

Sisters of the Holy Family of St Emilie

Baseline Audit Report
March 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is a baseline audit of the Safeguarding arrangements at the Sisters of the Holy Family of St Emilie. The audit has been undertaken as part of the CSSA's Baseline Audit phase of Religious Life Groups (RLGs). The audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of current safeguarding arrangements, by considering practice over the last twelve months.

1.2 The Sisters of the Holy Family of St Emilie, who will be referred to as The Sisters of the Holy Family for the remainder of this report, are comprised of six Sisters in the UK based in two houses, one in London and one in Exmouth. They are part of the English and Irish Sector. Their Sector Leader is resident in London.

1.3 The CSSA has devised a categorisation scheme for Religious Life Groups taking part in safeguarding audits. This categorises Groups on a scale from Level 1 Apostolic or Level 1 Enclosed (small communities with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), Level 2 (a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan Activities such as a Parish Priest) or Level 3 (a large community and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases). The Sisters of the Holy Family have been categorised as a Level 1 Apostolic audit.

1.4 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious, and acknowledges that the Religious Life Groups within any particular category may vary significantly in terms of size, ministry and safeguarding practice. Consequently, CSSA analysts may use professional judgement to ensure that Religious Life Groups are graded against the national standards in such a way that reflects their uniqueness.

2. Scope & Methodology

2.1 This Baseline Audit Report was undertaken following the submission of the Level 1 Apostolic Self-Assessment by the Safeguarding Lead on 6th August 2024. Supporting evidence was supplied on 28th August 2024.

2.2 Due to unforeseen circumstances, the date of in-person interviews had to be postponed from 15th October until 6th November. On the 6th November the Sector Leader and the Safeguarding Lead, a lay person who is the Sector Leader's House Manager, were interviewed.

2.3 Liaison has also taken place between auditors and the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)¹ regarding the Sisters of the Holy Family's engagement with them over the last 12 months.

3. Audit Grading

3.1 Safeguarding practice is assessed against the eight safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales².

3.2 Safeguarding practice is graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 1 Religious Life Groups. Each standard is graded on an ascending three point scale of *Not Met*, *Met with Recommendations* and *Met*. Grades for individual standards are combined in order to produce an overall grading for the Religious Life Group as an outcome of the audit. The audit draws on evidence generated from self-assessment, interviews and the supporting documentation provided by the Religious Life Group.

¹ The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) is an independent team of safeguarding professionals offering safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Their website is available [here](#)

² A description and full details of the Standards can be found on the CSSA website [here](#)

3.3 This report summarises the findings of the audit undertaken with the Sisters of the Holy Family and their progress towards meeting the eight safeguarding standards. The overall grading for the Group is assessed as Met with Recommendations.

Overall Grading	Met with Recommendations
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body’s leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Met
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church’s Safeguarding Message	Met
Standard 3 – Engaging with and Caring for those who report having been harmed	Met with Recommendations
Standard 4 – Effective Management of Allegations and Concerns	Met
Standard 5 – Management and Support of Subjects of Allegations and Concerns (respondents)	Met with Recommendations
Standard 6 – Robust Human Resource Management	Met with Recommendations
Standard 7 – Training and Support for Safeguarding	Met with Recommendations
Standard 8 – Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement	Met with Recommendations

4. Audit findings against each standard

4.1 Standard 1 Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture

4.1.1 The Sisters of the Holy Family's website³ contains a dedicated area titled Safeguarding Policy which contains a Safeguarding commitment statement. The statement outlines that any physical, sexual or emotional abuse will not be tolerated and that, in line with the policy of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, all allegations of abuse will be reported to statutory authorities. There is a standalone Safeguarding Policy, updated in September 2024, and based on an RLSS template which the Sisters of the Holy Family follow which is not yet on the website. They should add this to the website in the Safeguarding Policy section so that those who visit the website can understand the full Safeguarding expectations of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

4.1.2 The Safeguarding Lead has completed training relevant to her role, including Safeguarding Training for Trustees in June 2023 and Advanced Safeguarding Training in November 2023, both through RLSS.

4.1.3 There are four Trustees' meetings per year, attended by their five Trustees who are all Religious. Safeguarding is on the agenda for each of them, although there may not be significant discussion about Safeguarding on each occasion. This frequency exceeds the Charity Commission's minimum recommendation of at least two Trustees' meetings per year.

4.1.4 The Sisters of the Holy Family facilitated a CSSA audit of their Safeguarding practice. RLSS confirmed their membership of the organisation and that they had liaised with their membership, Safeguarding and training teams in the last 12 months. The Self-Assessment completed by the Sisters of the Holy Family stated that they have found RLSS have provided good support to the Safeguarding Lead and that they are comfortable to approach them for any necessary advice and guidance.

³ [Safeguarding Policy – Sisters of the Holy Family of St Emilie](#)

4.1.5 The Sector Leader said that she considers Integrity in Ministry⁴ to be an excellent manual for Religious communities. It is discussed at least twice a year amongst the Sisters and that they are very familiar with the expectations.

4.1.6 The public ministry of the Sisters has become increasingly limited in recent years. One Sister assists in First Communion Class where Safeguarding, and her Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)⁵, are organised by the Parish and Southwark Archdiocese. In addition, some training of adult confirmation catechists takes place. There are adult members of the Lay Holy Family who aim “to support one another in living Gospel values in today’s world”⁶. None of the adults who are engaged with these ministries would be considered an adult at risk. However, one Sister does take Holy Communion to an elderly lady in the community, overseen by the lady’s daughter who is in attendance. The Sister’s DBS check is over three year’s old which exceeds CSSA expectations. The Sector Lead and Safeguarding Lead confirmed that they would update this imminently.

Graded: Met

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church’s Safeguarding Message

4.2.1 The Sisters of the Holy Family do not have a formal separate Safeguarding Communication plan. As a small community they have found that frequent informal conversations amongst themselves over shared meals have proved to be an effective way of ensuring that Sisters understand Safeguarding and how to keep themselves safe. Relevant Safeguarding documentation is shared with the two Sisters in Exmouth, including a hard copy of their Safeguarding policy. The two

⁴ Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales

⁵ [Disclosure and Barring Service - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

⁶ [Lay Holy Family – Sisters of the Holy Family of St Emilie](#)

Sisters have no active ministry so the information that is shared with them is limited to what is relevant to their circumstances.

4.2.2 Annual Assemblies are held and documentary evidence was provided to demonstrate that Safeguarding is routinely on the agenda for these meetings. At the Annual Assembly in 2024 there was reflection on creating a safe living and working environment for Sisters and the staff that support them. This included thinking about recognising harassment and bullying, managing challenging behaviour and creating safe and caring communities.

4.2.3 As mentioned above, the Safeguarding policy is on the website. In addition there is a link to Safe Spaces⁷ to ensure that any Survivors that may use the website can directly access support tailored to their needs. There are also links to the CSSA, RLSS and the Catholic Bishops' Conference Safeguarding section to ensure that individuals can access the appropriate Safeguarding guidance for them. Contact details for the Safeguarding Lead are available so that anyone that chooses to do so can liaise with her around any Safeguarding issue that they have.

4.2.4 Therefore, although there is no formal communication plan or strategy it is evident that Safeguarding communication takes place via the website, during in-person discussions, by sharing of relevant documentation and at Annual Assemblies. This meets the needs of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

Graded: Met

⁷ Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal, and safe space for anyone who has been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales.

4.3 Standard 3 Engaging with and Caring for those who report having been harmed

4.3.1 The Sisters of the Holy Family have never received a report of someone being harmed, by a member of their community, their staff or the lay Holy Family. Therefore, discussions around engaging and caring for those who report having been harmed were theoretical.

4.3.2 To prepare for the possibility of receiving a disclosure of harm the Safeguarding Lead has completed advanced Safeguarding training through RLSS. In their self-assessment the Sisters of the Holy Family confirmed that they would, on receipt of any disclosure, liaise with RLSS to ensure that the individual received care tailored to their specific needs. The website also directs Survivors to Safe Spaces, an organisation designed to support those who report being harmed.

4.3.3 In the event of a disclosure being made the Sisters of the Holy Family indicated that they would expect those receiving the disclosure to be compassionately listening, taking contemporary notes and explaining next steps to Survivors. They have the resources to provide support to Survivors, through counselling for example, and could also provide the same to the individual receiving the disclosure if they need it.

4.3.4 In interview, the Sector Leader was confident that the Sisters would know how to report a concern. They would also have the knowledge of where to safely report a concern if it related to the Sector Leader or Safeguarding Lead. The Annual Assembly discussions around potential bullying and harassment demonstrate that these discussions have been had. The Safeguarding Policy would enable them to report directly to RLSS if the circumstance arose.

4.3.5 Whilst they have yet to receive a disclosure the leaders of the Sisters of the Holy Family may wish to liaise with other Religious Life Groups who have had direct experience to understand if there are any lessons they can learn to improve their existing procedures. The Sisters of the Holy Family intend to raise this question in future when they have informal meetings with other Religious Life Groups.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.4 Standard 4 Effective Management of Allegations and Concerns

4.4.1 The Safeguarding statement on the website makes clear the expectation that any allegation of abuse should be reported to statutory authorities, using 999 in a situation if there is an immediate risk of harm. The Sisters of the Holy Family would also report any concerns to RLSS as soon as they were aware of them and would use their specialist support and advice to ensure they were effectively managed.

4.4.2 As a small community, if there were any allegations then it is inevitable that Trustees would be aware of them. However, to guarantee that leaders are informed of any Safeguarding concern, Safeguarding is on the agenda for each of their meetings and oversight of any allegations would be maintained there.

4.4.3 Staff files are securely stored in the office of the Safeguarding Lead. Any documentation related to allegations or concerns would also be stored with access limited to individuals in leadership roles. Information would be shared with RLSS, and any statutory agencies involved, as necessary.

4.4.4 Although they do not have Canon Law expertise within the community in England, the Sisters of the Holy Family were confident that they could access advice in Canon Law should this become necessary.

4.4.5 The Sisters of the Holy Family's Safeguarding policy outlines the procedure they must follow to respond to any allegations of abuse and this is commensurate with national guidance from RLSS.

Graded: Met

4.5 Standard 5 Management and Support of Subjects of Allegations and Concerns (Respondents)

4.5.1 The Sector Leader confirmed that, were there ever to be a Respondent in the Sisters of the Holy Family, that they would receive whatever support was necessary during the period an allegation was open and afterwards. This would include ensuring that they were signposted to legal advice and were supported spiritually

and mentally. They have access to a retired Diocesan Priest at their site in London, who has an in date DBS check, who ministers to the Sisters. They also have sufficient financial resources to fund a safe environment for them to live in if they had to leave their current accommodation.

4.5.2 Guidance from RLSS would always be sought to provide expert guidance on supporting Respondents. In addition, they would be expected to lead on managing, monitoring and risk assessing any Respondents with the full cooperation of the leadership of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

4.5.3 It would be beneficial to create formal guidance, or a policy, which outlines to the Sisters exactly what support they would be given in the event that there were any allegation against them. Leaders should also familiarise themselves with local organisations that they could refer Respondents to so that, if an allegation were made, signposting could take place immediately.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.6 Standard 6 Robust Human Resource Management

4.6.1 The Sisters of the Holy Family directly employ seven part time staff, the House Manager, a Financial Officer, two cooks and three cleaners. The Safeguarding Policy contains Safer Recruitment guidance including a DBS check for relevant roles, previous employer references and an expectation that employees will read and understand all relevant policies and procedures, including the Safeguarding policy. The Sector Leader has previously completed Safer Recruitment training and the Safeguarding Lead has extensive experience in Human Resources. Therefore, they said they would always go through a recruitment process when employing new staff that includes a formal interview and a six month Probationary period, with a short notice period. The Safeguarding Lead wanted to ensure that all employed staff had DBS checks but their current role descriptions mean that they are not eligible to have them completed.

4.6.2 There is currently nobody in Formation in England and Wales and there is no imminent likelihood of any members joining from overseas, in part because of the challenge of getting visas. However, were an individual to arrive they would be expected to be at least 21 years old, provide references and demonstrate that they

meet a list of criteria, including completing a year of accompaniment before they join the community. Their preparation for Religious life would include an expectation of completion of Safeguarding training.

4.6.3 Records of DBS checks are kept but, as noted in 4.1.6, there is one that exceeds the expected renewal period of the CSSA of three years. The leaders have said that they will rectify this immediately.

4.6.4 Evidence was provided to auditors of a complaints policy. This is not available via the website for those who wish to raise complaints to access. Whistleblowing forms part of the wider Safeguarding policy and mandates that individuals can raise a concern without fear of victimisation or disadvantage.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.7 Standard 7 Training and Support for Safeguarding

4.7.1 Certificates of training completion by members of the Sisters of the Holy Family are held by the Safeguarding Lead. She has completed online Child Protection training in July 2022, RLSS Training for Trustees in June 2023 and Advanced Safeguarding training in November 2023. The Sector Leader also completed RLSS Trustee Training in June 2023. This training was provided in person on site to all the Trustees in post at the time. One additional Trustee, based in France, has joined since this training occurred and has yet to complete it. Overall, this demonstrates a clear expectation that those in key Safeguarding roles complete appropriate training. The Sisters of the Holy Family will wish to consider how they can facilitate Trustees training for the most recent Trustee to join.

4.7.2 The Safeguarding Lead intends to ensure that all employed staff have completed a level of Safeguarding training appropriate to their role but, to date, this has yet to be achieved. To facilitate this leaders should decide on an expected Safeguarding training level for all employees and for each of the Sisters, even if this is none because of a lack of public ministry and/or infirmity. Records should be created of completion dates and expected refresher training dates. Trustees should maintain oversight of training records to ensure that if compliance dips below expectations then early remedial action can be taken.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

4.8.1 The Sisters of the Holy Family have embraced the expectations of Integrity in Ministry and reflect upon sections of it together twice a year. Leaders acknowledge the importance of supporting, and learning from, Survivors whenever possible.

4.8.2 Prior to completion of the self-assessment to support this CSSA audit the Sisters of the Holy Family acknowledged that they had limited experience in evaluating the quality of their own Safeguarding practice. However, they have consistently demonstrated that they will engage with RLSS for training and other support needs. This will help them to ensure that they are meeting the expected Safeguarding standards of the Catholic Church in England and Wales and, if they are not, they can work with RLSS to improve.

4.8.3 Trustees should ensure that, at least annually, they formally review their compliance with the eight Safeguarding standards and the effectiveness of their own specific Safeguarding arrangements given their current ministry and circumstances. If deficiencies in Safeguarding practice are identified at any point it will be important to ensure that remedial actions are set and tracked for completion. Trustees may wish to implement an action plan to track completion of the recommendations of this audit as a way to demonstrate continuous improvement in Safeguarding practice. They will wish to ensure that all relevant Sisters, staff and volunteers are informed of any relevant learning from this audit as it impacts on their role.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

5. Summary of Overall Findings

5.1. The Sisters of the Holy Family are a group of six sisters based at two sites, one in London and one in Devon. Their ministry is decreasing due to the age and infirmity of some of the Sisters. Despite this, they have prioritised Safeguarding through the prominence of their Safeguarding commitment on their website and ensuring the training of people in key roles. Integrity in Ministry is a frequently

discussed cornerstone of their practice and Trustees have Safeguarding on the agenda of all of their meetings. Annual Assemblies are routinely used to discuss Safeguarding and particularly aspects, such as bullying or harassment, which are most likely to be relevant to their circumstances. Engagement with RLSS for training and general Safeguarding support is regular and will be effective in improving practice. Sisters know how to report Safeguarding concerns and have been facilitated to do so even if the concern were to involve the Sector Leader of the Safeguarding Lead.

5.2 The Sisters will wish to ensure that they continue to develop their Safeguarding practice and ensure that any key deficiencies, such as not all DBS checks being from within the last three years, are rectified. Establishing their training expectations for Sisters and staff, and tracking completion and renewal, will give Trustees confidence that there is an appropriate minimum level of Safeguarding knowledge across the community.

5.3 The evidence demonstrates that the Sisters of the Holy Family meet the basic Safeguarding expectations of the Catholic Church in England and Wales with recommendations which, if implemented, will improve practice further.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

Add the full Safeguarding Policy document to the Safeguarding Policy section of the website

Update all eligible DBS which have not been renewed within the last three years

Publish the Complaints policy on the website

Establish a Safeguarding training expectation for all Sisters and staff, tracked for completion and expected renewal and regularly reported on to Trustees

Within 6 months

Make available to all Sisters a document which confirms to them the support that they would receive should an allegation be raised against them

Within 12 months

Liaise with other Religious Life Groups which have experience of managing allegations and concerns, supporting Survivors and supporting Respondents to see if there are any transferable lessons that can be learned

Leaders to research local and national organisations they could signpost respondents to promptly for support in the event of an allegation being raised

Audit internal Safeguarding practice on an annual basis to ensure ongoing compliance with the Safeguarding standards and the expectations of Integrity in Ministry

7. Arrangements for Follow-up

7.1 In line with a baseline audit grade of Met with Recommendations, there will be a minimum period of two years before reaudit by the CSSA unless emerging Safeguarding concerns necessitate an earlier return.