



**UNIVERSAL
GUIDELINES
FRAMEWORK**



**TUTELA
MINORUM**

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE
PROTECTION OF MINORS

MARCH 2024

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subject to periodic review



Guideline 1

Committed church leadership and culture

The safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults is embedded in the church's leadership, governance and culture.



Criteria

1.1 *The Church Authority publicly commits to safeguarding, with a zero-tolerance stance towards abuse.*

1.2 *The Church Body's governance structures are clear, transparent, and effective.*

Indicators

- 1.1.1** The church's Safeguarding Policy is formally approved and endorsed by the Church Authority.
- 1.1.2** The church's Safeguarding Commitment Statement is publicly available and is widely disseminated.
- 1.1.3** The Church Authority and church leaders promote and monitor their safeguarding culture, emphasising universal responsibility.

- 1.2.1** There are clear and transparent governance structures in place with defined roles and responsibilities for safeguarding accountability.
- 1.2.2** The Church Authority establishes a Safeguarding Committee at the leadership level, to oversee the effective implementation of safeguarding practices, policies, and procedures.
- 1.2.3** The Church Authority appoints a safeguarding Co-ordinator(s) with specific safeguarding roles and responsibilities.

Criteria

1.3

The Church Body upholds a defined Code of Conduct, outlining behavioural expectations for Church personnel.

1.4

The Church Body implements a risk management strategy across its ministries.

1.5

The Church Authority informs communities whilst respecting privacy, data protection and maintains thorough records.

1.6

The Church Authority ensures open and transparent communications relating to safeguarding.

Indicators

- 1.3.1** The Code of Conduct applies to all church personnel and provides guidance on appropriate and expected standards of behaviour.
- 1.3.2** The Code of Conduct is written in accessible language and made publicly available to all.
- 1.3.3** The Code of Conduct addresses the needs of diverse and vulnerable groups and outlines how power imbalances can occur in ministries.

- 1.4.1** There is a comprehensive safeguarding risk management plan across the Church Body's ministries.
- 1.4.2** Regular risk assessments and updates to the risk management strategy are undertaken.

- 1.5.1** Record keeping and Information sharing is governed by legal requirements, canon law, respect for privacy and best-practice procedures.
- 1.5.2** Information sharing and record keeping policies and procedures are documented and communicated to personnel.
- 1.5.3** There are clear communication strategies to inform communities about past abuses and ongoing support.

- 1.6.1** The Church Authority is responsible for ensuring all safeguarding communications, both internal and external, are executed with clarity, transparency, and inclusivity, addressing all requirements as specified throughout the UGF. This encompasses a comprehensive approach to safeguarding information dissemination across the whole church body.

Guideline 2

Safe environments

Physical and online environments promote safety and contain appropriate safeguards to minimise the opportunity for children and vulnerable adults to be harmed.



Criteria

2.1 *A comprehensive Safe Environment Program is implemented that addresses both physical and online risks.*

2.2 *Risk management plans address the range of settings, activities, and physical environments in which ministry occurs.*

Indicators

- 2.1.1** There is a documented Safe Environment Program for each ministry that is regularly reviewed.
- 2.1.2** Personnel access and use of online environments are in line with the Church Body's Code of Conduct and local laws.
- 2.1.3** The online environment is monitored, and breaches are managed in accordance with disciplinary procedures, or other relevant policies.

2.2.1 Both physical and online risks are assessed and managed within the provision of ministry, especially considering risks arising from:

- + one-to-one interactions between an adult and a child;
- + ministries such as counselling, home visits, outreach, one-to-one tuition, the sacrament of reconciliation, spiritual direction, and mentoring;
- + potential physical contact between the penitent and the confessor where the sacrament of reconciliation is celebrated;
- + one-to-one interactions with vulnerable adults;

Criteria

Indicators

2.3

Contracts with third parties regarding access and facility usage must include safeguarding clauses.

2.2.2 It is important to consider the nature of the relationship and the spaces where the interactions take place. Where possible interactions should occur in an open or visible space, or within clear line of sight of another adult.

2.2.3 Church Personnel are involved in identifying and mitigating physical and online risks to children and adults.

2.2.4 Church Personnel are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for children to express their views, participate in decision-making and raising their concerns.

2.2.5 A process is in place to assess and manage risk if the Church Body becomes aware of the presence of someone who poses an unacceptable risk to others within their ministry.

2.3.1 If a third party provides services or uses the Church Body's facilities, appropriate safeguarding policies and practices must be in place.

Guideline 3

Partnering with survivors, families and communities

Accompaniment to Victims/Survivors, their families and communities affected by abuse is prioritized and the Church Body actively reaches out to engage with the church community in safeguarding efforts.



Criteria

3.1 *The Church Authority ensures holistic, person-centred support to victims/survivors.*

3.2 *The Church Body has policies and procedures detailing support provided to victims/survivors and their families.*

Indicators

- 3.1.1** The Church Authority ensures there is outreach to victims/survivors and their families.
- 3.1.2** The Church Authority provides access to skilled professionals, who understand trauma and are competent in providing support and care to vulnerable people to provide support and guidance to victims/survivors.
- 3.1.3** Support provided to victims/survivors is holistic and should include access to counselling and spiritual guidance.

- 3.2.1** The Church Body has clear policies and procedures for reparation and redress.
- 3.2.2** There are clear communication channels established to provide victims/survivors and the broader community with information about safeguarding, avenues for reporting abuse, and how to seek help.

Criteria

3.3 *The Church partners with families and the church community, and informs them about the Church Body's operations and governance.*

Indicators

- 3.3.1** The Church Body encourages parents, carers and/or guardians to take an active role in monitoring the safety of those engaged in church activities, especially children and adults with diminished capacity.
- 3.3.2** Safeguarding information is provided and widely available, including contact details of the Safeguarding Committee and/or Safeguarding Co-ordinator(s).
- 3.3.3** Processes are in place to engage families, carers and communities about their views on safeguarding policies and practices.
- 3.3.4** Families, carers and communities are aware of the roles and responsibilities of personnel providing ministries directly to children and vulnerable adults.

Guideline 4

Complaints/allegation response and management

Processes for raising concerns and complaints are responsive, accessible and understood by children, adults, families, carers, communities, and personnel.



Criteria

4.1 *Processes for raising concerns and complaints are responsive, accessible and understood by children, adults, families, carers, communities, and personnel.*

Indicators

- 4.1.1** The Church Body has a comprehensive Complaints/Allegation Handling Policy, that is easily accessible and understandable.
- 4.1.2** There are clear procedures that provide step-by-step guidance on the response, action to be taken and who is responsible for different types of complaints, including:
 - + Breaches of Codes of Conduct;
 - + Disclosures, allegations, or concerns of current abuse of a child;
 - + An adult bringing forward a complaint of abuse suffered as a child; and
 - + An adult bringing forward a complaint of current or past abuse experienced as an adult by someone who is or was in service to the Church.
- 4.1.3** The Church Body's Complaints/Allegation Handling Policy outlines how perceived or actual conflicts of interest are managed.
- 4.1.4** The Church Body's Complaints/Allegation Handling Policy acknowledges that power imbalances may exist between the complainant and respondent and has strategies in place to address this.
- 4.1.5** The Church Body's Complaints/Allegation Handling Policy spells out who has responsibilities in relation to handling complaints and when procedures are enacted and timeliness of required actions to be taken.

Criteria

Indicators

Every allegation, suspicion, or concern is addressed promptly, thoroughly, and transparently.

4.2

- 4.1.6** Abuse complaints, incidents, allegations, disclosures, concerns and referrals are recorded, and confidential information is stored, protected and retained according to Church and local privacy laws.
- 4.1.7** The Complaints Handling Policy and procedures demonstrate how the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults are prioritised (the paramouncy principle).
- 4.2.1** The Church Body's Complaints Handling Policy ensures an initial risk assessment is conducted upon receiving an abuse complaint. This may include the temporary restriction of the respondent's duties and movements until the investigation process concludes.
- 4.2.2** The Church Body has clear policies and procedures to assess and manage risks to children and vulnerable adults following the conclusion of an allegation.
- 4.2.3** The Church Body's Complaints Handling Policy includes clear procedures for informing individuals about allegations made against them (including any risk-management measures), maintaining clear records of the steps taken in responding to and managing the complaint.
- 4.2.4** Complainants are responded to promptly and provided regular updates as to the progress of dealing with their complaint.
- 4.2.5** Whilst maintaining confidentiality and the rights of all involved, the Church Authority seeks to maintain transparency concerning the management of allegations, demonstrating how the process was communicated to relevant parties and any feedback received from involved parties regarding the process.
- 4.2.6** Clear support mechanisms are established for complainants that is trauma-informed and victim-centred, ensuring support and care is offered to any child or adult who has experienced or is alleging abuse.
- 4.2.7** Clear support mechanisms are established for individuals facing allegations, guaranteeing fairness and compassionate handling at every stage. Following the conclusion of investigations, the Church Authority is responsible for enacting suitable responses based on the findings, which includes measures for restoring the reputation of individuals implicated in false or vexatious complaints.

Criteria

Indicators

4.3

The Church Body reports allegations of abuse and cooperates with civil authorities.

- 4.2.8 The Church Authority must ensure the availability of trained and qualified personnel who are skilled in listening to allegations, performing canonical preliminary investigations, and managing associated risks.
- 4.2.9 Sharing information relating to complaints adheres to relevant Privacy legislation and Canon Law, respecting the reputation and privacy of both the complainant and the respondent during any investigation process.
- 4.2.10 The Church Body's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures empower and support personnel to raise, in good faith, concerns and allegations about unacceptable behaviour towards children and adults by other personnel and include provisions for the protection of whistle-blowers from prejudice, retaliation or discrimination.
- 4.2.11 When a complaint against a cleric, religious or lay Church official is upheld under a civil standard, the Church Body undertakes a risk management process to determine the appropriate action. A cleric may be prohibited from the exercise of public ministry from the beginning of the preliminary investigation.
- 4.2.12 Where an accused is convicted of a canonical delict relating to sexual abuse, the Church Authority impose the penalty correspondent to the sentence by the relevant Dicastery, which should include that the respondent is to be prohibited from the exercise of ministry.

- 4.3.1 All reports of sexual abuse should be reported to the civil authorities. The Church Body maintains documented evidence of their cooperation with civil authorities in responding to abuse allegations.
- 4.3.2 There are clear and accessible mechanisms in place to ensure the reporting of all abuse allegations to the appropriate civil and Church Authorities. This should stipulate reporting to the local Ordinary where the alleged events took place.
- 4.3.3 Each Metropolitan must put in place procedures for managing allegations against Bishops and Church Authorities. This includes actions or omissions which result in abuse, in line with VELM articles 6-17.

Guideline 5

Culturally responsive

Safeguarding policies and procedures are contextualised to the culture of the local church.



Criteria

Safeguarding protocols are adapted to the
5.1 *Church Body's unique cultural and social contexts.*

The diverse needs and situations of the local Church Body's community is acknowledged, respected, and incorporated into safeguarding approaches.
5.2

Indicators

5.1.1 Safeguarding policies and procedures (especially the Code of Conduct and complaints processes) are contextualized to the culture of the local Church, while aligning with universal principles (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), ensuring that the zero-tolerance approach to abuse is maintained within the local cultural context.

5.1.2 The Church Body's Safeguarding Policy and procedures demonstrate an understanding the diverse circumstances that increase the risk of abuse and implements strategies to address within their local context.

5.1.3 The Complaints Handling Policy and procedures address barriers that may prevent a disclosure of abuse being made; and that hinder personnel from recognising and responding appropriately.

5.2.1 The diverse needs of First Nations and Indigenous People, those living with disability, those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, children and adults who are unable to live in their home, and those of diverse sexuality, are addressed with a focus on empowerment and selfdetermination in the Church Body's safeguarding policies and procedures.

Criteria

Indicators

5.3

Training and support for church personnel is tailored to the cultural nuances of the region.

5.2.2 The Church Body actively seeks representation in safeguarding teams and decision-making processes from local cultural representatives and those of diverse cultural perspectives.

5.2.3 The Church Body has feedback mechanisms in place to gather insights from various community groups about their specific cultural, social, political, or economic safeguarding needs and experiences.

5.2.4 Upholding the dignity and rights of individuals, the Church Body's safeguarding policies and procedures respect and acknowledge local cultural practices, especially in the context of caring and supporting victims/survivors, along with the management of perpetrators.

5.3.1 The Church Body develops and delivers (or provides access to) training programs that are sensitive to the cultural nuances of the region.

5.3.2 The Church Body's safeguarding approaches are reviewed and revised to reflect the diversity within the local Church community.

5.3.3 There are continuous evaluation and improvement of training programs to ensure they remain relevant and effective across the different cultural contexts of the Church's ministries.

Guideline 6

Policies and procedures support the safety of children and adults

Policies and procedures document how the church is safe for children and vulnerable adults.



Criteria

6.1 *Policies and procedures are aligned with the Universal Guidelines Framework (UGF).*

6.2 *All safeguarding policies and procedures are easily accessible, comprehensible, and guided by best practice models.*

Indicators

6.1.1 The Church Body's policies and procedures address the UGF and are grounded in the fundamental principles of the Gospel and Catholic teaching.

6.1.2 All relevant policies and procedures reference appropriate safeguarding approaches, requirements, and responsibilities and can demonstrate alignment with the UGF.

6.1.3 The Church Authority and church leaders promote the UGF and enact all safeguarding policies and procedures.

6.2.1 Safeguarding policies and procedures are readily available and accessible to all personnel.

6.2.2 There is a process in place to develop and review safeguarding policies and procedures, that includes best-practices models and stakeholder consultation.

6.2.2 The Church Body has mechanisms in place to obtain the input and feedback from both church personnel in the development of their safeguarding policies and procedures.

Criteria

6.3 *Safeguarding implementation plans support personnel to understand and embody the Church Body's safeguarding ethos.*

6.4 *The perspectives of victims/survivors included in the policy-development processes.*

Indicators

6.3.1 There are processes in place to support the implementation and monitor progress of how safeguarding policies and procedures are being implemented.

6.3.2 Personnel are encouraged to reflect on their understanding and practical implementation of policies and procedures and provide feedback.

6.3.3 Upholding the dignity and rights of individuals, the Church Body's safeguarding policies and procedures respect and acknowledge local cultural practices, especially in the context of caring and supporting victims/survivors, along with the management of perpetrators.

6.4.1 The Church Body actively seeks to include victims/survivors in Safeguarding activities and the development of policies and procedures.

Guideline 7

People management

People working with children and adults are suitable, informed of their obligations, supervised and supported to reflect safeguarding values in practice.



Criteria

7.1 *A strong commitment to safeguarding underpins the church's recruitment.*

7.2 *All personnel participate in a safeguarding induction program.*

Indicators

7.1.1 The commitment to safeguarding and zero tolerance approach to abuse are explicit in advertising, screening, and recruitment for personnel.

7.1.2 Recruitment and screening procedures and processes are fully documented.

7.1.3 Positions are assessed for the expected level of contact with children and/or vulnerable adults and appropriate safeguarding recruitment procedures are implemented.

7.1.4 There is evidence of assessing the safeguarding suitability and obtaining background checks as part of the recruitment process for all church personnel.

7.1.5 There is documentation of compliance with relevant safeguarding laws and policies for all personnel prior to their engagement in a formal role.

7.2.1 All personnel participate in a safeguarding induction program that familiarises them with their safeguarding responsibilities and reporting obligations as soon as possible after commencement in a role.

7.2.2 The Church Authority and their leadership team undertake formation on their obligations to the UGF.

Criteria

7.3

Ongoing supervision and people management of church personnel includes an emphasis on safeguarding.

7.4

Before and during seminary and religious formation, candidates are appropriately screened and supported.

7.5

The transfer, movement, and credentialing of those in ministry is appropriately managed.

Indicators

7.3.1 Professional and ongoing supervision, mentoring, and annual performance reviews for all Church personnel includes a focus on safeguarding responsibilities.

7.3.2 Records of supervision and performance appraisals are maintained.

7.4.1 The Church Authority seeks professional support in screening candidates for seminary/formation programs and before ordination/profession of vows. This includes a responsibility to enquire if an applicant or candidate has previously withdrawn or been exited from another seminary or formation program.

7.4.2 Seminary and initial formation programs have robust screening processes for candidates, including external psychological and psychosexual assessments.

7.4.3 Ongoing integrated formation for clergy and religious addresses both the canonical and civil safeguarding requirements.

7.4.4 All clergy and religious in ministry, undertake ongoing professional development and participate in regular performance appraisals.

7.4.5 All newly ordained clergy and newly professed religious are supported with a suitable mentor for at least five years post ordination or final profession.

7.5.1 The Church Body has a system in place to assess the safeguarding credentials (good standing) and manage the movement of all seminarians, clergy, religious and lay ministers between different seminaries, formation programs, other Church entities (especially across international borders).

7.5.2 The Church Body maintains records of the assessment and monitoring of personnel moving across jurisdictions.

Criteria

7.6 *Where clergy and religious from other countries are recruited to ministry, programs are in place to support their inculturation.*

Indicators

- 7.6.1** Clergy and religious from other countries recruited to ministry are screened and good standing verification information is sought from the international Church Authority.
- 7.6.2** Clergy and religious from other countries participate in a safeguarding inculturation, that includes awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities, their professional supervision, and ongoing formation, which is documented and occurs as soon as possible after arrival.
- 7.6.3** Clergy and religious from other countries are supported with a suitable mentor for at least the first two years of their arrival and appointment.

Guideline 8

Ongoing education and formation

Personnel are equipped with knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and vulnerable adults safe through information, ongoing education and formation.



Criteria

8.1

All church personnel undertake formation and training programs to support the implementation of the UGF and the Church Body's safeguarding approaches.

8.2

Church personnel are supported to respond effectively to safeguarding risks, concerns, disclosures, and allegations of abuse.

Indicators

- 8.1.1** Regular training sessions are provided for church personnel, focusing on their safeguarding obligations.
- 8.1.2** Church personnel are well-versed in the UGF and the Church Body's-specific protocols to implement their safeguarding policies and procedures.
- 8.1.3** There is documented evidence of personnel participating information and training programs.

- 8.2.1** Church personnel participate in regular (annual) training that emphasises children's rights and addresses factors that may place children at risk of abuse, building knowledge to:
 - + Understand the nature and impact of child abuse;
 - + Understand the nature, factors, and impact of institutional abuse;
 - + Identify risk factors, such as grooming behaviours; and
 - + Understand, identify, and respond to abusive behaviours by a child towards another child.

Criteria

Indicators

8.3

Church Personnel are supported to recognise the factors that contribute to adult abuse, with a focus on vulnerable adults.

8.2.2 Specialised formation and ongoing development is provided to those in roles with safeguarding responsibilities, covering topics like:

- + Understanding abuse,
- + Risk assessment,
- + Civil and canon law requirements,
- + Reporting abuse,
- + Undertaking investigations, and,
- + Harmful behaviours exhibited by children.

8.3.1 Education and training programs include materials addressing factors that may place vulnerable adults at risk of abuse, building knowledge to:

- + Understand the nature and impact of adult abuse;
- + Understand the nature, factors, and impact of institutional abuse;
- + Identify risk factors, such as abuse of power, and exploitation;
- + Recognise how adults and institutions can be groomed, including how power imbalances can be exploited; and
- + Understand what could make specific adults at increased risk of abuse.

8.3.2 Education and training programs equip relevant personnel to appropriately respond to and support anyone bringing forward concerns, disclosures, and allegations of abuse.

8.3.3 Personnel receive training on information sharing and record keeping policies and procedures.

8.3.4 Personnel receive training on reporting obligations under Statutory/civil and canon law, which includes:

- + reporting suspected criminal behaviour to police; mandatory reporting requirements;
- + Reporting to regulatory authorities or government departments; and,
- + Canonical reporting requirements.

Criteria

Seminary and religious formation programs incorporate safeguarding curricula, preparing clergy

8.4 *and religious to understand and lead initiatives for safeguarding children and adults.*

Personnel receive training and information on how to build culturally safe environments for children and adults, being able to incorporate local cultural nuances in their safeguarding practices.

8.5

Indicators

- 8.4.1** Seminary and initial formation programs build candidates' knowledge and skills in a range of areas to build a culture of care and support safeguarding children and adults.
- 8.4.2** Seminary and initial formation programs include developing pastoral responses to victims and survivors of abuse.
- 8.4.3** Seminary and initial formation programs identify how to avoid abuse of power and the development and/or reinforcement of clericalist attitudes and behaviours.

- 8.5.1** Key personnel participate in training initiatives or programs to enable integration of local cultural elements into their safeguarding practices, without compromising safeguarding measures.
- 8.5.2** Where appropriate, cultural safety training is provided to equip personnel to create culturally safe environments for First Nations and Indigenous people.
- 8.5.3** Where appropriate, training is provided to relevant personnel to equip them with the knowledge and understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds and how to create safe environments for people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse groups.

Guideline 9

Informed and empowered people

Children and vulnerable adults are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.



Criteria

9.1 *There is active engagement and support provided to families and the church community on safeguarding.*

Indicators

- 9.1.1** The Church Body has (or provides access to) support programs for families and the community to build their safeguarding capacity, raising awareness of their responsibility in creating and maintaining a safe environment.
- 9.1.2** The Church Body has mechanisms in place to obtain feedback from families and communities on the effectiveness and accessibility of their safeguarding programs.
- 9.1.3** The Church Body makes available abuse prevention programs and safeguarding resources tailored to different age groups and contexts (such as protective behaviours programs).
- 9.1.4** The Church Body undertakes initiatives and programs to educate the community and raise awareness on the dignity and rights of all people.

Criteria

9.2 *The community, especially children and vulnerable adults engaged in the Church's activities are informed about their rights, including safety, decision-making, participation, and how a complaint will be managed.*

9.3 *The importance of friendships and social connections is recognised.*

Indicators

9.2.1 Information sessions and materials are provided to children and vulnerable adults on their rights, including safety, decisionmaking, and complaint management.

9.2.2 Processes are in place for transparent decision-making involving parents, guardians, carers, and communities, especially when decisions affect children or vulnerable adults.

9.2.3 The Church Body promotes child-centred and person-centred participatory practices in all safeguarding initiatives, ensuring cultural safety, accessibility, and inclusivity.

9.2.4 There are mechanisms in place for the participatory and inclusive engagement of all community members, including children, parents/carers, lay faithful, and church personnel insafeguarding efforts.

9.3.1 There are initiatives and programs in place that foster friendships, relationships, and social connections withinChurch activities.

9.3.2 The Church Body actively undertakes mechanisms to gauge the impact of these initiatives on community members, such as surveys or feedback sessions.

Guideline 10

Continuous improvement

The church regularly reviews and improves their systems for keeping children and adults safe.



Criteria

10.1 *The Church Authority and their leadership team refines and enhances their safeguarding approaches.*

10.2 *Concerns and complaints are analysed to identify potential systemic failures in safeguarding methods.*

10.3 *The Church Authority reports findings from safeguarding reviews.*

Indicators

10.1.1 The Church Authority monitors the implementation of the UGF and safeguarding practices, coordinating annual local selfassessment checks.

10.1.2 The Safeguarding Policy is subject to review at least every three years and outcomes of this review are documented.

10.1.3 Church leaders facilitate third-party audits and reviews of safeguarding policies and practices at least every five years.

10.2.1 All serious incidents or complaints of abuse are reviewed and considered by the leadership to identify inadequate safeguarding practices and/or failures, systemic issues, or patterns to support continuous improvement.

10.3.1 The findings of relevant reviews of safeguarding policies, procedures, and practices are reported to stakeholders.

10.3.2 The findings of audits or reviews undertaken relating to the implementation of the UGF are made publicly available.



Glossary of terms

The definitions of terms used in the Universal Guidelines Framework (UGF) need to consider the various local laws and relevant regulations that are in place, canon law and information from the Holy See. They utilise the extensive work of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and the Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse published by the United Nations in 2017.

The UGF glossary does not have any legal force and is meant only to serve as a reference tool for the UGF. All terms and definitions are to be read in the context of the UGF alone.

● Abuse

when used throughout the UGF document this is an inclusive term covering both child and adult abuse.

● Abuse of Power

means the abuse of position, function or duty to take advantage of another. This can take many forms and include situations where a person has power over another person by virtue of their relationship (e.g. employer and employee, teacher and student, coach and athlete, parent or guardian and child, clergy/ religious and parishioner) and uses that power to their advantage.

● Accessible language

means information is provided in multiple formats for individuals with different levels of English literacy and proficiency, modes of communication, languages, and cognitive abilities.

● Adult

means any person 18 years or older. When used throughout the UGF document this is an inclusive term referring to all adults, including vulnerable adults.

● Adult abuse

means the improper treatment of an adult that results in the actual and/or likelihood of causing physical or emotional harm. Abuse can come in many forms, such as: physical or verbal maltreatment, neglect, injury, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices, crimes, exploitation, or other types of aggression.

There are several categories of abuse of adults, such as:

- + Sexual abuse*
- + Physical abuse*
- + Emotional/psychological abuse*
- + Neglect*
- + Elder abuse*
- + Financial abuse*
- + Exploitation*

Within the context of the Catholic Church it is also important to recognize spiritual abuse* as an additional subtype of abuse.

● Allegation

means a complaint, still to be verified, claiming, or asserting that someone has committed an act of abuse against a child or adult. The term is used interchangeably and in combination with “complaint”.

● Audit

means a mechanism to assess how a Church Authority, ministry or Church Body governed by a Church Authority, is implementing the UGF.

● Bishop

means a diocesan bishop or archbishop, the ordinary of an Ordinariate and the prelate of a Personal Prelature of the Latin Church and an eparch of the Eastern Churches.

● Canon law

means the revised code of canon law promulgated by His Holiness Pope John Paul II in 1983 and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches as promulgated in 1990 and any other universal or legislation promulgated by the competent Church authority.

● Canonical Offence

means canonical crimes¹ of sexual abuse committed by clerics and religious, which are:

- + forcing someone, by violence or threat or through abuse of authority, to perform or submit to sexual acts;
- + performing sexual acts with a minor or a vulnerable person²;
- + the production, exhibition, possession or distribution, including by electronic means, of child pornography, as well as by the recruitment of or inducement of a minor or a vulnerable person to participate in pornographic exhibitions.

committed by clerics or religious as stated in Art. 1 §1 a) of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*.

● Child/ren

means individuals under 18 years of age.

● Child abuse

There are different legal definitions of child abuse across the world. Definition provided by the WHO and sourced from the Australian Institute of Family Studies:

<https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/what-child-abuse-and-neglect>

All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting 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 abuse and neglect is commonly divided into five subtypes:

- + physical abuse
- + emotional/psychological abuse
- + neglect
- + sexual abuse
- + exposure to family violence

Within the context of the Catholic Church it is also important to recognize spiritual abuse* as an additional subtype of abuse.

● Church Authority

means:

- + a diocesan bishop or archbishop, an ordinary of an Ordinariate and the prelate of a Personal Prelature of the Latin Church and an eparch of an Eastern Church.
- + the competent authority, howsoever titled, exercising the ministry of governance for religious institutes in accordance with their Constitutions;
- + for Ministerial Public Juridic Persons the competent authority in accordance with the statutes.
- + or the senior ecclesiastical authority of any other ministry within the Church Body in accordance with its rules.

● Church Body

means a diocese, religious institute, ministerial PJP (including their agencies) or association recognised as Catholic in accord with canon law.

● Church Protocols

means official procedures or system of rules which govern the affairs of the Catholic Church, for example, *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*.

¹ The canonical crimes/delicts/offences

² Definition of vulnerable person as stated in Art. 1§2 b) of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*: "means: 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". This definition is captured by the term 'Vulnerable Adult' within the UGF.

*See separate definitions in glossary

● Civil Standard

A civil standard (of proof) refers to the duty of the person responsible for proving the case. There are different standards of proof in different circumstances:

- + the most common standard of proof relates to civil proceedings, which is the balance of probabilities (incorporating the principles from *Briginshaw v Briginshaw*) – which means it is more probable than not that what the person says happened is true (in criminal cases, the standard is proof beyond reasonable doubt).

● Clergy

includes bishops, priests and deacons.

● Clergy and Religious from other countries

means any cleric or member of a religious institute who is specifically recruited or welcomed from overseas by a Church Authority or Church Body.

● Cleric

includes bishops, priests and deacons.

● Clericalist/ism

means an attitude toward clergy/religious characterised by an excessive deference and an assumption of their moral superiority. Pope Francis has said that it occurs when “clerics feel they are superior, [and when] they are far from the people.” It can be “fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons”.

● Cognitive impairment

means when a person has trouble remembering, learning new things, concentrating, or making decisions that affect their everyday life, because of their condition. Some causes of long-term or permanent cognitive impairment include dementia, stroke, or brain injury. For further information see:

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/cognitive-impairment>

Complainant

means any person who makes a complaint that may include any allegation, suspicion,

concern, or report of a breach of the Church Body’s Code of Conduct. A complaint may also include disclosures made to an institution that may be about, or relate to, abuse in the Church Body’s context.

● Conflicts of interest

means situations (perceived or actual) where a conflict arises between a person’s official duties and their private interests, which could influence the performance of those official duties. Such conflict generally involves opposing principles or incompatible wishes or needs and may occur when personnel function in multiple roles.

● Consecrated Life/Institute of Consecrated Life

is an association of faithful in the Catholic Church erected by canon law whose members profess the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience by vows or other sacred bonds (as defined in the Code of Canon Law under canons 573–730).

Apart from being a member of an institute, consecrated life may also be lived individually; the Catholic Church recognises, as forms of individual consecrated life that are not members of institutes, namely that of hermits and consecrated virgins.

● Cultural safety

means an environment that is safe for people of all ethnicities and cultural identities: where there is no assault, challenge, or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge, and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.

● Dicastery

means a department of the Roman Curia.

● Dignity or Right to Risk

refers to enabling individuals the right (or dignity) to take reasonable risks. It recognises that restricting this right can stifle the individual’s growth, self-esteem and the overall quality of life.



● Diminished capacity

means if an adult needs to make a decision and is unable to carry out any part of this process (as listed below), they have impaired decision-making capacity. There are three elements to making a decision:

- + understanding the nature and effect of the decision;
- + freely and voluntarily deciding; and
- + communicating the decision in some way.

● Diocese

means a diocese, archdiocese, ordinariate or personal prelate of the Latin Church and an eparchy of an Eastern Church.

● Disability (persons with)

means those who have physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (Article 2, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.)

● Diversity

means a range of people who have various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds and various lifestyles, experience, and interests.

● Diverse sexuality

refers to all the diversities of sex characteristics, sexual orientations, and gender identities, without the need to specify each of the identities, behaviours, or characteristics that form this plurality.

● Elder abuse

means a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person.

● Emotional abuse (adults)

is a common form of abuse that occurs in close relationships. Emotional abuse is defined as abuse that occurs when a person is subjected to behaviours or actions aimed at preventing or controlling their behaviour, with the intent to cause them emotional harm or fear, through manipulation, isolation, or intimidation.

● Emotional abuse (children)

Emotional abuse of children refers to a parent or caregiver's inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts towards a child and/or a pattern of failure over time to provide a child with adequate non-physical nurturing and emotional availability. Such acts of commission or omission are likely to damage a child's self-esteem or social competence.

● Exploitation

is the deliberate maltreatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over another person. It is taking advantage of another person or situation usually, but not always, for personal gain.

● Exposure to family violence

is generally considered to be a form of psychologically abusive behaviour, where a child is present (hearing or seeing) while a parent or sibling is subjected to physical abuse, sexual abuse, or psychological maltreatment, or is visually exposed to the damage caused to persons or property by a family member's violent behaviour.

● Financial abuse

involves the illegal or improper use or mismanagement of a person's money, property or resources. Stealing, fraud, forgery, embezzlement, forced changes to a will, inappropriate removal of a resident's decision-making powers and misuse of power of attorney are all forms of financial abuse or exploitation.

● Formation/program

means a program preparing individuals for ordination or profession of vows and a lifelong journey to the invitation of Christ to proclaim and live the Gospel message, within the life of the Church.

● Good Standing

A person in good standing is regarded as having complied with all their safeguarding obligations, and is not subject to any form of allegation, disciplinary process, sanction or suspension.



● **Grooming (child)**

refers to a pattern of behaviour aimed at engaging a child as a precursor to sexual abuse. It includes establishing a 'special' friendship/relationship with the child. Grooming can include the conditioning of parents and other adults to think that the relationship with the child is 'normal' and positive.

● **Grooming (adult)**

is the predatory act of maneuvering another individual into a position that makes them more isolated, dependent, likely to trust, and more vulnerable to abusive behaviour.

● **Guardian**

refers to the person(s) who has the legal authority to care for the personal and property interests of another person.

● **Institutional abuse**

means abuse or poor care within an institution or specific care setting. Possible causes of institutional abuse include:

- + a "closed" culture within the Church Body where transparency is discouraged;
- + lack of flexibility and choice for people using the service;
- + failure to properly check the backgrounds and interview staff;
- + inadequate training;
- + lack of safeguarding policies and procedures;
- + lack of support of staff by management;
- + poor supervision; and
- + poor standards of care.

● **Lay/lay person**

means members of the Catholic Church and Church personnel other than bishops, priests, deacons and religious.

● **Leaders**

means personnel who are responsible for important governance decisions within a Church Church Body and/or who lead and coordinate Church improvement initiatives.

● **Mentor**

means an experienced and trusted advisor or a person who gives a younger or less experienced person help and advice over a period.

● **Ministry**

means any activity within, or conducted by, an Church Body, that is authorised by formal appointment and designed to carry out the apostolic and charitable works of the Catholic Church.

● **Neglect (adult)**

is the failure of a carer to provide the necessities of life to a person for whom they are caring.

● **Neglect (child)**

refers to a failure by a caregiver to provide the basic requirements for meeting the physical and emotional developmental needs of a child. Physically neglectful behaviours include a failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, supervision, hygiene or medical attention.

● **Offender**

means a person who has admitted abuse or whose responsibility for abuse has been determined by a court of law (criminal or civil), statutory or Church procedure.

● **Pastoral care**

means when one person has responsibility for the wellbeing of another or for a faith community. It includes the provision of spiritual advice and support, education, counselling, medical care, and assistance in times of need. All work involving the supervision or education of children and young people is a work of pastoral care.

● **Personnel (Church personnel)**

means a cleric, religious or other person who is employed by the Church Body or engaged on a contract, subcontract, voluntary or unpaid basis.

● **Physical abuse**

is a non-accidental physically aggressive act which results in physical pain or injury, and which may include physical coercion and physical restraint.

Physical abuse may be intentional or may be the inadvertent result of physical punishment.



● Priests

in these guidelines refers to both bishops and priests

● Professional/pastoral supervision

means a professional activity in which personnel are engaged in reflection and learning, under the guidance of a supervisor.

Supervision assists personnel in their accountabilities for professional standards, defined competencies for their role and understanding and implementation of the Church Body's policy and procedures. For clerics and religious, professional supervision assists in the maintenance of boundaries of the pastoral relationship and enhances the quality of their ministry.

● Protective behaviours program

is a type of abuse prevention program and means an age-appropriate structured education program to equip children and young people with the skills and knowledge to enhance their personal safety.

● Reflective practice

is a professional development technique that involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice. It is expected to be a continuous process, whereby an individual explores an experience to identify what happened and what their role in this experience was, including behaviour, thinking, and related emotions. Reflective practice enables potential changes in approaches to similar future events to be identified, with the aim of improved performance.

● Religious institute

means an Church Body within the Catholic Church whose members commit themselves through religious vows to lead a life of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Societies of apostolic life resemble religious institutes in that their members also live a life in common. They do not take religious vows but live out the apostolic purpose of the group. In the UGF, the term 'religious institutes' is used to include religious institutes, societies of apostolic life and secular institutes.

● Religious

means a member of an institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life.

● Respondent

means a person against whom a complaint is made.

● Review

means an internal self-assessment of an Church Body's implementation of the UGF. A review can also be an assessment that forms part of the process of continuous improvement which occurs when following up recommendations made during an audit.

● Risk Profile

means an assessment against key safeguarding risk factors.

● Safeguarding Committee

means a committee established to advise and support the Church Authority on all matters relating to safeguarding, including the development and implementation of a Safeguarding Implementation Plan and coordinating annual self-audits at a local level. Committee members need relevant and varied professional expertise in relation to safeguarding, child protection, Church Body's culture and structure, policy development, etc. and include lay women and men.

● Safeguarding Culture

means embedding safeguarding into everything the Church Body does. In promoting this culture, young people and adults at risk will understand they will be listened to, supported, a

● Safeguarding Commitment Statement

means a Commitment Statement describing an Church Body's commitment to keep children and adults safe from harm. It informs the Church Body's safeguarding culture.

● **Safeguarding Co-ordinator**

means an individual who champions safeguarding and co-ordinates the implementation of the UGF and local church's safeguarding protocols within an Church Body.

● **Safeguarding Implementation Plan**

means a documented plan which articulates actions to be taken across the Church Body to ensure safeguarding practices are in place. It includes actions, strategies, responsibilities, delegations, and accountabilities, and tracks review and progress. It is overseen by the Safeguarding Committee.

● **Safeguarding policies and procedures**

means any policies and procedures of the Church Body that address elements of safeguarding children and adults. For example, but not limited to:

- + recruitment;
- + risk management;
- + complaint handling; and,
- + acceptable use of online applications.

● **Seminarian**

a student in a theological formation and education centre preparing for ordination as a priest.

● **Seminary**

means a centre for the formation and education of students preparing for ordination.

● **Sexual abuse (adult)**

Sexual abuse is a form of sexual assault. Sexual abuse includes rape, indecent assault, sexual harassment, and sexual interference. Sexual activity with an adult who is incapacitated by a mental or physical condition (such as dementia) that impairs his or her ability to grant informed consent, is defined as sexual assault/ abuse. Sexual assault/abuse includes where by force, threats or abuse of authority an individual commits a canonical offence or forces someone to perform or submit to sexual acts. Sexual assault is a crime.

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● **Spiritual abuse**

means abuse of a person that invokes a person's religious beliefs and faith to perpetrate harm. Spiritual abuse can occur as a secondary experience of abuse when abuse is perpetrated by someone in a position of spiritual authority and trust within the Church and can negatively impact a person's spirituality.

● **Substantiated complaint**

means under the civil standard of proof an allegation of abuse for which the investigator finds that sufficient evidence exists to believe that the alleged conduct more likely than not occurred.

● **Third parties**

means any individual, group or legal Church Body outside the Church Church Body who contract services and facilities to or from the Church Church Body.

● **Transient Risk**

means short-term risk, experienced by people at different stages in their life: e.g. when someone is vulnerable due to:

- + grief
- + bereavement
- + relationship breakdown
- + homelessness
- + unemployment
- + financial hardship



● Trauma-informed and victim-centred support

is a strengths-based framework which is founded on five core principles:

- + safety,
- + trustworthiness,
- + choice,
- + collaboration, and
- + empowerment.

Trauma-informed services do no harm: they do not re-traumatise or blame victims for their efforts to manage their traumatic reactions, and they embrace a message of hope and optimism that recovery is possible.

In trauma-informed services, trauma survivors are seen as unique individuals who have managed their responses to the experiences as best that they could.

● Vulnerable Adult

means any person aged 18 years and over who is at increased risk of experiencing abuse, such as people:

- + who are elderly
- + with a disability
- + who suffer from mental illness
- + who have diminished capacity
- + who have cognitive impairment
- + who have suffered previous abuse
- + who are experiencing transient risks
- + who in receiving a ministry are subject to a power imbalance
- + who identify as First Nations and/or Indigenous
- + who are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background
- + who are of diverse sexuality
- + who have any other impairment or adversity that makes it difficult for them to protect themselves from abuse.

● Zero Tolerance

means a commitment to the prevention, reporting, and addressing of all forms of abuse, misconduct, and neglect within the Church. This stance is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Catholic Church, reflecting the inherent dignity and value of every individual, as created in the image of God.

'Zero Tolerance' mandates proactive measures for protection, swift and transparent responses

to allegations, the permanent removal from ministry of anyone convicted of sexual abuse and a pastoral approach to care for victims, guided by mercy, justice, and the pursuit of truth, to ensure the safety and sanctity of all members of the Church community.



PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE
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