

Religious Life Group

Baseline Audit Report
February 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is a baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements of a religious life group (RLG) in England and Wales. This audit has been undertaken as part of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency's (CSSA) baseline audit phase of RLGs. In accordance with CSSA standard practice this report has been redacted so as not to include the group's name or other identifying features due to an assessment that publication would create a risk of harm to a party linked to the RLG.

1.2 The RLG is an international Roman Catholic religious congregation supporting a number of Priests and Brothers worldwide. The small number of members in England and Wales are all of retirement age. The leader nevertheless remains in full-time active ministry, holding a number of chaplaincy roles. One other member provides cover as a supply Priest for his local diocese, is a school governor and celebrates Mass in other settings. None of the other remaining members carry out active ministry. A member of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service¹ (RLSS) carries out the role of Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) on behalf of the RLG.

1.3 The RLG does not employ any staff or have any volunteers. All their ministry is undertaken on behalf of other organisations.

1.4 This audit seeks to assess the effectiveness of current safeguarding arrangements, by considering practice over the last twelve 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 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). Although they are a small community the RLG has been assessed at Level 2 due to a number of longstanding safeguarding plans being place. They completed a corresponding self-assessment.

¹ [Religious Life Safeguarding Service – Religious Safeguarding](#)

2. Methodology

2.1 Initial contact with the RLG leader was made on 17 March 2025. An in-person audit interview date of 15 October 2025 was agreed with submission of the self-assessment and supporting evidence by 17 September 2025. The self-assessment and supporting evidence were provided on 15 September 2025. Additional documentation was provided in-person on 15 October 2025.

2.2 Interviews were completed with the leader, a lay Trustee and two of the community members who are subject to safeguarding plans.

2.3 Documentary evidence provided by the RLG is listed in the Appendix. Their Charity Commission report for 2024 has been read. The Safeguarding section of the international RLG website has a page for England and Wales which contains their Safeguarding Policy and a brief overview of how to report a concern. Members in England and Wales do not have full operational control of the international website but can send content to the webmaster for inclusion.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice was assessed against the eight national safeguarding standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales² and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 2 RLGs.

3.2 Potential audit ratings against each standard, and the final overall ratings, are: Below Basic, Basic, Early Progress, Firm Progress, Results Being Achieved, Comprehensive Assurance and Exemplary.

² 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)

Overall grading	Results Being Achieved
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body’s leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Comprehensive Assurance
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church’s safeguarding message	Firm Progress
Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Results Being Achieved
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	Results Being Achieved
Standard 8 – Quality assurance and continuous improvement	Results Being Achieved

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 With the agreement of RLSS, a professional member of their safeguarding team is the DSL for the RLG. The RLG leader has oversight of the day-to-day safeguarding for the RLG, including those members on safeguarding plans. A lay Trustee has been appointed with a lead for safeguarding and safeguarding is a standing agenda item for the Trustees. They are updated on the ongoing safeguarding plans and any new safeguarding concerns that may have arisen. The CSSA was shown evidence that demonstrates that the Trustees will make challenging decisions regarding safeguarding, on the advice of RLSS but contrary to the expressed wishes of the international leader. This resulted in one member of the Trustees agreeing to step down with immediate effect in accordance with RLSS guidance. Further restrictions on his role within the RLG were also implemented.

4.1.2 The international community has two safeguarding policies, one regarding children and the other vulnerable adults. On 20 June 2025 the community approved their own Safeguarding Policy. In the meeting it was highlighted that this policy took precedence over the two international policies.

4.1.3 The RLG's Action Plan is used to drive improvements in safeguarding practice. It was last reviewed in October 2025 with an expected subsequent review date before the planned Trustees meeting in November 2025. Actions are allocated to responsible individuals or groups and deemed either Not Started, Not Completed, Partially Completed or Completed. It is evident from the Action Plan that progress is being made in actions such as delivering safeguarding training to members, updating specific safeguarding plans and appointing new Trustees as the actions are deemed to be completed. At their 2026 AGM consideration will be given by the Trustees to whether the RLG needs a specific Low-Level Concerns policy. The Lay Trustee for safeguarding, who was interviewed, was mindful of the fact that the RLG,

with their relatively small size, needs to ensure that they are capable of delivering on the policies they have created.

4.1.4 In the community meeting on 13 June 2025 all members confirmed that they had read Integrity in Ministry³. Both members of the community subject to safeguarding plans who were interviewed confirmed that the document had been shared with them.

4.1.5 The correspondence evidence provided by the RLG demonstrates that they actively involve RLSS in their safeguarding practice. This includes managing safeguarding plans, responding to new, non-recent, concerns, attending training and acting on their advice over their governance structures.

Areas for development

4.1.6 The current Safeguarding Policy is newly adopted. The RLG will need to ensure that it is followed for any new safeguarding concerns that they receive and that they review the policy annually for effectiveness in line with the policy's own expectations.

4.1.7 The RLG in the UK does not have its own website. The Safeguarding notice on the door of their residence (to which there is some public access) details where to report a safeguarding concern. It does not contain a public commitment from the RLG to effective safeguarding. The RLG should consider if it can find a way to demonstrate to the general public its commitment to keeping people safe and responding effectively and compassionately to any new concerns that are raised.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

³ Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct for Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 The RLG is a small community who meet regularly together. The minutes of community meetings demonstrate that safeguarding has been a regular topic of discussion over the last 12 months. Interviews also confirmed that safeguarding information and policies are shared with the community via email on a consistent basis.

4.2.2 In August 2025 the Trustees approved a Safeguarding Awareness and Communication Plan (2025-2027). This contains a strategic goal of clearly and proactively communicating safeguarding responsibilities. Actions include adopting and disseminating national safeguarding policy across all communities and ministries. The specific communication plan has an objective of reinforcing safeguarding as a shared responsibility through regular notices in newsletters and community meetings. Transparency and accountability in safeguarding practice will be delivered by publishing policies, contacts and an annual report on websites and noticeboards. Reporting and feedback will be encouraged through provision of a confidential reporting email and helpline being on prominent display. The Plan is due for annual review in August 2026.

4.2.3 The RLG has close links with RLSS and an organisation in which the leader is chaplain to deliver a safe environment in their areas of ministry. Records demonstrate liaison with police and probation services to provide safe accommodation for members subject to safeguarding plans.

Areas for development

4.2.4 The Safeguarding Awareness and Communication Plan is newly created. Issues that will need to be addressed to successfully deliver it include having a mechanism for publishing information online including policies, contact details and reporting and feedback mechanisms. The current international website is not fit for this purpose.

4.2.5 When the RLG has developed an effective medium for sharing their safeguarding commitment with the general public they should also ensure that safeguarding messages are seen to originate from leaders in the RLG. They should include links to support services for Survivors of abuse, such as Safe Spaces⁴, in their communications.

Graded: Firm Progress

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

Strengths

4.3.1 The RLG has not had the opportunity to engage directly with Survivors of abuse. The leader told the CSSA analyst that he has offered to meet with Survivors but, to date, no Survivor has chosen to do so. If a Survivor did wish to meet, then the leader would engage with RLSS to support and guide him in managing a compassionate and responsive meeting.

4.3.2 The Safeguarding Policy contains a procedure to follow if a member becomes aware of a safeguarding concern. A key facet of the procedure is reporting the concern to RLSS. Then RLSS will keep the Survivor or individual disclosing advised of the next steps that will be taken and within what timeframe. If a statutory agency referral is necessary, the policy expectation is that the Survivor will be told that safeguarding concerns cannot be kept confidential. RLSS are expected to liaise with the RLG and keep it updated and “offer any support needed”. It would be helpful if the policy specified who the support would be for such as the Survivor, the person receiving the disclosure of harm or the RLG in supporting the Survivor.

⁴ Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal, and safe space for anyone who has been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales.

4.3.3 The safeguarding lead for the RLG is a professional member of RLSS staff. The RLG's job roles and responsibilities document for this position includes that they will ensure that Survivors receive "the appropriate professional support and assistance that they need or request". The RLG's document "Safeguarding: What you need to know" places the expectation on members that if they see something of concern then they must report it. Contact details for RLSS, the leader, the trustee for safeguarding and the emergency number are on this document.

4.3.4 The leader has completed a significant amount of training in safeguarding, also attending webinars and relevant conferences such as that delivered annually by RLSS. One of the webinars attended in June 2025 was called "Spiritual Abuses. How to listen and accompany a cry". This demonstrates his efforts to learn from the experiences of those who have been harmed.

Areas for development

4.3.5 The RLG leadership should access further training and events which develop their understanding of the experience of Survivors of abuse. Learning from this should be shared in community meetings to encourage a widespread understanding throughout the RLG. If possible, they should engage with RLGs that have had the experience of engaging with Survivors and seek to learn from them. Inter-congregational dialogue to ensure continuous learning forms part of their Safeguarding Awareness and Communication Plan.

4.3.6 As noted in 4.2.5, when the RLG is able to develop an effective way of sharing their safeguarding commitment with the public they should actively seek to promote organisations that support Survivors of abuse. This should include organisations listed on RLSS's useful links page⁵

Graded: Results Being Achieved

⁵ [Useful Links - Religious Life Safeguarding Service](#)

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 The Safeguarding Policy mandates that members of the RLG must report any new concern to RLSS and the leader, unless the concern is about the leader, immediately. Onward referrals to “relevant bodies” must take place within 24 hours. In cases where there is an immediate danger emergency services must be contacted. These expectations are reinforced in the “Safeguarding: what you need to know” document. Email correspondence was seen that showed that the leader referred a new, non-recent concern, about a deceased member of the RLG to RLSS within one hour of receiving it. This demonstrates prompt compliance with the Safeguarding Policy in practice.

4.4.2 Trustee meeting minutes from the last 12 months demonstrate that safeguarding is now a standing agenda item. The safeguarding plans that are in place are not routinely discussed as they are longstanding. However, when there are changes or issues related to the individuals on plans these are brought to trustee attention. This has included calling an extraordinary meeting to consider an issue raised by RLSS. Detailed minutes were taken and decisions made after a robust and challenging discussion among trustees.

4.4.3 The RLG stores the majority of their records electronically and in line with their Data Protection policy, last reviewed in August 2025. This includes specific provision for Canon Law considerations.

Areas for development

4.4.4 Leaders in the RLG should quality assure the work which has been completed in the last 12 months regarding ongoing safeguarding plans and how any new concerns have been dealt with to ensure that it is compliant with policy expectations and that risks have been identified and managed. The information from this work should inform the planned review of the Safeguarding Policy to

ensure that it has been effective or, if it has not, to allow appropriate changes to be made.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

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

Strengths

4.5.1 As part of this audit the RLG arranged for meetings with two Respondents to concerns. Their safeguarding plans have been in place for many years and pre-date RLSS, who have taken them over. They are not in ministry. One individual confirmed that he had a meeting online to discuss a review of his plan with RLSS. He asserts that he is not guilty of the non-recent allegations against him and has requested a psychological assessment to ascertain whether it is appropriate to remove him from a safeguarding plan. He has no criminal convictions. The psychological assessment is being arranged. It is good practice to review the appropriateness of plans in the light of professional assessments of risk.

4.5.2 The other Respondent interviewed confirmed that he felt well supported by the RLG. Psychological support has previously been provided to him. Accommodation away from the main place of residence has been arranged for all Respondents, where necessary in consultation and agreement with statutory services. The RLG has sought Canonical advice and are in the process of a second application to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith following the initial submission of a Vademecum for cases of Delicta Reservata in which the Dicastery declined to act. This is outside the control of the RLG. The Respondent told the CSSA analyst that he has not had the need to seek Canonical advice but is sure the RLG would support him to identify a source as necessary.

4.5.3 Neither of the Respondents spoken to has a dedicated support person although they are still involved in community life and regular meetings which take

place in locations appropriate to their safeguarding plans. Both considered the level of support they have received from the RLG to be sufficient therefore there is no need to consider a dedicated support person for either at this time.

Areas for development

4.5.4 Within the RLG the burden of managing and supporting Respondents, with the assistance of RLSS, has largely fallen on the leader. This has included when decisions made as Chair of Trustees have brought him into disagreement with the international leader. He has confirmed that he has support from co-chaplains and individuals outside the RLG. However, the RLG's Trustees should consider if there is any way to further support him in what has been a long-term and ongoing challenge.

4.5.5 Seeking formal feedback from the Respondents would enable the RLG to understand if their current practice is supportive and identify any improvements or changes that need to be made.

Graded: Comprehensive Assurance

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 The RLG does not employ anybody or have direct volunteers. The leader told me that there is no prospect of new members joining or arriving from overseas. Despite this, the Safeguarding Policy contains Safer Recruitment Practice Guidance which directs that members must have Disclosure and Barring Service⁶ (DBS) checks in line with Catholic Church requirements. The two members of the RLG who engage in active ministry have DBS checks through the organisations where they minister and records of these are held by the RLG. If they were to employ anyone, the employee would also be subject to a DBS check appropriate to the role they

⁶ [Disclosure and Barring Service - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

were to take. Previous employment references would be taken, and new employees must confirm that they understand all relevant policies and procedures, including the Safeguarding Policy.

4.6.2 The RLG have created policies including Complaints, Grievance and Whistleblowing policies. The Complaints Policy is applicable for anyone wishing to make a complaint. The Grievance Policy is for members of the RLG, and the Whistleblowing Policy is available to any clergy, lay staff, volunteers and Trustees. All the policies allow for the possibility of external review if resolution cannot be reached. The policies have been shared with members via email. No issues have been raised under any of the policies mentioned within the last 12 months.

4.6.3 As they do not have active recruitment or ministry on their own behalf, issues such as vetting or training are not routinely reported to Trustees. There is regular oversight of cases where members are assessed as posing a potential risk to others. Trustees must have oversight of any future decisions regarding removing individuals from safeguarding plans.

Areas for development

4.6.4 Whilst there is a complaints policy there is no clear mechanism for a member of the public to access it. The RLG must find a way to make relevant policies publicly available to allow individuals to raise safeguarding concerns or express their dissatisfaction about any aspect of the RLG.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 The Safeguarding Policy stipulates that members will undergo safeguarding training relevant to their role and undertake regular refresher training, although the expected refresher period is not specified. The training for members with no active ministry is RLSS Basic Safeguarding Training, which was completed by all relevant

members in May 2025. Records held by the leader demonstrate that he, and the other member in active ministry, have completed significantly more safeguarding training through RLSS, in their chaplaincy roles and to meet Diocesan expectations. Records for two lay Trustees are kept. One has completed RLSS training for Trustees alongside other relevant training as a school governor. The other was appointed in September 2025 and her RLSS training is planned for November 2025. This is prompt accessing of necessary training. The leader has plans for accessing two more appropriate training courses, one of which has been booked. It is expected that all Trustees will complete RLSS training on safeguarding plans when a course becomes available.

4.7.2 Trustee minutes from the last 12 months demonstrate that training compliance is discussed, including outstanding training expectations in January 2025. This issue has been resolved so there is no outstanding training except for the newly appointed Trustee which, as noted above, will be resolved in November 2025.

Areas for Development

4.7.3 The leader anticipated that members, even not in active ministry, would do some safeguarding training each year. Setting an expected training refresher date within the Safeguarding Policy would make the expectancy clear to everyone and, if there was non-compliance, individuals could be held to account against a formal policy expectation.

4.7.4 Seeking feedback from members on the training they have accessed and what further training they consider would benefit them would allow leaders to effectively plan what future safeguarding training is sought and delivered to members.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.8 Standard 8 Quality assurance and continuous improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 The RLG has demonstrated their active engagement with RLSS for creating policies, safeguarding training and work on managing concerns. They facilitated this CSSA audit and their action plan states that, within three months of receiving the results, they will ensure that all members of the RLG have the information and support they need to implement improvements.

Areas for Development

4.8.2 The Trustee minutes provided as evidence for this audit do not include reference to active oversight of the Action Plan. Ensuring that Trustees do have regular oversight will ensure that individuals are held to account for their actions in delivering improvements. The Plan should be updated in the light of the recommendations of this audit.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1. This is an RLG with a small number of members of whom only two carry out any form of active ministry. All the ministries that are undertaken are on behalf of other organisations. The RLG will not receive new members and do not anticipate directly employing anyone or engaging volunteers. They have demonstrated strengths in safeguarding practice including effective governance through the Trustees, with a dedicated safeguarding Trustee with relevant skills and experience. This enabled them to resolve a significant issue, with the guidance of RLSS, around membership of the Trustee board. Trustees have oversight of ongoing safeguarding plans and the RLG is responding to a request to review a plan when a psychological assessment can be completed. Relevant policies and procedures have been developed and an action plan designed to drive further safeguarding improvements.

5.2 To deliver the expectations of their Safeguarding Awareness and Communication Plan, the RLG needs to create an effective way of sharing their policies with the public as the international website is not fit for that purpose. When they are reviewing policies annually, they must do so having evaluated their current practice with feedback from Respondents and having considered their own responses to any new concerns that have been managed.

5.3 Overall, the evidence seen for this audit demonstrates that the RLG has achieved an overall rating of Results Being Achieved against the eight safeguarding standards of the Catholic church in England and Wales.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- Set a safeguarding training refresher expectation to include in the Safeguarding Policy
- Seek feedback from members of the training delivered and what future training would benefit them

Within 6 months

- Create a way of publicising relevant policies, reporting mechanisms and support services for Survivors of abuse
- Develop a statement of safeguarding commitment from leaders in the RLG to share with the public
- Seek feedback from those subject to Safeguarding Plans on their experience to inform review of the Safeguarding Policy
- Record oversight of the Action Plan in Trustee Meeting Minutes
- Plan future training expectation based upon feedback from members and availability of training which will develop understanding of the experience of Survivors

Within 12 months

- Review the Safeguarding Policy
- Seek to learn from other Religious Life Groups with experience of engaging with Survivors

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with an overall rating of Results Being Achieved, the earliest potential date of the next audit of the RLG by the CSSA is in two years. If the CSSA becomes aware of a significant Safeguarding concern or allegation in the intervening period, then an earlier audit will be required.

8. Appendix

8.1 Evidence Provided:

- Correspondence between the leader (as Chair of Trustees) and the international leader regarding safeguarding related changes to the Trustees
- Correspondence from the leader regarding non-recent allegations
- Correspondence between the RLG and RLSS regarding non-recent allegations
- International Child Protection Policy
- International Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy
- Notes from a one-week workshop on Safeguarding attended by the leader in Rome in November 2023
- Resident RLG and Safeguarding Procedures
- Safeguarding Lead Roles and Responsibilities
- Safeguarding Notice displayed at the entry to the RLG residence
- Safeguarding Policy of the RLG June 2025
- Safeguarding: What You Need to Know for Members
- Summaries of the Community meetings of the RLG in 2025
- Summary of the exchanges and discussions that took place during the meeting of the Extended General Council
- The Constitutions of the RLG
- The RLG Complaints Policy and Procedures
- The RLG Data Protection Policy
- The RLG Grievance Policy
- The RLG Guide of How to Report a Safeguarding Issue
- The RLG Safeguarding Awareness and Communication Plan

- The RLG Whistleblowing Policy
- The Protocol for Guests staying with the RLG
- Trustee Meeting Minutes extracts regarding safeguarding 2024/5