right to decline their request to stay.

For the purposes of safeguarding, guests are required to sign in on first arriving at the convent and, if on a residential stay, each time they leave the premises.

Procedure for online events

The platform used for LOT online events, including our Certificate in Catechesis, is Zoom.

All Zoom meetings are set up using a specific LOT Zoom account and never an individual's personal Zoom account. The Safeguarding Lead will ensure that the Zoom moderator for each session is aware of their responsibility to ensure the Zoom meeting is safeguarding compliant.

Before the online event (or before the first session of the course if it is a multi-session course), the sister primarily responsible for organising the course will:

- Send a basic Participants' Code of Conduct to registered participants, so that they are aware of standards of behaviour on this Zoom and the steps that will be taken if this Code of Conduct is breached. (For the Certificate in Catechesis, this is accessed through the Student Handbook.
- Ask participants to provide details of any additional needs that they feel may be relevant to their participation in this course - for instance, physical or cognitive disabilities and/or emotional/psychological difficulties. For the Certificate in Catechesis, this is done through the enrolment form.

Links to Zoom meetings are given only to those who have registered for the meeting and are not made publicly available.

Every Zoom meeting has the 'Waiting Room' function enabled and participants are only admitted to the meeting if immediately identifiable by their first and last name.

Any participant engaging in inappropriate behaviour (such as exposure and foul or abusive language) will be immediately removed from the meeting by the moderator.

Inappropriate behaviour is to be logged after the event in the LOT Safeguarding Concerns Log so that any necessary action can be taken.

In addition to the stipulations outlined above, the following applies to meetings in which children are present:

- For Zoom meetings aimed primarily at adults, participants under the age of 18 are to be accompanied by a responsible adult who is in the room with them while they are participating in the Zoom meeting.
- For meetings aimed primarily at children, two responsible adults must be present in the meeting at all times, including in breakout rooms.
- The parents/guardians of participants under the age of 18 are to be informed of: the nature and purpose of the Zoom event in which their child is participating; the number of other participants in the meeting and what information about their child these participants will be privy

to (name and visual image); the names and contact details of the adults responsible for safeguarding compliance.

- Participants under the age of 18, and their parents/guardians, should be made aware that they are permitted to turn off their camera if they do not wish to be visible to other participants.

Sisters may also undertake one-to-one spiritual direction and accompaniment over Zoom or a similar platform such as GoogleMeet. It is not necessary for sisters to observe these same directives in organising and undertaking one-to-one accompaniment online. Nevertheless, sisters have a responsibility to safeguard the privacy of their directees.

Recruitment

All those who collaborate in events organised by the sisters, whether in-person or online, and whether in a paid or a voluntary capacity, undergo the following process of checking and recruitment:

- Read and sign the Volunteer Agreement form
- Sign and read this Safeguarding Policy

If assisting with an in-person event in a school in which children are present, they are also required to obtain an Enhanced DBS check in line with both statutory and Church requirements.

Work requiring a DBS check will not be undertaken until the DBS check has been received.

Reporting

The sisters are committed to full cooperation and transparency with statutory agencies to ensure safeguarding allegations are promptly reported and thoroughly investigated.

Reporting procedures are to be applied in all situations where it is alleged, or there are reasonable grounds to believe, that a sister or a person collaborating with the sisters in our apostolic work has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed, or is likely to have caused harm, to a child or vulnerable adult, whether that vulnerability is permanent or transient
- committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or a vulnerable adult

- behaved towards others in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to others
- behaved in a way or made statements indicating that they may be unsuitable to work with children or vulnerable adults
- behaved in a way that suggests they intend to interfere with, prejudice, undermine or avoid a criminal, civil or canonical investigation involving the sisters and their work

It is the policy of the Catholic Church in England and Wales to report to statutory authorities all cases where a person is at immediate risk of harm, or currently experiencing harm, from somebody who does not hold a role within the Church. This includes:

- Someone who is at serious risk of harm from self or others
- Someone who poses a serious risk of harm to someone else
- A concern about a child or adult at risk of harm from someone else
- Serious concerns over a person's mental capacity

The following procedure will be observed when an incident of abuse has been alleged to have taken place:

Emergency incident

- If a person is in immediate danger, at imminent risk or requires medical attention, the relevant emergency service will be contacted via 999. Social Services should also be contacted at the earliest opportunity in the case of a child or vulnerable adult.
- Following the incident, the RLSS should be contacted as soon as possible and provided with a detailed account of the incident.

Non-emergency incident

- The person who witnessed the incident or received the allegation will inform the Safeguarding Lead, who will make a referral to the RLSS.
- The RLSS will advise as to which statutory bodies should be contacted and, if necessary, make the referral on the sisters' behalf.
- If the incident is judged to require immediate referral, the Safeguarding Lead does not need to be informed beforehand, as long as they are made aware as soon as possible afterwards.

During a safeguarding investigation

- While an investigation is ongoing, the accused person (respondent) is to be suspended from all involvement in the sister's apostolic work.
- If an allegation of sexual, physical or emotional abuse is proven to be true, the respondent is to be immediately barred from all involvement in the sister's apostolic work.
- The sisters acknowledge a duty of care towards both the alleged victim of a safeguarding incident and the respondent/s.

Sisters and those involved in their apostolic work are aware that:

- No allegation of abuse is to be trivialised, ignored or dismissed.
- They do not have the authority to initiate an investigation into a safeguarding allegation independently, even if they were the person to whom the allegation was made.
- The allegation is not to be discussed with the accused person outside of a formal investigation, and never before the allegation has been reported.

It is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Lead to ensure an accurate record is kept of the incident and its reporting.

Whistleblowing

In accordance with the principles of transparency and accountability, the sisters encourage and enable anyone who wishes to make a qualifying disclosure related to the sisters to do so without fear of victimisation or disadvantage. This applies both to the sisters themselves and to those with whom we collaborate.

A qualifying disclosure is a disclosure made in good faith by a person who has reasonable belief that a safeguarding incident, or the concealment of such an incident, is, has been, or is likely to take place either within the convent or in the course of our apostolic work.

The sisters confirm that there is no penalty for raising concerns, though allegations made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain will result in the person's involvement in the sister's apostolic work being reassessed. No action will be taken against a person who makes an allegation in good faith which is subsequently not confirmed by investigation.

A qualifying disclosure should in the first instance be made to the Safeguarding Lead, who will act on the concern. However, this may be deemed to be inappropriate due to their alleged involvement in the incident. In that situation, and depending on the gravity and nature of the alleged concern, the disclosure can be made to:

- The Prioress
- The Bishop of Portsmouth
- The RLSS

The disclosure can be made either in writing or verbally. Regardless of the authority to whom the disclosure is first made, the RLSS will be informed to oversee the process of investigation and determine the appropriate action to be taken. They will also provide written feedback on this process.

Matters raised in a qualifying disclosure may be subject to:

- internal investigation by the sisters, overseen by the RLSS
- referral to statutory authorities such as police or social services
- consideration under canon law
- notification to insurers and/or the Charities Commission.

If urgent action by statutory authorities is required, this will be taken before any investigation is conducted. Subject to legal constraints, the person who makes the disclosure will be informed of the outcome of any investigation.

Communication

Safeguarding procedures which apply to the public spaces of the convent and/or to our apostolic work will be communicated to the public in the following ways:

- Safeguarding policy made available on our main website and LOT website
- Safeguarding statement on our main website
- Safeguarding information poster prominently displayed in public spaces
- Safeguarding policy included in the Student Handbook distributed to Certificate in Catechesis students

The key information communicated to the public will be:

- The location of the public spaces of the convent

- Expected standards of behaviour in the public spaces of the convent
- Contact details of the Safeguarding Lead and RLSS

Public Spaces

The sisters reside at St Dominic's Priory, Lymington, SO41 8NH, in the Diocese of Portsmouth. The following areas of the property are designated as public spaces in which worship and formation events open to the public take place:

- Chapel
- Porch
- Dining room
- Front room
- Hallway, with toilet
- Guest wing, comprising bedrooms and bathrooms/toilets

The rest of the house is within the conventual enclosure and is designated a private space. Persons who are not members of the community do not normally have access to this area and enter only under specific circumstances at the authority of the Prioress. No events open to the public take place within the private area.

Events taking place in the public spaces of the convent are risk assessed. No child should be present in the public spaces of the convent without an accompanying adult.

Any sister who observes inappropriate or concerning behaviour from an adult or child in one of these public spaces should report this concern to the Safeguarding Lead or directly to the RLSS.

The sisters will remove from public spaces, with the assistance of statutory authorities if necessary, any adult present in the public spaces of the convent deemed to be a safeguarding risk.

Masses and other liturgies

The Masses and other liturgies celebrated in the priory chapel are open to the public. Normally, they are offered by the sisters' chaplain, whose priestly ministry to the community is determined by written agreement.

When visiting priests celebrate Mass in the priory chapel, it is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Lead to seek assurance that they are priests in good standing with their ordinary and in possession of faculties for the public celebration of the sacraments.

Records and Data Security

The safeguarding lead holds primary responsibility for the management of safeguarding documentation. They also maintain the Safeguarding Action Plan which is updated on a regular basis.

Records of safeguarding incidents and allegations will include:

- details of how/when the concern or allegation was received.
- details of the incident or concern itself.
- relevant historical context
- any identified past and present risk factors
- any actions or investigation subsequently undertaken
- outcome of these actions.

The Safeguarding Lead will also keep an up-to-date record of:

- Evidence of safeguarding compliance for all sisters and those involved in our apostolic work
- DBS checks
- Safeguarding training undertaken

The Safeguarding Lead stores documentation in a suitable and easily retrievable format with a record of provenance and integrity, for ease of use in an audit, inquiry, investigation, or criminal proceeding. They will also abide by the general principles of the sisters' Data Security Policy.

Internal Safeguarding

The sisters also have an internal safeguarding policy to ensure that members of the community are protected against all forms of physical, psychological and spiritual maltreatment, including neglect, in their common life.

Policy Reviewal

This policy is reviewed once a year by the Chapter of the Dominican Sisters of St Joseph and updated as necessary. *Last updated March 2025.*