

Holy Family Sisters of the Needy

Baseline Audit Report
June 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is a baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements of the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy. This audit has been undertaken as part of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency's (CSSA) Baseline Audit phase of Religious Life Groups (RLGs).

1.2 The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy are an international Religious Institute founded in Nigeria in 1983. The Charism of the Institute is to safeguard the rights of the unborn child, rehabilitate unmarried mothers, provide pastoral care to the poor and needy and alleviate their problems with attention to their spiritual wellbeing¹. The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy in England and Wales number five sisters who undertake their primary ministry in, but not on behalf of, the Diocese of Brentwood. They are part of the UK English Zone and the mother house is in Brentwood Diocese. One of the sisters also undertakes ministry on behalf of their Diocesan parish in bringing Holy Communion to the housebound. The parish work is undertaken under Diocesan safeguarding arrangements.

1.3 The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy do not employ any staff. They occasionally organise events which have volunteers supporting them but these events would not place the volunteers in any regulated activity which would necessitate a Disclosure and Barring Service² (DBS) check. The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy joined the Religious Life Safeguarding Service³ (RLSS) in May 2025. At the point of audit, the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy were not contracted to the CSSA but agreed to engage with a safeguarding audit. They signed the CSSA contract in September 2025.

1.4 This audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of current safeguarding arrangements by considering practice over the last 12 months. The CSSA has categorised RLGs on a scale from Level 1 (a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns), Level 2 (a medium sized

¹ [Holy Family Sisters of the Needy](#)

² [Disclosure and Barring Service – GOV.UK](#)

³ [Religious Life Safeguarding Service](#)

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). The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy were categorised at Level 1 as they are a small community with no known safeguarding concerns.

2. Methodology

2.1 Initial contact was made via email on 11 March 2025. An in person interview date of 19 June 2025 was agreed with submission of the self-assessment and supporting evidence provided on 20 May 2025.

2.2 Audit interviews were completed on 19 June 2025 with the Superior of the House in England, the Safeguarding Lead and two of the Sisters.

2.3 Liaison with RLSS and the Diocese of Brentwood about the engagements of the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy took place on 15 May 2025. This liaison confirmed that there are no known safeguarding concerns related to the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy.

2.4 To support their self-assessment the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy provided a safeguarding policy as evidence. Following the interviews they also provided a Complaints Policy, an Inquiry Form, the form they use to collect client details and their safeguarding rules. Hard copies of paperwork entitled "How to Encourage both Members and those who you come into contact in your Public Ministry to Report Harm", "Practical Steps to Responding to Someone Reporting Having Been Harmed" and "Guiding Principles for Reporting Harm by Members and those we encounter in our Public Ministry" were given to the auditor in person.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Safeguarding practice is assessed against the eight safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales⁴.

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.

3.3 This report summarises the findings of the audit undertaken with the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy and their progress towards meeting the eight safeguarding standards. The overall grading was Met with Recommendations with six of the eight standards being graded as that. The other two were graded as Not Met.

⁴ A description and full details of the Standards can be found on the CSSA website [here](#)

Overall grading	Met with Recommendations
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	Not 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 with Recommendations
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	Not Met

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 In May 2025 the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy signed up to RLSS to access their safeguarding support service. They have utilised a template Safeguarding Policy from RLSS which is in the process of being finalised as their own policy. Prior to this there was no written safeguarding policy or commitment to safeguarding. They have started to use the services of RLSS for Advanced Safeguarding training which all members completed two days prior to the audit interviews.

4.1.2 The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy have a designated safeguarding lead. They have a total of five trustees, three Religious and two Lay members. The trustees meet twice a year, which is in accordance with the Charity Commission minimum expectation⁵. However, safeguarding is not a standing agenda item for them and would only be discussed if there was a known concern that had arisen.

4.1.3 The Superior of the English House and the safeguarding lead were able to speak about the responsibilities that they hold for ensuring effective safeguarding for the Sisters and also for the vulnerable women that they minister to.

Areas for development

4.1.4 The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy Trustees should complete safeguarding for trustees training. This will ensure that they have a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Trustee meetings should also routinely discuss safeguarding as a standing agenda item and should plan for how they will implement the recommendations of this audit which will form the basis of a safeguarding implementation plan.

⁵ [Charity meetings - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/charity-meetings)

4.1.5 Monthly meetings of the sisters should ensure that safeguarding is discussed in terms of training expectations, vetting compliance and any safeguarding concerns that have arisen in their ministry. They should also discuss the pastoral standards document, Integrity in Ministry⁶, to ensure that it is understood and that Sisters are compliant with it in their work.

4.1.6 When the safeguarding policy is finalised the Sisters should ensure that it is accessible internally and to those that they minister to. They should incorporate CSSA practice guidance⁷ on Creating a Safer Environment into their ongoing ministry to make sure they keep those who utilise their ministry and themselves as safe as possible.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 As noted above, safeguarding has not routinely been discussed within the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy. Documents related to safeguarding were available on a noticeboard within the Sisters' accommodation. This included an RLSS poster with contact details for the safeguarding lead and for RLSS and also the paperwork referred to in 2.4.

Areas for development

4.2.2 The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy do not have an online presence for the English House and do not plan to create one. The international website is in the process of being updated and should be completed by the end of 2025. However, this will not hold safeguarding specific information for England. The Holy Family

⁶ Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales

⁷ [Practice Guidance](#)

Sisters of the Needy should consider how they will promote the importance of safeguarding to those they minister to. This might include printed documentation to give to their service users which tells them how to raise a safeguarding concern and also links to sources of support for survivors of abuse. A list of organisations such as these is available on the RLSS website on their commitment to Survivors page⁸.

Graded: Not Met

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

Strengths

4.3.1 The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy have no experience of dealing with a reported safeguarding concern so much of the evidence from Standards 3 to 5 is theoretical.

4.3.2 Documents such as “How to Encourage both Members and those who you come into contact in your Public Ministry to Report Harm” and “Practical Steps to Responding to Someone Reporting Having Been Harmed” have been created by the Safeguarding Lead to facilitate an understanding of how to handle a disclosure of harm and ensure the Survivor receives support and care according to their circumstances. They also have a generic “Holy Family Sisters of the Needy Inquiry Form” which aims to enable individuals to contact the safeguarding lead alongside other enquiries such as donating or making a prayer request. Individuals using the form are requested to email or post it to the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy. It is not clear how service users would access this form or know of its existence. It does reference Safe Spaces⁹ as a potential source of support for Survivors and there is a

⁸ [RLSS Commitment to Survivors](#)

⁹ 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.

hyperlink on the online copy of the form to their website. The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy should ensure that they make all those they minister to aware of the existence of the Inquiry Form.

4.3.3 “Practical Steps to Responding to Someone Reporting Having Been Harmed” acknowledges that those making a disclosure may require emotional support and should be referred to “appropriate services”, suggesting the NSPCC, Victim Support or local child protection services. Contact details for the suggested sources of support are not included. The potential support needs of the person receiving the disclosure are also noted but these are anticipated to be met by “any organisation that can provide support”.

Areas for development

4.3.4 Whilst Safe Spaces was referenced in the Inquiry Form, interviews demonstrated there was a lack of awareness among the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy of their services. Given the nature of their ministry, the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy could potentially work with women, babies and very young children who have been, or at risk of being, abused. Therefore, they should familiarise themselves with places where referrals may need to be made in an emergency, such as the local authority in Newham¹⁰, alongside support services for Survivors such as those referenced on the RLSS website.

4.3.5 RLSS are not mentioned in any of the documentation referred to under this standard. As the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy are now contracted to them for support they should play a key role in all aspects of safeguarding practice, including liaison over support for survivors.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

¹⁰ [Newham Families Advice and Support | Safeguarding Children & Young People](#)

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 Prior to contracting with RLSS, the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy did not have an effective mechanism to manage allegations and concerns in England. They now have a support system to refer to if they were to receive an allegation of abuse. There was an awareness of forms of abuse that they would be likely to encounter in their ministry. This included women who are fleeing from domestic abuse and trying to live independently with their children.

4.4.2 As they are a small community it is inevitable that trustees would be made aware of safeguarding concerns promptly. The safeguarding lead and Superior of the House in England said they would let lay trustees know by telephone as soon as they became aware of any allegation. They would also meet outside of the planned two trustee meetings a year.

4.4.3 “Practical Steps to Responding to Someone Reporting Having Been Harmed” has key guidance on responding appropriately to a report of harm. This includes immediately contacting emergency services if there is an immediate risk, making notes of the disclosure without judgement and reporting it. It also highlights the need for the person receiving the information to not investigate the allegation themselves and to store records securely. In practice, the safeguarding lead has a locked file where records would be stored. In her absence, or if she were the subject of the allegation, the Superior of the House can also access the files.

4.4.4 If there were a need for an investigation into abuse then the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy have access to Canon Law advice through their international community. This would help to ensure that any investigation was compliant with the expectations of Canon Law.

Areas for development

4.4.5 The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy had an awareness of the need for making Serious Incident Reports to the Charity Commission in instances of financial

mismanagement or fraud. Trustees should ensure that they have full knowledge of the expectation of when and how to report any safeguarding related concerns and a process of how this would be done and by whom.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

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

Strengths

4.5.1 The template safeguarding policy and the documents created by the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy regarding safeguarding do not reference support for the Respondent. In interview the sisters also were not aware of what support they may receive in the event of an allegation against them. However, the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy said they would be able to facilitate temporary removal from ministry by moving the Respondent to their House in Scotland or one in Europe.

4.5.2 There is an understanding that RLSS should be contacted for support in managing and supporting any Respondents to allegations although there is a lack of detailed knowledge of what that support might look like. However, it was recognised that a Sister might need practical, spiritual, emotional or psychological support.

Areas for development

4.5.3 The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy should ensure that they can signpost Respondents to allegations to a separate source of Canon Law advice from the one the Order would use.

4.5.4 Leaders should also familiarise themselves with potential sources of support that Respondents may need so they can signpost them promptly in the event of an allegation or concern.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 Formation in the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy takes place in Nigeria and it was reported that there are ongoing seminars and workshops on safeguarding as part of this. Decisions about Sisters being sent to the UK are made by the Mother General and her council. When a Sister arrives in the UK a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check is done within two months and records kept. The Sister would not have commenced in active ministry before that. The Sisters believed that the Mother General would send the Zonal Leader a letter indicating that the Sister moving was in good standing and there were no known concerns about her.

4.6.2 The Inquiry form is the expected mechanism to raise complaints although it is not clear how service users are made aware of the existence of the form. The Sisters were confident if they have a complaint about the leaders in England and Wales they could raise them and have them addressed via the international Order.

Areas for development

4.6.3 The draft Safeguarding Policy has guidance on safer recruitment. The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy will need to ensure that they are compliant with this for any volunteers that they utilise. They should also seek clarity as to how they will verify that any Sisters that arrive to minister in the UK are in good standing. Compliance with safer recruitment expectations should routinely be reported to trustees for their oversight.

4.6.4 It would be helpful if the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy created, or used a template, complaints policy rather than a generic inquiry form. This would allow individuals who wished to raise a complaint to have a dedicated form to use with clear instruction on how to submit a complaint and how it will be handled once received.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 Since contracting with RLSS the Sisters have completed Basic, Adult and Advanced safeguarding training sessions. They keep records of training completion. In June 2025 the Safeguarding Lead completed RLSS Safeguarding Lead training.

Areas for Development

4.7.2 Trustees of the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy should complete Safeguarding for Trustees training to ensure they fully understand their responsibilities.

4.7.3 Although they do not run specific children's activities, the nature of their ministry is likely to mean the Sisters have contact with parents and their children and babies. It is therefore imperative that all members complete RLSS Safeguarding Children and Young People training.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 Prior to their engagement with RLSS in May 2025, safeguarding arrangements in the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy were insufficient. Improvements are starting to take place and these need to become established and routine.

Areas for Development

4.8.2 Trustees have not had routine oversight of safeguarding and need to be assured that, at a minimum, there is a safeguarding policy which is being followed, including for training and vetting expectations. They should also plan for how they are going to effectively implement the recommendations of this audit and ensure that the Sisters are aware of the expectations of Integrity in Ministry. The Holy Family

Sisters of the Needy should continue to use the services of RLSS for training and for advice in any safeguarding concerns or allegations which they receive.

Graded: Not Met

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1. The Holy Family Sisters of the Needy are a small RLG who undertake their ministry in support of mothers and children. They have only recently contracted with RLSS for safeguarding support but, since that point, have been active in using their training provision. They have sought to develop a Safeguarding Policy and some associated procedures around reporting harm.

5.2 The Safeguarding Policy needs to be finalised and ratified by Trustees who must ensure they have regular and active oversight of their compliance with the Policy and the eight safeguarding standards of the Catholic church in England and Wales. Where standards are not met, Trustees must develop a plan to address identified deficiencies.

5.3 The evidence for this audit demonstrates that, overall, the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy have achieved a rating of Met with Recommendations against the eight safeguarding standards.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- Safeguarding Policy to be completed and ratified
- Sisters to read Integrity in Ministry and discuss expectations at their meetings
- Trustees to develop a plan to implement and track the completion of the recommendations of this audit

Within 6 months

- Trustees to attend RLSS training for Trustees
- All Sisters to attend RLSS training on Safeguarding Children and Young People
- Trustees to have safeguarding as a standing agenda item and receive information on compliance with the Safeguarding Policy
- Document to be created to give to service users which tells them how to raise a safeguarding concern and how it will be addressed
- Leaders to familiarise themselves with support services for Survivors of abuse so they can be referenced in documents provided to service users
- RLSS to be referenced as a source of safeguarding support in documents
- Trustees to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities in notifying the Charity Commission of any Serious Incidents related to safeguarding

Within 12 months

- Leaders to establish a procedure to ensure new arrivals in the UK are in good standing prior to arrival
- Leaders to consider what types of support Respondents to allegations would need and how they could promptly signpost to them

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with an overall rating of Met with Recommendations, the earliest date of the next audit of the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy by the CSSA is within two years in June 2027. If the CSSA becomes aware of a significant Safeguarding concern or allegation in the intervening period then an earlier audit will be required.