

Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey

Baseline Audit Report
June 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is a baseline audit report of the safeguarding arrangements of the Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey, situated in Kent. Minster Abbey was founded in 670 AD by St Domneva. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries the Abbey was sold into private hands. In 1937 when the property was bought from the lay owners by the Benedictine nuns of St Walburga's Abbey, Eichstätt, Bavaria, Minster Abbey was re-founded as a permanent monastic community. The sisters live together within Minster Abbey (known forthwith as 'the Abbey') as an enclosed community numbering ten members, one of whom is resident in a local Care Home. The sisters do not participate in any external ministry but live a life committed to prayer, work and hospitality under the Rule of St Benedict. Work life includes the care of the monastic gardens, orchards, kitchens and the guest house. The sisters also maintain a small flock of sheep that reside in a paddock adjacent to the Abbey. The Abbey site includes a chapel, a small gift shop where visitors can purchase items made by the sisters, a guest house, which can accommodate up to 12 persons in four distinct areas, each with its own kitchenette and facilities. Tithe barn and paddocks are rented out to generate an income for the Abbey. A cottage is currently in use as a residence for a refugee family from the Ukraine. There is one paid employee and there are five volunteers that support the work of the community in the Abbey and two externally contracted trades people to maintain the Abbey and grounds.

1.2 The CSSA assess Religious Life Groups against a categorisation scheme based on the safeguarding risk that is likely to be associated with their activities and size, from Level 1, a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns known as an Apostolic or an Enclosed Order, depending on their particular ministry, Level 2, a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan activities such as a Parish Priest and 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 Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey were audited as a Level 1 Enclosed Order.

1.3 The CSSA held an initial meeting with the Prioress and the safeguarding leads on the 17 December 2024 to discuss the audit requirements. An email was sent the same day that included a self-assessment document (with an agreed completion date of the 10 February 2025), guidance for completion, the Level 1 maturity Matrix document and the CSSA Eight National Safeguarding Standards.

1.4 Due to a change of CSSA personnel a further Zoom meeting was held between the Prioress and the safeguarding leads and the new analyst on 15th January 2025 that confirmed the details of the audit which was scheduled for the 10th March 2025. A final email confirmation for the audit was sent to the Prioress and safeguarding leads on the 3 March 2025.

1.5 The CSSA visited Minster Abbey on the 10 March 2025, having remotely reviewed the self-assessment documentation and additional evidence provided by the Prioress and safeguarding team and from the Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey website.

1.6 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious and acknowledges that the Religious Life Groups within any 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 it reflects their uniqueness.

2. Scope and Methodology

2.1 In advance of the formal audit week, the Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey (known forthwith as ‘the community’) were requested to complete a bespoke Level 1 – Enclosed Orders audit self-assessment tool providing information on their adherence to the Eight National Safeguarding Standards¹ and progress in the overall implementation of said standards.

¹Full details of the eight standards and underpinning sub standards are available here: [The Eight National Safeguarding Standards](#)

2.2 Information provided within the self-assessment was analysed by the CSSA, alongside additional documentary evidence provided by the community together with information from the community's website² and the Charity Commission annual report. Further confirmation of engagement was sought from the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)³. This evidence was assessed against a bespoke Enclosed Orders Maturity Matrix to arrive at ratings for each standard and a combined overall grade.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Interviews

Interviews took place with the following individuals on Monday 10th March 2025:

- The Prioress
- The safeguarding leads
- The guesthouse mistress
- Sisters focus group

2.3.2 Document review

A review of the following documentation was undertaken:

- The self-assessment document
- The community safeguarding policy
- The community safeguarding supplement
- Safeguarding training records and certification
- Disclosure and Barring Service records and certificates
- Minutes from Trustee meetings
- Guest house information for visitors

²[Home – Minster Abbey Nuns](#)

³The 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.

- Safeguarding communication documents
- The Charity Commission Annual Report

2.3.3 Casework review

No new allegations or concerns have been reported to, or about, the Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey within the previous 12 months therefore it was not possible to examine casework during this audit or assess some aspects of direct safeguarding practices. An allegation from 2021 has previously been reviewed by CSSA as part of the baseline audit of the Archdiocese of Southwark undertaken in May 2022. Evidence shared showed that all recommendations from this review have been completed.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice is assessed against the Eight National Safeguarding Standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Enclosed Orders⁴. Each standard is graded on an ascending three-point scale of Not Met, Met with Recommendations, and Met. Grades for individual standards are combined to produce an overall grading. The audit draws on evidence generated from self-assessment, supporting documentation and interviews.

⁴[APPENDIX-5-LEVEL-1-ENCLOSED-MATURITY-MATRIX-FINAL.docx](#)

Overall grading	Met
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body’s leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Met with recommendations
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church’s safeguarding message	Met with recommendations
Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Met
Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Met
Standard 5 – Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Met
Standard 6 – Robust human resource management	Met
Standard 7 – Training and support for safeguarding	Met with recommendations
Standard 8 – Quality assurance and continuous Improvement	Met

3.2 This report summarises the findings of the audit undertaken with the Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey and their progress towards meeting the eight safeguarding standards. The overall grading for the Group is assessed as “Met”. The positive and proactive approach to safeguarding was deemed to be a particular strength of the community.

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 There is a positive culture of safeguarding embedded in the community, demonstrated through the discussions with the community and the ongoing programme of training and practice development with the leadership driving the need for all community members to understand their roles and responsibilities regarding the safeguarding of both children and vulnerable adults. Integrity in Ministry⁵ has been widely promoted and discussed and forms the foundation for all the safeguarding actions undertaken including the provision of a safeguarding supplement which is underpinned by a robust safeguarding policy, both of which are reviewed annually.

4.1.2 Resilience is built into the management of safeguarding at the abbey by the Prioress being supported by two safeguarding leads. The safeguarding leads have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and have undertaken the appropriate training to be able to fulfil these. Regular safeguarding meetings take place, and outcomes are disseminated to the rest of the community through chapter meetings. Actions and outcomes from safeguarding meetings are shared with the Trustees.

4.1.3 Governance arrangements are in place with the responsibility for the oversight of safeguarding sitting with the Trustees. The Trustees meet routinely every 6–8 weeks as well as for extraordinary meetings as required, with safeguarding as a standing agenda item shown in the minutes of these meetings. One of the four Trustees has a dual role as a safeguarding lead and reports to and communicates decisions from the Trustees to the other members of the

⁵Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct of Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales

safeguarding team. All Trustees have undertaken Trustees training and could describe their roles and responsibilities for reporting and managing safeguarding for the community both at local level and with the Charity Commission.

4.1.4 The community has signed contracts with the RLSS and the CSSA and has worked hard to establish good lines of communication with both. All community members demonstrated an awareness of the work of RLSS and those who had had cause to work with them directly reported positive engagement and outcomes from this. Information about and from RLSS was available throughout the communal areas of the Abbey.

4.1.5 Leaders demonstrated an awareness of risk and risk management in safeguarding and are working actively with RLSS to review and update their safer recruitment and volunteer policies having identified additional risk caused by the increasing frailty and vulnerability of some of the elder members of their community.

4.1.6 Leaders demonstrated a commitment to safeguarding and positive actions in the management of safeguarding.

4.1.7 There is currently no formal safeguarding plan although discussions and actions on safeguarding matters are recorded and reviewed in the minutes of meetings. The Prioress and the safeguarding leads should consider formalising their ongoing work through the provision of a safeguarding plan that can be both audited and scrutinised by the Trustees, providing assurance and an audit trail of work done to improve safeguarding at the Abbey.

Graded: Met with recommendations

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

4.2.1 Safeguarding messages and the importance of good communication is shared widely within the community and with staff and visitors who visit the

Abbey. There is however no formal communication plan for safeguarding within the safeguarding policy document or safeguarding supplement.

4.2.2 Safeguarding messages (posters and leaflets) are seen in all public and private places of the Abbey with contact details for both the safeguarding team and Safe Spaces⁶. These are also seen in the guesthouse which also has a handbook for visitors which includes the safeguarding policy for the Abbey together with details of other local and national resources. There is no provision currently for safeguarding communications in additional languages or in enlarged text for the visually impaired which the sisters may wish to consider depending on their knowledge of those who visit the Abbey.

4.2.3 Integrity in Ministry has been read to the community at mealtimes with discussions taking place in chapter meetings following this where knowledge and understanding can be evaluated and built upon. There is a code of conduct within the safeguarding supplement which is derived from the Integrity in Ministry document.

4.2.4 The safeguarding team have developed a safeguarding supplement that acts as a practical guide to the implementation of the safeguarding policy and supports the basic training the sisters have had. This includes information on how and what to communicate should a sister have a safeguarding concern or receive a disclosure of harm. It also includes information for local and national safeguarding resources as well as other charities that people may be signposted to for support.

4.2.5 The community welcome visitors for pre-arranged tours of the Abbey on Saturday mornings. Children are not admitted without direct supervision. School groups visiting the Abbey must provide their own supervision arrangements for the children they bring to the Abbey. The guest house can also accommodate

⁶ 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

day groups of up to 30 people. Groups must sign to say that they have understood and will abide by the safeguarding policy prior to admission to the site.

Graded: Met with recommendations

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

4.3.1 The safeguarding policy and supplement both include a clearly defined process for supporting those who disclose harm. The policy considers the immediate safety of the individual, the physical and emotional support they may require, the correct reporting processes to follow, including the recording and management of the information shared by the individual. All community members have been trained to use this policy, with the Prioress, the Trustees and the safeguarding leads having all undertaken additional training in these areas.

4.3.2 The Prioress and safeguarding leads have been trained to manage a disclosure and have had previous experience of doing so. The most recent disclosure occurred in 2021 and was managed with the support of the archdiocesan safeguarding team. The community are now aligned with RLSS and are clear on the processes to be followed should a new allegation be raised and have established links with Safe Spaces to whom they can signpost victim-survivors.

4.3.3 The previous disclosure from 2021 was the subject of a case review as part of the baseline audit for the Archdiocese of Southwark. The lessons learned and recommendations made following this have been implemented and are evidenced in the new safeguarding policy and safeguarding supplement. Although outside of this audit period, the case review showed evidence of a caring and compassionate approach to the individual who made the allegation and the ongoing provision of care and support until the matter was resolved.

4.3.4 Focus group interviews with the community demonstrated a good knowledge of how to manage a disclosure and all the members of the community felt confident to share information with the safeguarding leads and the Prioress if they had received a disclosure or felt the need to raise a concern about themselves or others. The safeguarding policy includes guidance on whistle blowing.

Graded: Met

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

4.4.1 Basic training in safeguarding has provided the whole community with the skills and knowledge to recognise a safeguarding allegation or concern and act in accordance with policy. There is a good awareness of incidences that might require a safeguarding concern to be raised. The safeguarding supplement describes in detail types of abuse for children and vulnerable adults that reflect those seen in national safeguarding guidance documents and also refers to the five R's of safeguarding; Recognise, Respond, Refer, Report, Record as a mechanism for managing allegations and concerns.

4.4.2 Although there are no recent examples of reporting safeguarding allegations to statutory authorities and the Charity Commission, there is a clearly defined policy and process to be followed should an allegation or concern be identified. This policy was developed in association with RLSS and is consistent with both the requirements of civil and canon law.

4.4.3 The leadership and community demonstrated a good understanding of data security and recording and management of information and personal data in line with the Data Protection Act and GDPR. Records were kept securely locked away in the office with access limited to the Prioress and the safeguarding leads. There was an awareness of the requirements to redact documents and to send

confidential information via a password protected route. Guidance on recording safeguarding concerns is available in the safeguarding supplement.

Graded: Met

4.5 Standard 5 Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)

4.5.1 The safeguarding policy includes clear guidance for the management of those members of the community that may be the subject of a safeguarding allegation or concern. The management of these situations has previously been conducted with the support and guidance of the archdiocese but since 2023 it is understood that the RLSS will advise the Prioress, Trustees and safeguarding leads on all actions that must be taken and the timeframes for these.

4.5.2 Although there have been no recent allegations or concerns raised about a community member a significant event occurred in 2021. Although outside of the timeframe of this audit, the case review showed that due process was followed in line with both Canon and civil law.

4.5.3 Evidence from the case review demonstrated that alternative accommodation was secured in this instance and that the emotional and physical wellbeing of the individual concerned was a priority for the Prioress and the rest of the community.

4.5.4 The community demonstrated an understanding that RLSS should be contacted immediately to secure guidance and practical support for any individual who becomes the subject of an allegation or safeguarding concern. This would include signposting and referral to additional legal (Canon lawyer), financial, emotional and physical health support for the individual out with their current community. Within the community there are members who have been trained to support individuals that are subject to an allegation.

4.5.5 Alternative accommodation for an individual would have to be arranged at point of need should it arise as currently the community have no alternative accommodation off site. In this circumstance further advice would need to be sought from RLSS and the diocese.

Graded: Met

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

4.6.1 The community have a well-established safer recruitment policy, managed by the safeguarding leads and overseen by the Trustees. All members of the community have up to date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates with one exception who is resident in a nursing home. RLSS assist with the DBS process and provide advice and guidance for the community on the requirement for DBS checks for staff and volunteers. Currently all staff and volunteers have up-to-date DBS certificates.

4.6.2 The Prioress and the safeguarding leads are currently reviewing their safer recruitment policy with RLSS to ensure that it meets the requirement of their ageing and increasingly frail and potentially vulnerable community. Additional training and enhanced DBS requirements are the most likely outcomes of this review for staff and volunteers.

4.6.3 The Abbey does not have a resident chaplain so the community welcome visiting clergy to celebrate the Sacraments. No priest is accepted for priestly ministry to the nuns without a current celebrant which ensures that they have a current DBS certificate and have completed safeguarding training. Evidence was seen of a file containing all the celebrants and DBS certificates of the priests who have been welcomed into the Abbey. Included in the file was documentation pertaining to a priest who was refused permission to minister by the community as he was unable to provide the required up-to-date certificates, demonstrating a commitment to the safety of all.

4.6.4 Currently there are no members of the community in formation. There is a clear process for those who wish to explore a vocation who must have a DBS certificate prior to entering as postulants. In addition, postulants undergo psychological assessments and must provide references as part of the admissions process. All postulants receive safeguarding training during their postulancy. The community does not receive overseas applicants for formation due to the challenges presented by the current UK visa system.

4.6.5 A whistleblowing policy is within the community safeguarding policy. The sisters demonstrated an understanding of this policy and were confident that their concerns would be listened to both within and without the community setting. There have been no complaints or concerns raised within the scope of this audit.

Graded: Met

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

4.7.1 Responsibility for the assurance that all community members have undertaken safeguarding training is overseen by the Trustees as evidenced in their meeting minutes. All community members have undergone basic safeguarding training as demonstrated by training records and certification. In addition to this the Trustees have undertaken Trustees Training which includes the management of safeguarding and the roles and responsibilities of Trustees. The safeguarding leads have undertaken the Safeguarding Lead training provided by RLSS. The Prioress has completed the Religious Life Leaders training in addition. Further training undertaken by the safeguarding leads includes care and safety management plans, training on spiritual abuse for spiritual directors and adult safeguarding training.

4.7.2 The leadership team demonstrated a commitment to continual learning through attendance at additional bespoke training as well as attendance at the RLSS annual conference and Annual General Meeting. Training opportunities

through RLSS and other organisations were shared with the leadership team and the community and relevant training was accessed in a timely manner.

4.7.3 The safeguarding leads promote safeguarding knowledge and skills through discussions at chapter meetings and through sharing updates with the community. There is currently no formal training schedule, although the safeguarding leads have identified this and are working towards creating one. The team have developed a series of scenarios that could be used to promote discussion and learning on what to do in the event of a disclosure of harm or the recognition of a safeguarding concern.

4.7.4 Volunteers and staff have all received safeguarding training relevant to their roles and responsibilities. There is currently a review taking place with the support of RLSS to ensure that those who are working with or alongside the more elderly, frail and potentially vulnerable members of the community have received enough training to be able to support them safely.

4.7.5 Discussions with the sisters demonstrated that they all felt that they had received the right level of training to meet their needs. The sisters reported that through their work they often hear details of the difficult and challenging circumstances those that confide in them have been in. There is a recognition that support needs to be offered to sisters by way of supervision to enable a safe environment for them to de-brief and to protect their own emotional and psychological health. The safeguarding leads will be working with the community to develop this process.

Graded: Met with recommendations

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

4.8.1 Evidence from documentation and the interview process demonstrated a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the community. Safeguarding is embedded in all aspects of the community's activities with the sisters demonstrating how it was a consideration for them in all their interactions with

each other and with the visitors they welcome to the Abbey and to their guest house.

4.8.2 Awareness of current safeguarding issues and practices was good with the safeguarding leads taking the initiative on developing current policies and practices to reflect changes in national guidance and best practice, such as attending additional training on spiritual abuse following the outcome of the L'Arche enquiry.⁷

4.8.3 Scrutiny of the safeguarding requirements and practice was clear through the evidence shown in the minutes of Trustee meetings and their involvement and support was an integral part of the how the community has developed its safeguarding practice. The leadership team demonstrated a commitment to further improve practice through the review of their safer recruitment policy and training schedule.

4.8.4 At interviews with the Prioress and the safeguarding leads it was clear that non-compliance with the Abbey's safeguarding expectations was not tolerated and that the policies and processes in place were effective in managing such events.

4.8.5 The leadership and community demonstrate positive and proactive communication with external agencies including RLSS in their commitment to monitor, evaluate and improve their safeguarding practice.

Graded: Met

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 The Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey have demonstrated an open, transparent, proactive approach to safeguarding under the strong leadership of

⁷[L'Arche International inquiry into historic sexual abuse by Jean Vanier | L'Arche](#)

the Prioress who is very well supported by two safeguarding leads. The community as a whole benefits from this dynamic leadership and commitment of the Trustees to ensure that safeguarding is embedded in all elements of the community life.

5.2 The community welcomes guests and visitors and provides hospitality on the Abbey premises. Particular care is taken to ensure that the safeguarding of all those who visit and meet with the community is a high priority and this is demonstrated through the awareness, understanding and actions of the community as a whole. All elements of safeguarding are aligned with both national and local policy guidance and with recognised best practice.

5.3 The Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey have shown a commitment to continuous improvement and development of their safeguarding practice and have taken proactive steps to achieve this aim with the evaluation and review of current practice and sharing learning with the community. There is an atmosphere of mutual support, empathy and compassion that supports this drive for continuous improvement and better outcomes for all.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The overall grading for the audit of the Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey is 'Met'.

6.2 The Benedictine Nuns of Minster Abbey receive the following recommendations:

- A formal safeguarding plan should be created that would bring together all the safeguarding work currently underway in an auditable action plan.
- A training schedule should be created to ensure training needs are more formally identified and managed.
- Provision should be made for sisters to access de-briefing sessions to allow for confidential discussion and supervision to support their emotional and psychological wellbeing after difficult conversations with visitors and guests.
- A distinct safeguarding communication plan should be added to the safeguarding policy or to the safeguarding plan before the next review date that formalises the sisters' approach to sharing safeguarding information and key messages.

7. Arrangements for Follow-up

7.1 In line with this overall rating a re-audit of the Group by the CSSA should not normally take place for a three-year minimum period, subject to no indicators of a raised safeguarding risk arising.