

Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa

Baseline Audit Report
December 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This report is a baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements for the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa¹. It is undertaken as part of the CSSA programme of baseline audits for Religious Life Groups (RLGs) in England and Wales.

1.2 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa is an international Congregation founded in 1869 in Algeria for the evangelisation of Africa. Its mission is to provide the services necessary to build up the Kingdom of God and the local Church in Africa. Every Sister is sent on a mission to Africa unless they are needed for internal services for a time within the Congregation. All of the Sisters have spent their working lives in Africa or for some years in Congregational services in the UK or in Rome. Sisters are generally appointed to their countries of origin at around the age of 75 years so as to be reintegrated into their home culture. The Superior for the group in England and Wales has delegate authority from the Canonical Leader and is hereafter referred to within this report as the Local Delegate. There are eight Sisters in England who reside across three sites; six of whom reside in the community in Ealing, one who resides independently and one who lives in a CQC regulated care home not run by the group. At present only two Sisters are volunteers in ministry that requires a DBS check. There are no Sisters situated in Wales. The group have two employees and no lay members or volunteers.

1.3 The scope of this audit includes safeguarding arrangements for the 12 month period preceding the audit week which took place in September 2025. The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa undertake voluntary apostolic work outside of the group through external agencies and charities with their own safeguarding arrangements in place which this audit will not include commentary on. Nor will this report cover the safeguarding arrangements in place for the diocese in which Parish support is undertaken by Sisters. This audit will focus on the activities, governance and operations of the Sisters residing in England and Wales; the scope

¹ The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa CIO, also known as the White Sisters, is an Incorporated Charitable Organisation registered under charity number 1171062.

of which will not include the international body which governs the England and Wales area.

1.4 The CSSA has devised a categorisation scheme for Religious Life Groups taking part in safeguarding audits. This categorises groups on a scale of *Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3*. Level 1 is classed as a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns. Level 1 is itself divided into two categories: *Enclosed* (for Enclosed Orders) and *Apostolic* (for non-Enclosed Orders). Level 2 is for Orders of medium sized communities with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some diocesan activities such as a Parish Priest. Level 3 audits cover larger communities and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases. The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have been assigned to a Level 1 Apostolic safeguarding audit.

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

2. Methodology

2.1 The Trustee responsible for safeguarding and the Local Delegate of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa were initially contacted by the CSSA Analyst via email on 14 May 2025 to notify them of the intention to complete a safeguarding audit and the relevant Level 1 audit guidance documents were shared. Over a series of further emails a date for the in-person visit was arranged.

2.2 The Level 1 self-assessment form (an assessment tool which provides background information on the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa's adherence

to the eight individual National Safeguarding Standards²) was completed by the group and then emailed to the CSSA with accompanying evidence on 5 August 2025. Following the review of the self-assessment and the supporting evidence provided, the CSSA Analyst completed the in-person visit to the Montpelier Court community on 10 September 2025. During the safeguarding audit the CSSA Analyst interviewed the Trustee responsible for safeguarding and the Local Delegate who is also the Chair of Trustees together, and another group member who is also a Trustee separately.

2.3 The evidence provided in both the self-assessment form and the in-person visit has been assessed against the Level 1 Maturity Matrix and ratings for each standard have been assigned, together with a combined overall grade.

2.4 The following evidence has also been considered in the preparation of this report in reaching decisions regarding scoring for the individual safeguarding standards and the overall grade:

- The Charity Commission webpages for the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa³
- Level 1 self-assessment form completed by the group lead and the Trustee responsible for safeguarding and submitted to the CSSA Analyst
- The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa's Safeguarding Policy
- The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa's Code of Conduct
- The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa's Declaration of Intent
- Introductory document to the set-up of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa
- DBS certificates
- Training records
- Data Protection Registration certificate issued by the ICO
- Certificates of Data Disposal
- Complaints and grievance procedures
- Email liaison with the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)

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

³ The Charity Commission website page can be accessed [here](#)

2.5 No case audit work has been undertaken during the course of this audit as there have been no safeguarding allegations or concerns reported involving the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa within the last 12 months and hence there are no current case files to pass comment on.

3. Audit grading

3.1 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.⁴ The audit draws on evidence generated from self-assessment, interviews and the supporting documentation as listed in paragraph 2.4.

3.2 This report summarises the findings of the audit undertaken for the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa and their progress towards meeting the eight National Safeguarding Standards; the grading for each of which is tabulated below. The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have received an overall rating of *Met*.

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

⁴ Full information on supporting documentation in respect of the audit methodology is available here: [Quality Assurance Framework for Religious Life Groups](#)

Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Met with Recommendations
Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Met
Standard 5 – Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Met
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

4. Audit findings against each standard

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

4.1.1 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa are a Congregation of Pontifical Right with a General Leadership team, also known as the General Council, and a Canonical Leadership team, also referred to as Entity Leaders, who are both based in Rome. The General Council has an appointed member who is responsible for safeguarding internationally. Within England and Wales, for matters concerning Religious Life, the Local Delegate has no Canonical authority but is delegated to attend Conference of Religious meetings and is authorised to handle matters that concern the daily running of the communities. The General Leader in Rome handles legal matters and is due to visit the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa at the

end of 2025 on her first visit, whilst the Canonical Leaders visit every year for one week. The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have meetings as a community almost every week and hand-written minutes of these meetings are made.

4.1.2 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have five Trustees; all of whom are Religious members. The Local Delegate, who is also a Trustee, and the Trustee responsible for safeguarding, have both completed Trustee training with the RLSS. The general bursar, who is based in Rome, is a Trustee and so is able to offer a wider view of safeguarding governance. Trustee meetings are held three times per year and safeguarding is discussed, as evidenced through meeting minutes, when there are safeguarding issues. However, safeguarding is not a standing agenda item for all Trustee meetings. All Sisters interviewed for the purpose of this audit recognised the importance of informing the Trustees of allegations and the Local Delegate and Trustee responsible for safeguarding understood the need to refer serious incidents to the Charity Commission. Should a serious incident arise then the Trustees would have an extraordinary meeting to decide whether it met the threshold for referral.

4.1.3 The Safeguarding Policy for the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa is compiled by the General Council and is reviewed annually and formally adopted by the Trustees. The last review was in September 2024 and, at the time of the audit, was due to be approved imminently. The policy contains a preamble with the Gospel values underpinning the care for the vulnerable, definitions of abuse, guidance on receiving disclosures, supporting the complainant, supporting and managing any accused members, the importance of record keeping and reporting a complaint. The Local Delegate explained that having a Safeguarding Policy in place has been a requirement of their insurers since 2007. In addition to the Safeguarding Policy the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have a Declaration of Intent for adopting safeguarding policies and procedures. The declaration commits to following the Church's "One Church" approach to safeguarding and to ensure that safeguarding policies are adopted, monitored and implemented effectively. However, the resolution is eight years old and refers to the policies of the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission (NCSC); an organisation which no longer exists.

4.1.4 The international safeguarding policy for the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa is a suitable policy for the global Congregation. However, it needs to be adapted to fit safeguarding expectations in England and Wales such as statutory reporting requirements and the role of the RLSS.

4.1.5 When *Integrity in Ministry*⁵ was published the document was circulated to all members of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa. This has since been revisited by the group to ensure that all Sisters are aware of the content and how it applies to them. Hard copies are stored in the office for reference if required.

4.1.6 The RLSS⁶ have confirmed that the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa are members of the service and have actively engaged with relevant safeguarding provision and training offered.

4.1.7 In the absence of the appointed Safeguarding Lead who is currently in poor health, the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have designated a Trustee as responsible for safeguarding. Although only intended as a temporary cover until the Safeguarding Lead's return, the Trustee responsible for safeguarding evidenced a thorough grasp of safeguarding policy and processes during interview and has previously been the group's Safeguarding Lead. The Safeguarding Lead is a member of another Religious Order who has received appropriate training to carry out the role and also acts as the Safeguarding Lead for his own RLG.

4.1.8 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have no safeguarding action plan or work plan. A plan should be agreed by Trustees and reviewed annually to drive safeguarding activity within the group.

4.1.9 All members interviewed for the purpose of the audit were passionate about safeguarding as an issue and understood the need to provide a safe environment

⁵ *Integrity in Ministry* is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It has been written for the guidance of those in ministry and for the information of those people with and among whom Religious exercise their ministry. A copy can be located [here](#)

⁶ RLSS are an independent team of Safeguarding professionals offering Safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales

for all those they work with. The willingness to continually improve practice suggests a culture of safeguarding prevails within the group.

4.1.10 The Trustee responsible for safeguarding, Local Delegate and Trustees create a safe environment and manage safeguarding risks for their own members by liaising with Sisters in care and living independently with Social Care assistance and liaising with those responsible for providing this care. There is no public contact that the Sisters need to consider mitigating risk for outside of that arranged by host organisations.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

4.2.1 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa do not have a website for England and Wales which is considered reasonable for the size of the group and given that the ministry they undertake falls under the responsibility of host organisations. Nonetheless, the Local Delegate has approached the Canonical Leadership team to advise that it would be good safeguarding practice to have contact details of safeguarding leads, safeguarding policy and victim support details published on the international website.

4.2.2 The General Council sends the Trustee responsible for safeguarding and Local Delegate safeguarding updates and messages which are then disseminated amongst the group members via email or printed and discussed at community meetings. The same occurs with any safeguarding updates from the RLSS and Conference of Religious when they are received.

4.2.3 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa do not have a safeguarding communications plan. A bespoke plan, or one which forms part of the safeguarding policy or action plan, that outlines considerations behind safeguarding messaging should be agreed.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

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

4.3.1 Given that there is no previous or current experience of handling allegations of abuse the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have a limited opportunity to evidence working practices in Standards 3, 4 and 5. In the absence of their own opportunities for learning it would benefit the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa to create links with other RLGs or organisations with experience in working with survivors and managing allegations in order to learn from their experiences.

4.3.2 Although contact between members and vulnerable groups is minimal, the Local Delegate does recognise that non-recent allegations and concerns from within their own Congregation may still be reported and that suitable arrangements must be in place to accommodate and support those reporting abuse. During interview the group member and trustee was able to describe the actions she would take in the event of a disclosure in detail and evidenced a sound understanding of the need for sensitivity, compassion and support of complainants.

4.3.3 The members interviewed during the in-person visit demonstrated empathy and the need for respect and dignity when working with victims and survivors. The Safeguarding Policy also supports a compassionate approach to working and the need to be responsive towards complainants and their families and ensure their needs are what drives decision making. The Safeguarding Policy outlines that in the case of proven abuse a suitably qualified support person will be appointed by the local leadership. However, in interview the Local Delegate and the Trustee responsible for safeguarding were not able to state who this person might be. They reported that the revised version of the Safeguarding Policy which is due imminently may offer some guidance for them in this respect.

4.3.4 The premises occupied by the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa are private residence for the community and so not accessible to members of the public. Nonetheless, Safe Spaces⁷ posters are on display in the office area to remind Sisters of the resource available to themselves or any survivors they may meet or work with in the future.

4.3.5 The group member and Trustee was able to relay how they would respond to any safeguarding concerns that came to their attention and who to report it to, illustrating that the processes outlined in the Safeguarding Policy were understood. If a disclosure or allegation of abuse originated from a situation in ministry the institution for whom the volunteer works would be responsible for managing it.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

4.4.1 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have no current or previous allegations or concerns raised. However, if they were to receive any the Safeguarding Policy outlines how these should be reported to Leaders as soon as possible. The Local Delegate and Trustee responsible for safeguarding state that any concerns would be recorded as soon as practicable after they were raised and stored in a password-protected computer file accessible to both parties.

4.4.2 Recorded in the self-assessment is the action that the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa would take should one of their members be accused of abuse which includes ensuring there was no further communication or contact from the respondent to the person making the complaint. The Local Delegate would also follow the Safeguarding Policy but their authority is somewhat limited given that overall decision making regarding the management of the respondent would

⁷ Safe Spaces is a free and confidential support service funded by the Catholic Church for victims and survivors of abuse. Their website can be accessed [here](#)

come from Canonical Leaders Rome. Although there is no direct mention of statutory reporting requirements in England and Wales in the international policy, during interview the Trustee responsible for safeguarding and Local Delegate displayed a good awareness of the need to inform statutory agencies in the event of an allegation. In addition, they report that they would liaise with the RLSS for advice if they had any uncertainties regarding reporting thresholds.

4.4.3 Although not separately titled as whistleblowing, the process for members wishing to make a complaint about the Local Delegate is recorded in policy. The group member and Trustee was aware of what action to take should she need to raise a complaint and advised that they would report this direct to the General Council via telephone, email or social media messaging.

Graded: Met

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

4.5.1 The Safeguarding Policy states that any Sister subject to an allegation will be supported by a qualified support person. During the in-person visit the Local Delegate explained that the General Council has a specialised member who is allocated responsibility for supporting accused members. They also advised that the Canonical Leadership team would decide whether an accused member of the group could remain in the community or be asked to move to alternative accommodation.

4.5.2 The RLSS would be contacted for advice in relation to supporting any individual accused of abuse. In addition, depending on the circumstances of the allegation and the accused personal preferences, the Local Delegate informs that other members in the group could provide spiritual and pastoral support.

4.5.3 The group member and Trustee advised that they were confident they know of the support available to them should they be subject of an allegation. They report

that they have access to leaflets advising them of support available and that they feel the RLSS would also be able to advise on avenues for support if required.

Graded: Met

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

4.6.1 At present only two Sisters are volunteers in ministry that require a DBS check; one within the NHS and the other in St Benedict's Abbey which is part of Westminster Diocese. Therefore, both DBS checks are completed by the host organisations in which the Sisters volunteer. Evidence of these DBS checks was provided as evidence for the audit. Other Sisters are involved in voluntary work and activity that does not require them to hold a valid DBS check such as a charity shop and kitchen for feeding the homeless.

4.6.2 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have two employees comprising of a cook and a financial administrator; neither of whom require a DBS certificate to undertake their roles. Whilst the financial administrator has been employed for several decades, the cook has been employed more recently and safer recruitment steps included interview, the receipt of satisfactory references which were checked for authenticity, and ID and eligibility to work checks. Grievance procedures are outlined in the contracts of both employees. Neither employee had a safeguarding element to their induction. The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa should have assurance that their employees have read and understand the group's safeguarding policy and there should be a safeguarding element to their inductions.

4.6.3 Each member of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa has a physical personal file which is stored in a lockable cabinet within a locked office. Evidence that members have completed Data and Security Awareness training was provided to illustrate an understanding of the sensitivity needed in handling personal information. Additionally, Data Protection registration and GDPR data disposal certificates were also seen.

4.6.4 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa do not receive visitors from overseas. They have a spare room for visiting family members to stay in for one or two nights but there are no public areas for them to access.

4.6.5 Any new members entering the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa are inducted outside of England and Wales and hence there are no necessary procedures for accepting new members within the area.

4.6.6 All members of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa are required to sign a Code of Conduct which outlines expected behaviours to all those they have contact with, including other members. It also outlines that any action inconsistent with the Code of Practice may result in removal from ministry and other remedial actions. Also covered in the Code of Conduct is the requirement for members to be subject to a thorough background check including criminal history when required.

4.6.7 Complaints and whistleblowing procedures are in place and recorded in the Safeguarding Policy for all those who may have a need for them. Although there are no practice examples to evidence how the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa work to resolve matters, the Local Delegate advised that they would have oversight of any information received and were aware of how to manage any future instance.

Graded: Met

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

4.7.1 The two Sisters who are volunteering in roles within the NHS and the Diocese of Westminster are required by those organisations to undertake safeguarding training and refresher training at regular intervals. Evidence provided for the audit confirmed that certificates of completions for safeguarding training are obtained and recorded by the Trustee responsible for safeguarding for the Sisters working for host organisations. Hard copies of certificates are retained within members' personal files.

4.7.2 At present there is no requirement for employees to complete any safeguarding training. Although contact with group members is relatively limited,

employees should complete safeguarding training so that they are able to spot signs of abuse and know appropriate action to take in the event of a disclosure. Records of the training completed and of due dates for refreshers should be retained for Trustee oversight.

4.7.3 The RLSS have confirmed that the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have taken up training offered in Safeguarding Adults, Safeguarding Trustees, Dementia Awareness and Safeguarding in Spiritual Accompaniment. Whilst the Local Delegate and Trustee responsible for safeguarding report that they encourage safeguarding training wherever possible and send out the RLSS training schedule when they receive it, it is not a mandated requirement for all Sisters undertake it. The Safeguarding Lead who is currently on sickness leave has completed numerous safeguarding training courses and has a significant background in safeguarding.

4.7.4 The group member and Trustee confirmed during interview that they have completed safeguarding training with the RLSS and that affirmed that the Trustee responsible for safeguarding and Local Delegate relay safeguarding messages during meetings and provide relevant material when it is available.

Graded: Met with Recommendations

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

4.8.1 The Trustee responsible for safeguarding and Local Delegate both commented that they found the process of completing the self-assessment ahead of this audit an enjoyable experience and one which offered them the opportunity to reflect on their safeguarding practice.

4.8.2 In relation to peer-to-peer learning, representatives from the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa have visited another RLG whose first language is not English to explain the eight National Safeguarding Standards and help described the structures of the CSSA and the RLSS. It is positive that they are willing to support others in learning safeguarding.

4.8.3 Safeguarding practice is reviewed by Trustees annually. Those interviewed for the purpose of this audit demonstrated a sound understanding of effective safeguarding arrangements.

Graded: Met

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 The Sisters interviewed during the audit displayed enthusiasm and a proactive approach to safeguarding. They voiced willingness to constantly learn and develop and their attendance at training and meetings arranged by the RLSS support this view.

5.2 The group have a structured Safeguarding Policy in place that is reviewed annually and offer guidance on making and handling complaints and members are aware of its content.

5.3 Although acknowledging the small size of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa and the limited opportunity within their work for contact with vulnerable groups outside of the responsibility of host organisations, they should still outline minimum safeguarding training requirements for their members and employees.

5.4 In relation to governance it is positive that the Trustees meet regularly and that safeguarding is often discussed. However, ensuring safeguarding is a standing agenda item and agreeing a safeguarding action plan with a communication plan included that can be reviewed annually, would assist the trustees in driving safeguarding in the group and ensuring themselves of good practice.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- Safeguarding is added to the agenda for all future Trustee meetings.
- Determine who would be the appropriately qualified support person for victims of abuse as highlighted in the Safeguarding Policy.
- The international safeguarding policy for the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa should be adapted, or should incorporate an addendum, for use within England and Wales.
- The declaration of intent should be reviewed and brought up-to-date.

Within 6 months

- Employees should complete safeguarding training appropriate to their roles and completions should be recorded and tracked to assure Trustees of compliance. Employees should also read and understand the group's safeguarding policy and have a safeguarding element incorporated onto their inductions.
- Agree a safeguarding action plan to help drive safeguarding and provide Trustees with assurance.

Within 12 months

- Policy should reflect that all members in active ministry must complete safeguarding training relevant to their roles and a record should be kept to evidence this has been completed.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In accordance with the overall grading of Met, the earliest date for the next audit of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa's by the CSSA is in three years' time. However, this period may be reduced if the CSSA becomes aware of any significant concerns or allegations indicative of a weakening of safeguarding arrangements that are raised in the meantime.