

Franciscan Friars of the Renewal

Baseline Audit Report
December 2024

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1. Introduction

1.1 The international Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal comprises 14 friaries located across the United States of America (USA), Honduras, Nicaragua, England, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; the Community has its Generalate in New York, USA, and is led by Fr. John Anthony as General Servant, with the European friaries being overseen by Regional Servant, Fr. Michael Kmitek. The current audit was conducted with St. Pio Friary in Bradford and St. Fidelis Friary in East London, both of which are supported by Local Servants; the communities are made up of both Brothers and Fathers¹, and number eight and seven² members, respectively. The Friars' primary external ministry is the service of the poor and destitute, with each Friary running soup kitchens and providing additional material and spiritual support to guests; St. Pio Friary also has care of St. Patrick's Mission in Bradford, which provides daily Mass services and Eucharistic Adoration, and both Friaries are engaged in evangelisation activities.

1.2 This CSSA devised a categorisation scheme for Religious Life Groups; this placed Groups on a scale from Level 1 (a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), through Level 2 (a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan Activities such as a Parish Priest) to Level 3 (a large community and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases).³ The categorisation scheme was paired with bespoke self-assessment and grading materials that corresponded to the respective levels; the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (hereafter referred to as the Religious Life Group) were allocated to Level 2 of the categorisation scheme for the current audit.

¹ Fathers are those members who have been ordained as Priests.

² Figures for St. Fidelis Friary include the Regional Servant, who is based at the location, and two Fathers who are currently based in Germany.

³ 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 reflects their uniqueness.

1.3 The Religious Life Group was sent formal notification of the safeguarding audit on 22.05.24; this was accompanied by the Level 2 self-assessment document, with a required completion date of 22.07.24. A list of additional required evidence and supporting documentation was also supplied by the CSSA, and an appropriate method of sharing this material was put in place. An online pre-audit meeting was held on 10.06.24 where the audit process and key dates were discussed and agreed; in attendance were the CSSA analyst, the Religious Life Group Local Servants for both English Friaries, and a representative from the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)⁴. The CSSA analyst and Local Servants subsequently conducted email communications to finalise arrangements for visiting the Friaries for audit interviews.

1.4 This baseline audit took place between August and October 2024. The CSSA analyst remotely reviewed the material submitted as part of a self-assessment process in August 2024, prior to visiting St. Fidelis Friary on 03.09.24⁵ to conduct audit interviews; online audit interviews were conducted with members of the St. Pio Community on 01.10.24

2. Scope & Methodology

2.1 In advance of the formal audit week, the Religious Life Group was requested to complete a bespoke Level 2 audit self-assessment tool providing information on Religious Life Group adherence to the national safeguarding standards⁶ and progress in the overall implementation of said standards.

2.2 Information provided within the self-assessment was analysed by the CSSA, alongside additional material available on the Religious Life Group's website. This

⁴ The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) provides a range of safeguarding support services to Religious Life Groups throughout the United Kingdom.

⁵ The visit was initially planned for 19.08.24 but was delayed due scheduling issues for both the Religious Life Group and CSSA analyst.

⁶ Full details of the eight standards and underpinning sub standards are available here: [The Eight National Safeguarding Standards \(catholicsafeguarding.org.uk\)](https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk)

evidence was assessed against the Level 2 Religious Life Group Maturity Matrix to arrive at ratings for each standard and a combined overall grade.

2.3 The following methods were employed:

2.3.1 Interviews

Interviews took place with key individuals from the Religious Life Group on 03.09.24 (London) and 01.10.24 (Bradford)⁷:

- Regional Servant (European Region)
- Local Servant (London)–European Safeguarding Lead
- Vicar (Bradford)⁸
- Soup Kitchen Director (London)
- Rector–Soup Kitchen Director (Bradford)
- Soup Kitchen Lead (Bradford)

2.3.2 Document Review

The following key documents were reviewed⁹

- Level 2 RLG Self-Assessment Tool (completed)
- Community of Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (International) Safeguarding Policy (2018 & 2021 versions)
- Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (England & Wales) Safeguarding Policy (2024)
- Community of Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Safeguarding Statement (UK & ROI)
- Community of Franciscan Friars of the Renewal redacted Trustee Minutes
- Community of Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Statutory Code of Conduct

⁷ London interviews were conducted in person, but Bradford interviews were conducted online due to scheduling issues.

⁸ The Vicar is temporarily acting as Local Servant.

⁹ The Franciscan Friars also provided a quantity of material relating to safeguarding communications (internal and external), training, DBS processes, casework, and other activities relating to the national safeguarding standards.

- Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Complaints Policy
- Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Whistleblowing Policy
- Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Volunteer Policy
- Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Volunteer Handbook
- Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Home Visit Logbook
- Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Data Processing Consent Form
- Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Complaints Register

2.3.3 Casework Review

There were four relevant matters occurring during the 12-month audit period, comprising three lower-level concerns¹⁰ and a single safeguarding allegation; none of these matters involved members of the Religious Life Group and two of the matters concerned events unconnected to the Group other than that they were reported to a Group member. A single concern was selected for a formal case audit (25% of casework total), with one of these matters already having been subject to a case audit as part of an associated Diocesan safeguarding audit. Redacted material relating to each of the three remaining concerns was viewed as part of the current audit and was used to support assessment of practice in respect of relevant safeguarding standards.

3. Audit Grading

3.1. Practice was assessed against the eight safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales. The CSSA RLG Level 2 Maturity Matrix was used to grade audit evidence, with scores from the individual sub-standards being used to calculate the overall standard gradings. Each standard was graded on an ascending six-point scale of *Basic*, *Early Progress*, *Firm Progress*, *Results Being*

¹⁰ Lower-level concerns are situations in which concern is expressed about a person's welfare or behaviour, but in which there is no substantive allegation of harmful or abusive behaviour.

*Achieved, Comprehensive Assurance, and Exemplary*¹¹. Grades for individual standards were combined to produce an overall grading.

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

¹¹ Where evidence does not meet the threshold for a grade of ‘Basic,’ a substitute grade of ‘Below Basic’ would be awarded.

4. Audit findings against each standard

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

Strengths

4.1.1 The Religious Life Group has an effective governance structure that lend itself to an effective oversight of safeguarding concerns, allegations, and practice. Chaired by the Regional Servant, the Board of Trustees comprises a mix of lay and clergy and meets on a quarterly basis to discuss matters relating to all European Friaries; the Assistant Safeguarding Lead is currently a Trustee and the Safeguarding Lead attends each meeting to provide formal safeguarding updates. Meeting minutes demonstrate that Trustees take an active role in scrutinising safeguarding activity and contribute their time, skills and specialist knowledge to developing policy and practice, with an extraordinary meeting recently convened to support the approval of new policies in a timely way.

4.1.2 Safeguarding practice is overseen by the European Regional Director of the Office of Safe Environment and his Deputy (hereafter referred to as the Safeguarding Lead and Assistant Safeguarding Lead), with these roles currently being performed by the Local Servants of St. Fidelis Friary and St. Pio Friary, respectively¹². Both Leads have been able to access a wide range of training to

¹² Throughout this report, these Group members will be referred to by the role (local Servant or Safeguarding Lead) that is most appropriate to the context.

support them in their roles, with training records demonstrating the completion of all core national safeguarding training, additional online safeguarding modules, and a range of bespoke faith-based safeguarding training, such as RLSS 'Spiritual Abuse' training. The Safeguarding Leads liaise regularly with the Religious Life Group's international safeguarding team to develop policy and practice, through which they are able to access the support and expertise of 'Praesidium'¹³, which provides the international community with safeguarding services and to which the Group is accredited.

4.1.3 The Religious Life Group has bespoke safeguarding policies in place. The Group's international safeguarding policy has been produced by Praesidium and is a high-quality document that provides clear guidance on all matters relating to safeguarding. This is supplemented by a local safeguarding policy that has been developed by RLSS and the Safeguarding Leads; this distils the key aspects of the international policy, places key processes in the local context, and is commensurate with CSSA expectations for Religious Life Groups. Both documents have defined review processes, and the more detailed international policy is notable for its inclusion of the key principles of the 'Integrity in Ministry'¹⁴ pastoral standards.

4.1.4 The Religious Life Group has a culture of safeguarding, in that safeguarding is an intrinsic part of the Friars' daily lives and ministries, and that Friars understand the importance of their individual contributions to the effectiveness of the Group's safeguarding practice. Safeguarding Policies clearly define the individual roles and responsibilities of Group members in respect of safeguarding, and both audit interview and practice evidence demonstrated that members understand their responsibilities and, importantly, consistently act upon these. Leaders were seen to promote the RLSS and CSSA as a source of guidance and support, and it was

¹³ 'Praesidium' is a USA-based organisation which provides a range of safeguarding services to companies and organisations, such as training, advice, and policy development relating to the abuse of children or vulnerable adults (Adults at Risk). Organisations which adhere to Praesidium standards and practice can receive an accreditation which is an indication of the organisation's commitment to high standards in abuse prevention.

¹⁴ 'Integrity in Ministry' is a set of pastoral standards to guide Religious Life Group members in how to maintain safe and appropriate boundaries in their ministry, practice, work and daily lives.

apparent that individual members were aware of when they should contact the RLSS and how they should do so. Evidence supplied as part of the self-assessment process indicated that the Group takes a zero tolerance to abuse by responding effectively to lower-level concerns, and this is echoed in the Group's safeguarding statement that is due to be featured on the newly developed website. Additionally, the Group takes steps to maintain a safe environment for themselves and those they encounter in their ministries, such as by maintaining a home visit log, ensuring home visits and Soup Kitchens duties are conducted by at least two Friars, and ensuring that any group using Group premises maintains expected safeguarding standards¹⁵.

Areas for Development

4.1.5 The Religious Life Group is in the process of a lay Trustee stepping down due to retirement, and the Regional Superior has discussed the challenges in finding people who are able to dedicate their time and personal resources, as well bring skills and knowledge that will provide diversity of thought and support oversight and improvement. Efforts to replace the lay Trustee should continue at pace, and consideration should be given to devising a formal succession planning process to ensure that any future Trustee changes allow for good business continuity and the maintenance of a diverse skill base.

Graded: Exemplary

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Strengths

4.2.1 The Religious Life Group has commissioned a significant piece of work to redevelop its website, including the safeguarding pages. This is a longstanding project that is due for imminent completion and has been undertaken by an

¹⁵ The Latin Mass Group using St. Patrick's Mission provides a Parish Safeguarding Representative.

organisation with significant experience in faith-based communications. This is an important investment by the Group, and it is commendable that the development has been informed by feedback regarding usability. Once launched, the Group should ensure that the safeguarding pages are used to maximum effect to deliver its core safeguarding messages and provide access to key safeguarding material.

4.2.2 Documentary, communications and interview evidence demonstrated that the Religious Life Group delivers safeguarding messages via a range of mediums and as a matter of course in its ministry and practice. The Group limits digital communications in the internal life of its communities, but safeguarding is evidently discussed on a regular basis in person: safeguarding is a standing item on the agenda of all Trustee meetings, interview evidence demonstrated that safeguarding is discussed in both whole-Friary meetings and those between individual members and the General and Local Servants, and posters are displayed in Group premises. The Group does also maintain a presence on Facebook, albeit this is not currently used for regular safeguarding communications.

4.2.3 The Religious Life Group was seen to work very effectively with a range of external stakeholders; importantly, these links were seen to contribute to maintaining a safer environment in relation to Group activities and premises. The Group's strong working relationship with RLSS is a theme that runs through this report, and has supported a rapid development of policies and quality assurance of practice; the Group was also seen to work equally effectively with its local Dioceses in relation to DBS¹⁶ checks, training and general safeguarding practice. More widely, the Group has established relationships with a range of local statutory agencies and specialist organisations, which have led to additional opportunities for safeguarding training and bespoke support to the Group's service users; an excellent example in this area is the Group's liaison with local Health Services to periodically provide a Mobile Health Unit at St. Fidelis Friary Soup Kitchen.

Areas for Development

¹⁶ DBS – the Disclosure and Barring Service; a government organisation which facilitates the completion of criminal records checks, as well as consulting other material and databases which might suggest that someone is unsuitable to work with children or adults at risk.

4.2.4 The Religious Life Group's international (Praesidium) Safeguarding Policy makes various references to safeguarding communications and, importantly, emphasises a need for transparency in such. Practice in this area could be improved by developing the existing local Safeguarding Policy to include an overview of the Group's safeguarding communication strategy; this should include brief details of the Group's key safeguarding messages (such as the overarching safeguarding statement), the intended audiences for these messages and the means of communication. The communication strategy should be a living document, and consideration should be given to how to engage with volunteers and service users to evaluate safeguarding communications and divert their feedback to developing these and the overall strategy; once the new website is launched, this might provide a useful platform for seeking feedback.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

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

Strengths

4.3.1 Practice evidence demonstrated that the Religious Life Group provides a compassionate and caring response to those who report being harmed; this was seen in the detailed case audit conducted as part of the audit process, as well as wider communications material provided to support the self-assessment. It was evident that Friars listen to and accompany victim-survivors, as well as providing practical support and signposting to both specialist organisations, such as Safe Spaces¹⁷, and statutory agencies.

4.3.2 Practice in this area is underpinned by clear and high-quality safeguarding policies and training. The international safeguarding policy places a clear expectation on individual Friaries to ensure a supportive means of interacting with victim-survivors and their families, and the local Safeguarding Policy provides clear guidance on how to appropriately manage initial information-gathering and support processes with those reporting harm. As will be drawn out in relation to

¹⁷ Safe Spaces is an ecumenical initiative, providing free and independent support to those who have been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church.

other standards, the Friars have accessed a wide range of safeguarding training, but it is noted here that this has included topics such as effective and compassionate responses to victim-survivors, as well as hearing directly from victim-survivors in bespoke training.

4.3.3 Leaders have engaged with victim-survivors, reflected on their experience and discussed what they have learned. The Safeguarding Lead and Assistant Lead were both seen to engage directly with those who report harm, and interview evidence demonstrated the profound learning that Friars had obtained from a Diocesan training event led by victim-survivors. The Religious Life Group's international safeguarding team benefits from having a victim-survivor on its board, which has enabled their direct contribution to the development of international policies and procedures. The Local Servant at St. Pio Friary has undertaken the 'Grief to Grace'¹⁸ programme, and had been involved in supporting the Religious Life Group's international programme of victim-survivor training and support prior to assuming additional duties as Local Servant and Assistant Safeguarding Lead.

Areas for Development

4.3.4 Practice in this area could be developed further by exploring how feedback could be obtained from those who report harm, or those who are provided with a service more widely. Case audit A demonstrated that feedback is obtained on an ad hoc basis, but there is scope to seek this more proactively. Any attempts to obtain such feedback should always be victim-survivor-led, and could be simply achieved by publicising the Safeguarding Lead's (or other appropriate) email address as a means for providing feedback; this might dovetail well with the impending launch of the new Group website, and consideration should be given to devising an online feedback form or other means of canvassing peoples' views and experiences. Any feedback obtained should be diverted to the continuous improvement of Religious Life Group practice and policy in this area.

¹⁸ Grief to Grace is an initiative that provides a specialised 5-day programme of spiritual and psychological healing for those who have suffered abuse; this includes abuse occurring within the church and wider society and is delivered by means of a retreat.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.4 Standard 4 Effective Management of Allegations and Concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 As discussed in relation to Standard 1, the Religious Life Group has comprehensive policies in place to guide members' responses to safeguarding concerns and allegations. Both policies provide comprehensive guidance on responding to matters in a timely and effective manner, and Case audit A provided excellent practice evidence of this. Practice is underpinned by members accessing a range of training to guide their responses, which will be discussed in more detail elsewhere. Importantly, members were seen to engage with Diocesan Safeguarding Teams and RLSS Advisors in a timely manner to obtain expert guidance on safeguarding matters and quality assure any actions already taken.

4.4.2 Both the international and local safeguarding policies emphasise the expectation that members will notify statutory agencies of relevant safeguarding concerns and allegations in a timely manner, and conduct effective ongoing liaison with agencies to support investigations; this was seen to happen in practice. Case audit A demonstrated appropriate contact with Police in an emergency situation, and both audit interview and documentary evidence indicated Group experience of conducting ongoing police liaison with support from a Diocesan Safeguarding Team, as well as making referrals to, and engaging with, Local Authority services in order to support those who access Soup Kitchen services.

4.4.3 The Religious Life Group does not maintain a bespoke case management system, but makes good use of an Incident Book within each Friary to make an initial log of matters arising in connection with ministries, with any follow-on enquiries being logged digitally in Word documents by the Safeguarding Lead. Case audit A and other documentary evidence demonstrated that case recording was of high quality, with matters being recorded sensitively and in good detail. Care is evidently taken to maintain the confidentiality of relevant parties, with safeguarding files being retained in a secure cabinet, safeguarding policies

dealing explicitly with confidentiality and case recording standards, and Data Processing consent forms being used.

4.4.4 The leadership was seen to exercise appropriate oversight of safeguarding concerns and allegations. All matters are referred to the European Safeguarding Lead, who is also the Local Servant of St. Fidelis Friary; he manages any investigations and liaises with external bodies as necessary. The nature of community life and meetings is such that the Regional Servant is made aware of safeguarding concerns on a regular basis; interview evidence demonstrated that he balances the provision of support and guidance with the need to maintain confidentiality and impartiality should he subsequently need to instigate any complaints or canonical processes. There were no matters occurring during the 12-month audit period that would warrant formal notification to the Trustees or General Servant; similarly, there were no matters requiring submission of a Serious Incident Report to the Charity Commission, but meeting minutes, interview evidence and the Trustees Code of Conduct indicated a good understanding of Trustee responsibilities in this area.

Areas for Development

4.4.5 The Religious Life Group's ministry is such that the Friars interact with adults with a range of significant vulnerabilities, whether this be serious poverty, homelessness, poor mental health or exposure to abuse within these contexts. In audit interviews, Friars spoke of the challenges inherent in these interactions in respect of reporting safeguarding incidents; whilst some matters were seen to be clear cut when determining whether to record and report concerns, there were other areas that were not, and there was concern that it would not be practicable to report every single matter or observation connected with their guests. When working and ministering with people with complex circumstances, it can be a challenge to establish a threshold that balances reporting obligations with the need to conduct core activities, maintain effective pastoral and spiritual relationships, and avoid alienating the people who come to the Group in need. This is an area that would benefit from discernment as a Community, and with guidance from the RLSS.

4.4.6 Documentary and interview evidence indicated that the Religious Life Group is able to identify learning on an ad hoc basis, and the nature of community life is such that members are able to reflect on incidents as a group. Consideration

should be given to how learning processes could be formalised to increase opportunities to extract and share learning from safeguarding concerns, allegations, or general safeguarding practice. This could be as simple as introducing a “lessons learned” section to any case logs, which could be completed prior to the matter being closed, or as a formal talking point at meetings of the Trustees or wider Friaries.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

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

Strengths

4.5.1 The international Safeguarding Policy provides a comprehensive overview of the expected processes for monitoring and supporting any Group member who might become subject to a safeguarding allegation. The Religious Life Group has members who are able to devise and monitor risk management strategies for either lay or clergy respondents. Both Safeguarding Leads have completed the RLSS ‘Care and Safety Management Plans’ training package, and evidence was seen to support the Group’s ability to work with both Dioceses and the RLSS to ensure that effective risk management is delivered in this area. The individual case audit completed, supported by wider evidence provided during the self-assessment process, demonstrated that the Group interacts with respondents in a way that balances compassion with robust risk management.

4.5.2 The Religious Life Group has established links and put processes in place to ensure that any respondents would be supported during statutory or other safeguarding investigations. The international community is able to draw on the support of members who are qualified counsellors, and there are existing arrangements in place for counselling and spiritual direction to be sourced from outside of the Group. The leadership has confirmed that there is both the resilience and facility for members to step back from community life if they were to become

subject to an allegation, which is well evidenced in the existing practice of occasionally reorganising community membership to ensure harmonious relationships, and the support provided to members who need to step back from community life to deal with family matters and personal issues. This was seen to be paired with an understanding, both in policy and leadership interviews, of the importance of maintaining respondents' good name and supporting their return to ministry where appropriate.

Areas for Development

4.5.3 Practice and policy in this area is strong, but the leadership may want to consider providing periodic reassurance to Group members regarding the support available should they be subject to a safeguarding concern or allegation, as well as an overview of the statutory and Diocesan/RLSS investigatory processes that they may be subject to. This would dovetail well with any work to reassure members regarding expectations on reporting standards for matters touching on safeguarding.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.6 Standard 6 Robust Human Resource Management

Strengths

4.6.1 The Religious Life Group has recently devised individual policies relating to whistleblowing and complaints processes, with the local Safeguarding Policy also featuring a brief section regarding whistleblowing. The bespoke policies have been developed using templates sourced by Trustees, have been quality assured by the Group's international leadership to ensure that they are commensurate with Praesidium expectations, and RLSS was also consulted on the documents prior to ratification by the Trustees. Both policies support matters to be raised in a range of circumstances, provide clear information on process and timescale, and will support timely resolution. Complaints processes are also underpinned by a formal complaints register that will support the tracking of complaints, albeit the process has yet to be formally tested.

4.6.2 DBS compliance is 100% for Group members and Trustees, with individual members liaising directly with the relevant Diocesan Safeguarding Teams to ensure that these are completed in good time. Prior to the Covid pandemic, Dioceses required that Religious Life Group volunteers also completed DBS checks; whilst that is no longer the case, the Group is in the process of clarifying which volunteers should submit to checks and taking forward those which are required, and the Safeguarding Leads and Soup Kitchen Directors are driving this forwards with the RLSS and relevant Diocesan Safeguarding Team. The Group has very aged experience of dealing with a blemished DBS record, and would work with either the Diocesan Safeguarding Team or RLSS to risk assess any future issues.

4.6.3 There has been a significant development of safer recruitment processes over the past year. Although the Religious Life Group currently has no employees, the local Safeguarding Policy sets out clear requirements regarding DBS and references for the eventuality that employees are sought. The Friaries are supported by in excess of 35 volunteers, primarily in relation to the Soup Kitchens, and arrangements have traditionally been somewhat informal. Volunteers are now required to provide two references, and there is a significant programme underway to backdate this process for volunteers who have been with the Group for some time. New volunteers now receive formal inductions whereby they are monitored by a Friar (and potentially an experienced volunteer) at an initial “taster” session and, if this is successful, the reference and training process is initiated prior to further sessions being completed; a brief Volunteer Handbook has also been devised. In respect of Friars, formation processes take place exclusively in the USA, with those Friars subsequently ministering in England & Wales being required to comply with Diocesan and Praesidium expectations in respect of DBS and training.

Areas for Development

4.6.4 A key development in this area is for a final drive to roll out the safer recruitment process to existing volunteers, albeit it is acknowledged that the irregular attendance of many volunteers presents significant challenges to achieving this in a timely way. With regards to volunteer DBS checks, the Religious Life Group will need to make further explorations to ensure that the Praesidium expectation that all volunteers complete DBS checks is balanced with local limitations on the level of check that can or should be completed.

4.6.5 The Religious Life Group has already identified that leadership oversight of DBS compliance could be developed further. Currently, individual Friars hold responsibility for maintaining 3-yearly DBS checks, and whilst this has worked well thus far, there is recognition that this should be proactively monitored by the Safeguarding Leads and wider leadership. The Safeguarding Leads are currently devising a means of monitoring the DBS (and training) status of each Group member and Trustee, and embedding this into existing annual review processes.

4.6.6 The whistleblowing and complaints policies are relatively new documents and would benefit from dissemination to all who may have use of them. Consideration should be given to providing hard copies within Friaries, Soup Kitchens and any other Group venues, and signposting Friars and volunteers to these. The impending completion of the Group website development will provide a key opportunity for wider dissemination of these and any other safeguarding policies.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.7 Standard 7: Training and Support for Safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 Training compliance is excellent within the Religious Life Group and training requirements for different groups are entirely commensurate with CSSA expectations. All Friars have completed the CSSA Level 3 online safeguarding training and take part in additional safeguarding training on an annual basis. Trustees who do not have active ministry in England and Wales (both lay and clergy) have completed the CSSA Level 2 online safeguarding training. Both Friaries are also in the process of rolling out the CSSA Level 1 safeguarding training pamphlet to Soup Kitchen volunteers; this is well underway at both sites, with the pamphlet being provided to existing volunteers as and when they attend for sessions and to new volunteers as part of their recruitment process.

4.7.2 Friars obtain training from a wide range of sources, with the result that they have accessed a significant breadth and depth of safeguarding training. In addition to the online national training materials, the Friars attend training events

within their respective Dioceses so are able to access the national in-person training provision, as well as bespoke opportunities provided by Diocesan Safeguarding Teams. All Friars were required to complete two core safeguarding training modules with Praesidium in 2024 ('Preventing Abuse in Youth Serving Organisation' and 'Duty to Report: Mandated Reporter'), and Friars have either accessed, or are booked to attend, a range of bespoke training courses provided by RLSS; both the Safeguarding Lead and his Assistant have accessed advanced RLSS safeguarding courses.

4.7.3 Safeguarding training is promoted, facilitated and overseen by the Leadership. Minimum training standards are clearly set out within the local Safeguarding Policy and meeting minutes demonstrate that training is frequently discussed in Trustee meetings. Records are kept of training compliance and Local Servants monitor and ensure attendance at national training events within their Dioceses. Training records and audit interviews demonstrate that leadership figures embrace and take advantage of all opportunities to diversify their safeguarding training, and that this practice is modelled to their communities.

Areas for Development

4.7.4 Development in this area involves building on existing strong practice. As identified in the Group's own audit self-assessment, there is scope to formalise leadership scrutiny of training compliance. As discussed in relation to Standard 6, the Safeguarding Leads plan to conduct formal annual reviews of Friars' DBS status, and this would sit well with scrutiny of training compliance and exploration of training impact and needs; this will be discussed further in relation to Standard 8.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 The Religious Life Group has established strong links that will support the quality assurance and continuous improvement of its safeguarding practice. The Group has signed contracts with both the RLSS and CSSA, and a range of evidence

demonstrates a strong and effective working relationship with RLSS in respect of both reactive and proactive safeguarding activity. As well as accessing training and case advice, there has been good interaction with RLSS to devise and quality assure a range of local safeguarding policies. It is of particular note that the Group was already working with RLSS to conduct a safeguarding audit when the CSSA audit notification was received and took primacy.

4.8.2 The Religious Life Group has engaged wholeheartedly with the audit process. The self-assessment form has been completed in a detailed and reflective manner that showcases the good work undertaken thus far and identifies areas for, and means of, further development. The Safeguarding Leads have also liaised closely with both the CSSA analyst and an RLSS representative to understand the CSSA audit process and make appropriate preparations.

4.8.3 Meeting minutes for the past 12 months demonstrate an explicit leadership consideration of the national safeguarding standards, the progress of aligning the Group's practice to these, as well as ensuring that practice reflects the international standards set by Praesidium. Both lay and clergy trustees were seen to contribute time and energy to a range of initiatives in this area, such as developing a range of policies and arranging a complete redesign of the Group website (including the safeguarding pages of this).

Areas for development

4.8.4 Development in this area relates to matters that are already in the planning stage. The Safeguarding Lead has discussed firm plans to build on the existing annual apostolic review process to support a formal review of safeguarding practice over the year. The individual Friary reviews provide an opportunity for the whole community to reflect on the year and discern what ministry and practice should continue, be developed or cease, and these reviews will now feature a safeguarding element. These annual events will support each Friary to review individual DBS and training compliance, canvas group members for feedback on training to identify any additional needs, and to capture and share any opportunities for learning from safeguarding incidents or practice.

4.8.5 Plans are also underway for the Religious Life Group to devise a formal Safeguarding Implementation Plan. Such a document will formalise the good practice that is already in place and provide a simple structure by which the

leadership can monitor practice and drive improvement in relation to the individual safeguarding standards, whether this be at periodic Trustee meetings or annual apostolic reviews. Consideration should be given to incorporating CSSA audit report recommendations within the Plan, and the leadership should ensure that any actions are shared appropriately across the Group, with resources and support provided to enable people to complete their individual actions.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

5. Summary of Overall Findings

5.1 The baseline safeguarding audit conducted with the Religious Life Group found good practice across all eight of the national safeguarding standards. Safeguarding practice in respect of governance and training were particular strengths. The Group was compliant with statutory and regulatory requirements.

5.2 Safeguarding was seen to be intrinsic to the Religious Life Group's ministry and practice, with effective safeguarding policies, excellent DBS and training compliance for members, and each member making a valuable contribution to wider safeguarding practice. Governance processes are effective, with leaders making proactive contributions to developing policy and practice; the leadership also embraces and promotes national safeguarding processes and standards. Practice evidence demonstrated that the Group provides a compassionate and caring response to all, and that this is balanced with robust risk management and effective signposting to a range of support services.

5.3 Areas for development concern building on the good work that has already taken place or is underway within the Religious Life Group, as well as some matters that have been identified within the Group's comprehensive self-assessment. The imminent roll-out of the newly developed website will provide opportunities for a wider dissemination of the Group's safeguarding messages and materials, as well as a means of obtaining feedback that can be used to develop and improve

safeguarding policies and procedures. Existing processes should be harnessed to enable formal annual reviews of Group and member safeguarding practice, which should be supported by a structured plan for implementing and maintaining high standards of practice.

6. Recommendations

6.1 To support development in identified areas, the following recommendations are made in order of importance:

- Continue succession planning to maintain lay representation on the Board of Trustees.
- Continue the roll-out of safer recruitment processes to volunteers.
- Consider developing guidance to support Friar decision making in respect of reportable incidents.
- Consider distilling relevant guidance into a bespoke document to advise Friars of the support and processes involved in becoming subject to a safeguarding concern.
- Incorporate a brief communication strategy within the existing European Safeguarding Policy.
- Develop a process for more regular oversight of DBS and training compliance.
- Develop methods to obtain feedback from those who report harm.
- Develop methods to identify and share learning from safeguarding concerns and allegations.
- Develop a Safeguarding Implementation Plan to support oversight of existing and planned safeguarding activity, with incorporation of CSSA recommendations.
- Take forward plans to incorporate a safeguarding element into annual Friary Apostolic Reviews.
- Engage with key stakeholders to evaluate safeguarding communications, including the newly developed website, and further develop any communication strategy.
- Develop methods for evaluating training compliance and identifying additional training needs.

6.2 In accordance with the overall rating of *Comprehensive Assurance* reaudit by the CSSA should take place after a three-year period, subject to no new risk factors arising. A “check-in” meeting with a CSSA analyst should take place within a year.