

Religious Life Group

Review Audit Report
March 2026

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Methodology.....	4
3. Audit grading.....	5
4. Audit findings against each standard.....	7
5. Summary of overall findings.....	25
6. Recommendations.....	27
7. Arrangements for follow-up.....	28
8. Appendix.....	29

1. Introduction

1.1 This is a re-audit of the safeguarding arrangements of a religious life group in England and Wales. In accordance with Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) standard practice this report has been redacted due to an assessment that publication would create a risk of harm to a party linked to the religious life group. The religious life group was the subject of a baseline audit in November 2024 in which they received a grade of Early Progress¹. This re-audit was undertaken in accordance with the CSSA's standard process for low-scoring religious life groups.

1.2 There are several hundred members of the religious life group worldwide. There is a General Leader, and each region has a Regional Leader who approves the ministries undertaken. The Regional Leader will appoint the treasurer and Local Leader for each smaller community. Members are typically assigned to a community for six years and then move on, elderly members may be left in a community which they prefer, and the members will care for one another as their health declines. None of the members are in employment.

1.3 The congregation in England and Wales is very small and members reside in a deprived area, in one shared property, that is leased to them from the local diocese. The religious life group undertakes a range of ministries. These include hospitality and youth projects run from their place of residence, which is also open to adult visitors who come for conversation or support. The religious life group is well known in their community which is reflected in their number of visitors. In turn, members visit adults in their own homes, some who have been known to them generationally, occasionally also taking communion to them. They also provide street ministry, offer support to the homeless, prison chaplaincy and mentoring sessions within education settings. The members also support the Mass at the neighbouring Church and have contact with its schools on special occasions. The circumstances of the religious life group are essentially unchanged from the time of its baseline audit.

¹ This report is available [here](#) and titled *RLG audit report April 2025*.

1.4 The CSSA devised a categorisation scheme for Religious Life Groups as part of the pilot audit phase: this placed Religious Life 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). Although they are a small congregation the religious life group was audited using the Level 2 Audit framework in accordance with their extensive public outreach and associated risk management, given one member is subject to a safety management plan.

1.5 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious and acknowledges that 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.

2. Methodology

2.1 The religious life group was sent formal notification of the safeguarding audit on 4 August 2025 via email, and a completion date of 20 October 2025 for the self-assessment and supporting evidence was agreed.

2.2 The CSSA analyst visited the religious life group on 21 November 2025 having remotely reviewed the evidence submitted as part of the self-assessment process and the website for the international congregation.

2.3 Interviews

Interviews took place with the following key individuals

- Local leader
- Brothers focus group (three members)

2.4 Document review

- Self-assessment form
- Supplementary evidence (listed at Appendix A)

2.5 The CSSA analyst has liaised with the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)² and the local diocese in respect of engagement with the religious life group. Both report that the community have been open to support and responded well to suggestions made to improve safeguarding since their initial audit.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Practice is assessed against the eight National Safeguarding Standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Level 2 orders³ where scores from the individual sub-standards are used to calculate the overall standard gradings. Each standard was graded on an ascending seven-point scale of Below Basic, Basic, Early Progress, Firm Progress, Results Being Achieved, Comprehensive Assurance and Exemplary. Grades for individual standards were combined to produce an overall grading.

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

² [Religious Life Safeguarding Service \(religioussafeguarding.org\)](https://religioussafeguarding.org/)

³ <https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/resources/our-quality-assurance-framework/>

Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Firm Progress
Standard 5 – Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Firm Progress
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	Firm Progress

3.2 The key finding from this audit is that the religious life group has demonstrated meaningful progress across the eight National Safeguarding Standards and has achieved the overall grade of Firm Progress. The community has strengthened policies, consistently engaged with safeguarding training, and made considerable progress in safer ministry practices. The community benefits from a local leader whose collaboration with both the RLSS and the diocesan safeguarding team has driven overall improvements. While safeguarding requirements are being met and compliance is evident, there remains a prevailing perception within the community that safeguarding processes can impact the spontaneity and perceived purpose of ministry. In addition, further practical improvements are required to embed safeguarding more consistently, and the development of more robust, clearly articulated guidance would further support and strengthen safer ministry practice.

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 local leader continues to be the safeguarding lead for the community, and his role is understood by all members that took part in interviews, who have consistently shared that if there are any safeguarding concerns the local leader must be made aware immediately. The local leader is integral to the community's awareness of safeguarding and has encouraged training and developed appropriate safeguarding processes to support members to minister safely. The local leader has completed a range of training to support him in his role, which will be further detailed in standard seven.

4.1.2 The religious life group has a safeguarding policy that is easily accessible to members and stored in a shared file in the residence. The safeguarding policy is reviewed annually, most recently in August 2025, and reflects learning and recommendations from the CSSA baseline audit completed in October 2024. The safeguarding policy now includes further information for members should they be the subject of an allegation, and clear guidance that respondents should not commission their own specialist assessments. The safeguarding policy is suitably adapted from the RLSS template to fit the ministry of the religious life group.

4.1.3 The religious life group has a three-year safeguarding implementation plan that has been in place since October 2024. The safeguarding implementation plan is being used to improve safeguarding practice and is supported by a checklist that is included at the end of the document and has a space for dates to be included of when actions have been completed or reviewed. The safeguarding implementation plan is reviewed annually, most recently in October 2025, and includes actions recommended from the baseline audit, including ensuring that all activities with vulnerable groups are subject to risk assessments.

4.1.4 Risk assessments have been completed in relation to all activities completed by members, and bespoke risk assessments will be completed in relation to any new activities undertaken outside of the residence and grounds. The risk assessments have been subject to input and oversight from the RLSS and the local diocesan safeguarding team and now include contingency plans should an allegation be made against one or more members of the religious life group. Members report consistently ministering in pairs when engaging with the homeless and they ensure that they are not left alone with children. Members engage with children only when parental or guardian consent has been formally obtained. On one occasion, consent could not be secured, and the child therefore did not participate in any activity with the brothers.

4.1.5 A more structured approach to working with vulnerable groups has been developed by the members, which is clearly advertised on posters on display within the residence and on leaflets which can be provided to those accessing support. The local leader advises that this has led to lots of discussions with young people who do not always enjoy having to adhere to structured timetables. Members have shared that they are aware that ensuring limited crossovers between vulnerable groups is important to reduce potential risks caused by their members meeting.

4.1.6 All members are familiar with the pastoral standards document *Integrity in Ministry*⁴ which has been shared by the local leader. Members are aware of the risks associated with their ministry and take practical steps to reduce risks, demonstrated when discussing street ministry, in which ministry is always conducted in pairs, and members do not approach unknown groups or those individuals considered to be under the influence of substances.

4.1.7 The religious life group in England and Wales is a small congregation and community meetings of all members are held regularly, there having been six since the completion of the baseline audit, 12 previously. Safeguarding has been discussed at all but one meeting. Safeguarding topics discussed at community

⁴ 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.

meetings have included reflections of young people and violence, self-harm and suicide, and spiritual abuse. There is also evidence that the code of conduct has been discussed at community meetings and information provided by the RLSS has also been shared.

4.1.8 There is evidence of health and safety risks being routinely identified and mitigated such as ensuring that obstacles and hazards are removed in the areas that children access, and similarly members have discussed ensuring that knives and tools are stored safely to prevent them being used as weapons.

4.1.9 The religious life group are a valued resource in the area, and there is evidence of external agencies advocating for a young person to access support by the brothers. The brothers have received a community award for “*being reliable and always doing what they say they will.*”

Areas for development

4.1.10 The safeguarding policy is an all-encompassing document for the organisation and is intentionally succinct in many areas. The local leader advises that this brevity is intended to encourage members to read and absorb the information, which is clearly important. However, given the complexity of the organisation’s public ministry, certain sections would benefit from further expansion and clarification, particularly in respect of offering support to victims and survivors, and support for those members subject to a safety management plan. Guidance documents separate to the safeguarding policy should therefore be developed so as to allow for appropriate and detailed information to be available, but also to enable the safeguarding policy to remain accessible to members.

4.1.11 The safeguarding implementation plan is succinct and has elements of ‘smart’ planning, however the religious life group should fully align the safeguarding implementation plan with the eight National Safeguarding Standards as this would ensure that safeguarding activity is measured not only against internal priorities but also against recognised benchmarks of good practice. It would also help

identify gaps, supports better decision-making, and provide clear evidence of compliance.

4.1.12 The local leader is role modelling the importance of safeguarding to the other members and is engaged with the local diocesan safeguarding team and the RLSS. The extent to which safeguarding is embedded within the community however is yet to be tested, and there continues to be some concern by all members that the bureaucracy of safeguarding impacts the delivery of ministries. Further work is therefore needed with members to explore the perceived barriers to implementing safeguarding measures in the group's ministry.

4.1.13 Members have reported that ministry with children is routinely undertaken in pairs, and often with three members of the community present. However, this established practice is not consistently reflected in either the risk assessments or the code of conduct. For example, the one onsite activity risk assessment identifies the hazard of "a young person or group not having adequate supervision" and proposes a protective measure stating that, if only one group leader is available, another member of the community will be positioned in the house to assist if required. The assessment also references the NSPCC May 2023 guideline of "*1 adult to 8 young children*," yet does not incorporate the NSPCC's concurrent recommendation that "*at least two adults be present, even with smaller groups*,"⁵ which was also highlighted in the baseline audit. To ensure alignment with recognised safeguarding standards, it is recommended that both the code of conduct and associated risk assessments explicitly require that ministry with children is conducted by a minimum of two adults at all times.

4.1.14 Current risk assessments demonstrate an awareness of the diverse physical, behavioural, and safeguarding risks associated with work involving children and vulnerable groups, particularly within open-access or public contexts. Members have identified relevant hazards and implemented practical control measures that reflect real-world experience and a clear commitment to maintaining safe environments. Nevertheless, opportunities for improvement remain. All risk assessments need to ensure that those receiving a service are not tasked with any

⁵ [Recommended adult to child ratios for working with children | NSPCC Learning](#)

responsibilities, as it would appear risk assessments are not shared with the public. Similarly, whilst it is identified where the police should be called in emergency situations it is not clearly stated that the RLSS must be made aware of concerns and what forms should be completed by members to capture concerns. It is therefore recommended all risk assessments are reviewed and updated.

4.1.15 Significant responsibility rests with the local leader who is solely responsible for the development of any safeguarding policies and practices and the implementation of any safety management plans. Whilst members tend to remain in the community for six years, succession planning is required, or more consideration should be given to distributing safeguarding responsibilities within the community.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

Strengths

4.2.1 The safeguarding policy highlights that the religious life group is *"committed to safeguarding all children and adults. This commitment directly relates to the fact that we are all made in the image of God and the Church's common belief in the preciousness, dignity and uniqueness of every human life"*. Whilst there is no formal safeguarding communication plan, communicating the Church's safeguarding message remains point seven of the three-year safeguarding implementation plan in which it is highlighted that *"A public notice on Safeguarding to be displayed in the house and a safeguarding statement to be added to the information sheet given to parents"*. This is recorded in point 7a and 7b within the checklist and is therefore reviewed on an annual basis which is proportionate to the ministry of the community.

4.2.2 The eight National Safeguarding Standards are displayed on a noticeboard within the residence, as are the contact details for the local leader, local diocesan parish safeguarding representative and the diocesan safeguarding team, in addition to the contact details for the RLSS. Details of support services are also shared on the noticeboard such as services for the homeless and addiction support services.

4.2.3 Safeguarding messages are also contained within posters for activities, for example the poster in respect of evening meals which is displayed in the residence advises guests to remain within the residence for the whole of the visit, and it is highlighted that attendance at the meal is by invitation only, which enables members to proactively consider any potential risks or difficulties. In a leaflet provided to the parents and guardians is a statement that says “*all the members of our community are committed to keeping young people safe. Our Safeguarding support, training and DBSs are provided by the RLSS, should you have any concerns*” and the RLSS contact details are provided, it is also highlighted that a complaints form will be provided upon request.

4.2.4 Messages of safeguarding are also available to guests who stay with the members, guests whilst not frequent are friends or family members of the community who have visited for short periods. Messages are displayed to guests within the guest bedroom. The notice provides “safeguarding guidance” to guests, highlighting that the members are engaged with vulnerable people whose behaviour is unpredictable and therefore a number of guidelines have been developed to protect the safety of guests and vulnerable groups, guests are advised not to be alone with children, and it is also advised that exchanging phone numbers is not completed without one of the members being made aware.

4.2.5 Members report sharing safeguarding communications formally at community meetings, but also informally during discussions, often at mealtimes. Members, acknowledging that they are engaged with children whose language is often very different to adults have familiarised themselves with ‘*slang and rap slang*’ in order to better understand what the children are talking about. If they

become aware of any concerning information they intend to share this with appropriate services.

4.2.6 Members have established external links with the local Priests that serve the neighbouring Church, the staff within the neighbouring schools and other religious life groups that are in the area, in addition to support from the RLSS and the diocesan safeguarding team over the past year, which all contribute to the promotion of a safer environment for community members and vulnerable groups.

Areas for development

4.2.7 The religious life group has acknowledged that establishing boundaries to ensure safeguarding is effective within ministries has been successful with children, and so it may be that children who are engaged with members can provide feedback via child-friendly surveys, focus or feedback prompts to assess whether safeguarding messages are understood and meaningful. This should include opportunities for children to contribute to the design of safeguarding communications where appropriate.

4.2.8 Members continue to provide street ministry, however there is limited safeguarding communications provided to these groups and so members should consider how safeguarding messages could be actively disseminated to those receiving this support safely and effectively.

4.2.9 The religious life group does not have a community website and there have been no updates to the website for the international congregation since the baseline audit. The religious life group has had a long-standing presence in their area and are well known within the immediate community, given the extensive public ministry of the religious life group, it is recommended that members consider the construction of a website although it is recognised that this is a decision that will be taken on a broader basis than just safeguarding needs.

4.2.10 To achieve an overall grade of comprehensive assurance or exemplary, members should expand the communications plan within the safeguarding policy, outlining key safeguarding messages, intended audiences, communication

methods, responsibilities, and timescales. This plan should include an annual review process and measurable indicators of effectiveness.

4.2.11 It is positive that a guest room notice offers guidance to visitors however it is recommended that this is updated with firmer guidelines to include, guests must not be alone with children and if this inadvertently occurs guests must leave the room. Whilst it is currently recommended in the guidelines that guests need to let a brother know if they exchange phone numbers with a vulnerable person or a child, this should be updated to state that guests must not exchange phone numbers or any contact details with children or any adults receiving support from the community.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

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

Strengths

4.3.1 The religious life group has appropriate policies and guidance in place to support members to provide a suitable response should they receive a disclosure of harm. It is recorded in the safeguarding policy that members “*start from the principle that each person has a right to expect the highest level of protection, love, encouragement and respect*”, and it is recorded that “*It is the responsibility of all the... [b]rothers to prevent abuse, whether by action or omission*” and various examples of abuse are identified, including coercive control and spiritual abuse.

4.3.2 It is clearly stated in the safeguarding policy that if the religious life group becomes aware of a safeguarding issue this must be shared with the RLSS and all associated documentation should be shared immediately. Whilst the local leader would be the first port of call for any concerns raised, there is guidance available to members in respect of what actions should be taken in the absence of the local leader and includes contact details for the RLSS and expected timescales for

information sharing. All members demonstrated that they are aware of the procedures they need to follow and will ensure that information is shared with the local leader, RLSS and in the case of an emergency the police.

4.3.3 Within the religious life group's safeguarding policy are details for support services, both national and local, and there it is highlighted where services have identified they only support males or females. Survivor support services details include Safe Spaces, a local charity and Childline.

4.3.4 The local leader has completed the CSSA training '*Listening to Victims and Survivors Perspectives*' and all members have completed 'Advanced Safeguarding Training' with the RLSS, so all members have accessed appropriate knowledge to support them to respond to a victim of harm. The local leader has also used case scenarios which have been discussed at community meetings to generate discussions in relation to safeguarding and posed questions such as "*who do we know who is vulnerable in a similar way*" which is an excellent method to support members to recognise the potential vulnerability and risk faced by the people they work with.

4.3.5 As identified in the previous audit the local leader has shared that there are resources available within the community for specialist support for members, and the community have previously commissioned appropriate services to support novices struggling with emotional health.

Areas for development

4.3.6 In the absence of experience of working directly with anyone who has disclosed harm, the local leader should continue to use case scenarios to promote confidence with the members about responding to disclosures and use this to support identification of what further training is needed for individual members. Members should also engage with peers who have direct experience of working with those who report harm as to reflect on their experience and any learning that could be relevant to the religious life group. Practising how to respond to a disclosure of abuse will support members to remain capable in the absence of actual disclosures.

4.3.7 All members, but particularly the local leader, need to ensure that they are confident in providing a trauma informed response to survivors of abuse, accessing training and case scenarios will build knowledge in this area. The local leader has also identified that one other member should attend 'Listening to victims and survivors' perspectives training'.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

Strengths

4.4.1 The religious life group does not have any recent experiences of managing allegations and concerns. Findings in respect of this standard are therefore based on an assessment of theoretical arrangements and of members' understanding of these. Within the safeguarding policy the responsibilities of each role are identified, and it is recorded that *"All members and volunteers have an obligation to ensure they know how to respond to safeguarding concerns by being familiar with the content of this policy, the procedure contained within it and any other associated policies/procedures."*

4.4.2 As identified in the previous audit the local leader understands the need to make accurate records of any concerns, and the safeguarding policy identifies that the *"primary responsibility for the management of documents and safeguarding case files lies with the safeguarding lead/ RLSS, who will ensure an accurate auditable secure record of any safeguarding concerns or allegations referred to... [the religious life group is] maintained"*. The local leader is clear that upon receiving an initial disclosure all information will be passed to the RLSS who will assume primary responsibility and offer the local leader support as necessary.

4.4.3 There is guidance available within the safeguarding policy in respect of what to record and a recognition that records have the potential to be evidence in

criminal or civil proceedings and statutory and public inquiries. Data protection is also considered within the safeguarding policy, and it is recorded that the religious life group does “*not store personal details of any person on computer or the internet and are therefore not required to register with the Data Protection Registrar. Personal details of members, volunteers or those with whom we work may be kept on paper and kept in a secure locked storage. Access will be provided according to the Data Protection laws in force.*”

4.4.4 As identified in the previous audit the religious life group has recording tools available to support them in responding to a disclosure, there is a ‘*How to respond to Safeguarding Concerns or Allegations*’ flowchart as well as a script to follow in order to encourage the use of appropriate language and responses. The community have adapted the CSSA ‘*Recording a disclosure of abuse, an allegation or concerns*’ to fit their community circumstances with guidance to the correct forms to use and where they are stored.

Areas for development

4.4.5 Although development has taken place in standard four both in regard to member training and case scenarios being used, there has been no opportunity since the previous audit for the religious life group to evidence improvements in the practical application of policies in relation to effective management of allegations and concerns. Whilst it is acknowledged that simulated examples and case scenarios can often lack authenticity and therefore impact responses, the religious life group should continue to expand their use of case studies as planned to ensure that each individual member can demonstrate appropriate reactions, knowledge and actions when responding to a disclosure of harm. Case scenarios should continue to be varied, encompassing various aspects of ministry.

Graded: Firm Progress

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

Strengths

4.5.1 The religious life group has updated the safeguarding policy to include guidance to members who may be subject to an allegation, the safeguarding policy highlights that “a *member of the [religious life group] who is subject to an allegation or concern, or who has been ‘stepped down’ from ministry, will be offered spiritual, emotional, legal, canonical and financial support, resource persons can be found through the RLSS and [the local] Diocese*”. It is also noted within the safeguarding policy that individuals requiring specialist assessments are not permitted to arrange their own assessment, nor can they determine how much of the resulting report is shared with the RLSS. This is consistent with the recommendations made in the baseline audit.

4.5.2 The religious life group continues to support one member who remains subject to a safety management plan. The local leader has been monitoring the plan for over 12 months and has attended ‘*Care and Safety Management Plans*’ training provided by the RLSS in November 2024. The local leader works in collaboration with the RLSS to oversee the plan, which has been subject to review once in the past 12 months although there have been no changes made to the plan (except for the details of the RLSS safeguarding officer). This was seemingly done without a formal meeting with the subject, which the religious life group should ensure occurs for subsequent reviews, in conjunction with the RLSS.

4.5.3 The local leader has advised that should a member require legal advice or the support of a canon lawyer, he would direct them to the RLSS or the local diocesan Vicar for Religious. The religious life group is also aware of other support for members such as St Luke’s Centre⁶. The constitutions for the religious life group,

⁶ St. Luke’s Centre An allied, independent facility providing individual assessment and evaluation, candidate assessments, outpatient mental health services, tailored education and wellness

advise that a regional leader must seek the consent of the Regional Council to grant a professed brother a leave of absence from his assigned house.

4.5.4 Members have shared that they feel well supported within the religious life group particularly by the local leader and feel that in the event a concern was raised about them they would be supported effectively. Members have shared that the standards of safeguarding practice and expectation at local level exceeds expectations at more senior levels within the international congregation. All members have spiritual directors.

4.5.5 The religious life group has responded effectively to recommendations from the previous audit in relation to expanding the safeguarding policy to include expectations in respect of commissioning specialist assessments, the safeguarding policy states *“In case a member of the [religious life group] or a volunteer requires a specialist assessment, the Safeguarding Lead will see that the details are worked out with the assistance of the RLSS. The person being assessed cannot arrange their own assessment nor can they determine how much of the report is passed to the RLSS. It may be necessary for the Regional Leader to insist on this in writing.”*

Areas for development

4.5.6 As there has been limited activity in respect of the safety management plan (there is one brief record of a meeting held between the respondent and the local leader in February 2025) and the respondent does not wish to contribute directly to this audit in respect of his experiences, no case audit has been completed. However, communications between the local leader and the RLSS highlights that whilst the local leader and respondent continue to adhere to the required safeguarding restrictions, their comments indicate incomplete understanding and limited agreement with the safeguarding principles that underpin these

programmes for Roman Catholic clergy, women and men religious, and candidates for ministry in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

procedures. The RLSS will therefore need to continue to offer support to the local leader and respondent.

4.5.7 It is established practice that all members and volunteers are required to minister safely and in full compliance with a signed code of conduct. Although the current code of conduct has been adapted from the CSSA template, it would benefit from more directive and unambiguous language in several key areas. In particular, expectations relating to engagement with young people, the prohibition on sharing personal contact details, and the requirement to refrain from any involvement while under the influence of drugs or alcohol should be articulated in stronger, mandatory terms to ensure clarity of obligation and safeguarding integrity.

Graded: Firm Progress

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

Strengths

4.6.1 The safeguarding policy, as highlighted in the previous audit, includes the safer recruitment practice expectations for both members and volunteers. However, the religious life group has had no new members join the community within the last 12 months. There are also no employees working with the community. A member who has previously lived with the community has returned from overseas and safer recruitment processes were followed, a DBS update was completed by the RLSS and shared with the community, and as per the safeguarding policy a testimonial of suitability was provided to the community by the regional leader.

4.6.2 All members of the community and the one volunteer have up-to-date DBS checks and are registered with the DBS update service. DBS checks are reviewed on an annual basis as part of the three-year safeguarding implementation plan.

4.6.3 The safeguarding policy for the religious life group requests that members are in receipt of a reference from the regional leader, however during the baseline audit

it was noted that the respondent was not in possession of a reference from the regional leader due to concerns that had been noted. Since the completion of the baseline audit the regional leader has provided a reference for the respondent, enabling safer recruitment practice to be aligned with the expectations within the safeguarding policy.

4.6.4 There have been no known complaints against the community in the past 12 months, or during the previous audit period of 2023–2024. As identified in the previous audit, there is a complaints procedure available within the safeguarding policy. The complaints procedure has also been updated to identify the CSSA as the final port of call for complainants who are not satisfied with the responses of the community. It is detailed in information available to parents and children who visit the community that a complaints form can be requested.

4.6.5 A whistleblowing procedure is also available within the safeguarding policy where it is highlighted that if there are concerns about the practices of the religious life group this must be referred to the RLSS.

Areas for development

4.6.6 An overseas postulant visited the religious life group in April 2025. It is reported that due to the lack of a response from a parish priest, references for the postulant could not be verified, and so alternative checks were completed with leaders from other parts of the wider congregation that the postulant had also visited. Whilst the local leader has been pro-active to ensure, through consultation with other leaders, that no concerns had been raised, it is a concern that the references could not be verified, and the postulant was still provided the opportunity to visit the community.

4.6.7 As identified in the previous audit, it is the intention of the local leader to develop an enculturation package for any overseas members, so that any ambiguities in relation to acceptable practices are removed and appropriate boundaries are enforced that promote safeguarding.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

Strengths

4.7.1 The training expectation for members and volunteers is outlined within the safeguarding policy, where it is stated that all community members and volunteers are expected to complete safeguarding training equivalent to level 2, and the safeguarding lead will complete safeguarding training equivalent to level 3. All members are expected to undertake refresher safeguarding training every two years.

4.7.2 All members of the religious life group have completed advanced safeguarding training provided by the RLSS, which includes training in relation to disclosures of abuse and supporting survivors. Advanced safeguarding training is pertinent to members as the ministry they complete is with very vulnerable groups, either by virtue of age or life circumstances. The local leader maintains a record of members' presence in the UK and the safeguarding training they have attended. Copies of training certificates are retained by the safeguarding lead.

4.7.3 The local leader has completed a range of safeguarding training that support him in his role, including '*Safeguarding Training for Leaders*' in 2023 and 2025, '*Care and Safety Management Plans*' in 2024 and online training with the CSSA in respect of '*Listening to Victims and Survivors Perspectives*' in 2025. To support his mentoring work in educational settings and his work with young people in the community, the local leader has access to an online training platform for education which is inclusive of safeguarding and has completed first aid training.

4.7.4 Safeguarding is being promoted in the community, one member is part of a USA Catholic Safeguarding Programme and receives communications every two months which are shared with the community. Members have also watched highly acclaimed television programmes dealing with sensitive and significant issues for young people and reflections have been encouraged through discussions. The local leader has also used case scenarios to reflect upon safeguarding and has supported members to consider risks and vulnerabilities of the people they engage with.

4.7.5 The local leader is part of a regional networking group for religious life group safeguarding leads in which safeguarding topics discussed during the last year have included artificial intelligence and confidentiality, and overseas religious ministering in the UK. Attendance at the networking group is important and will contribute to the religious life group's knowledge of regional challenges and good practice, similarly it is an opportunity for the community to share their experiences, providing learning opportunities to the other members of the networking group. One member also volunteers within a prison where safeguarding conversations are frequent.

4.7.6 The religious life group is a small congregation in England and Wales and as such has not developed a formal training plan, however the local leader reports that through conversations and observations he is aware of the needs of members and can identify training accordingly, and feels that further training may be needed in safeguarding adults and working with those who may have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Members have not identified any knowledge gaps or training needs themselves.

Areas for development

4.7.7 The local leader should encourage members to discuss experiences of safeguarding training and formally record members' reflections within the community meeting to capture what has been understood, and how members intend to use this knowledge to improve their ministry.

4.7.8 The local leader is promoting training within the religious life group, and members are demonstrating a commitment to formal training and a positive attitude to the informal training taking place within the community. However, in the absence of a training needs analysis and formal recordings of training needs, to identify training gaps, the religious life group will not be able to achieve higher grades in this standard.

Graded: Results Being Achieved

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

Strengths

4.8.1 Since completion of the baseline audit in November 2024, the local leader has continued to make progress in embedding the eight National Safeguarding Standards within the community. The three-year safeguarding implementation plan has been updated to include recommendations from the baseline audit that have subsequently been actioned and completed. The religious life group has clearly worked hard to ensure that baseline recommendations have been completed, with the development of an enculturation pack for new members remaining as the only outstanding recommendation.

4.8.2 The local leader has also created a development plan, actions from which have been referenced throughout this report. The local leader hopes that outstanding actions in respect of training will be completed by March 2026, and others, many of which are routine activities to be completed on an annual basis, will be completed in line with other responsibilities and commitments.

4.8.3 The religious life group has good links with the RLSS who continue to support the community in relation to safeguarding practice and the implementation of a safety management plan. The local leader has ensured that any developments to policies have had oversight from the RLSS. Similarly, the local diocesan safeguarding team have offered support to the community which has been well received.

Areas for Development

4.8.4 Robust safeguarding requires shared responsibility and collective ownership; members however were not all made aware of the publication of the baseline audit report, and the safeguarding implementation plan is not embedded with all members of the community. Safeguarding outcomes rest largely with the current local leader, and this practice raises significant organisational risk, as if for any reason the local leader was unable to fulfil his obligations the community would need extensive additional support to continue to ensure effective compliance. One

possible means of developing this resilience would be to include lay people within suitable expertise in governance arrangements.

Graded: Firm Progress

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1 The re-audit demonstrates that the religious life group has made meaningful progress in embedding safeguarding practices since the baseline audit, with evidence of increased awareness, improved safeguarding structures and strengthened engagement with external safeguarding partners. The community benefits from a committed and proactive local leader who is central to developing policy, facilitating training, promoting a safeguarding culture, and implementing recommendations from the baseline audit. Members generally express confidence in safeguarding processes and show willingness to adapt their ministry to ensure the safety of vulnerable groups.

5.2 Safeguarding documentation has improved considerably. The safeguarding policy has been revised, the three-year implementation plan is active, and processes such as risk assessments, structured activity planning, safer recruitment, and information-sharing protocols have been enhanced. There is now greater clarity for members who may be subject to allegations, and safeguarding messages are clearly displayed within the residence and in materials shared with parents, guardians, and guests. The community has also strengthened links with the RLSS and the diocesan safeguarding team, both of whom provide ongoing guidance and oversight.

5.3 Despite this progress, safeguarding practice within the community remains heavily dependent on the local leader, presenting a significant organisational risk. While members demonstrate awareness of safeguarding principles, their confidence and understanding have not been consistently tested, and the wider safeguarding culture is not yet fully embedded. Some members continue to feel that safeguarding processes are bureaucratic or burdensome, indicating that the

deeper cultural integration necessary for long-term sustainability has not yet been achieved.

5.4 Several structural gaps remain. The safeguarding policy, though improved, is intentionally succinct and lacks detail in areas relating to victim support, respondent care, and procedural guidance. Safeguarding communications, while present within the residence, are limited in scope and do not yet extend to all groups the community serves, such as those engaged in street ministry. Safer recruitment practices require strengthening, highlighted by a recent case in which a postulant visited the community without verified references. Additionally, training, though undertaken regularly, is not underpinned by a formal training needs analysis, meaning that knowledge gaps cannot be systematically identified and addressed.

5.5 A further concern is the limited capacity for internal governance and oversight. The community does not currently have a formal leadership structure beyond the local leader, and safeguarding responsibilities are not distributed or matched with appropriate succession planning. The safeguarding implementation plan, while active, is not fully embedded across the community, and not all members were aware of key documents such as the baseline audit report. These issues present challenges for long-term resilience and compliance.

5.6 Overall, the religious life group has achieved the grade of Firm Progress in five standards and Results Being Achieved in the others. There is a clear intention, commitment, and goodwill within the community to strengthen safeguarding practice. However, for safeguarding to become firmly embedded and sustainable, the community must broaden its internal safeguarding capacity, strengthen governance, deepen member understanding and ownership of safeguarding responsibilities, and continue to develop clear, practical, and accessible processes that align fully with the expectations of the eight National Safeguarding Standards.

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- Update the code of conduct and risk assessments to explicitly state that ministry with children is always conducted by a minimum of two adults.
- Continue to use case scenarios to promote confidence with the members about responding to disclosures of abuse.
- The local leader should organise an in-person meeting with the RLSS and the respondent to ensure complete understanding of the rationale for his safety management plan.
- Update the code of conduct for volunteers and members with clear assertive language and guidance re interactions with young people and the use of substances whilst ministering.
- Consider what support can be provided to the local leader formally within the community.
- Update the guest room notice to ensure guests are advised not to be alone with children, or adults accessing the support of the community and advising that under no circumstances contact details should be exchanged.

Within 6 months

- Update risk assessments to include more proactive preventative measures rather than predominantly reactive controls.
- Consider how safeguarding communications could be safely disseminated to vulnerable groups such as the homeless.
- Develop a formal safeguarding communication plan (this may be part of the overall safeguarding implementation plan).
- Engage with peers who have direct experience of engaging with those who report harm as to reflect on their experience and any learning that could be relevant to the religious life group.

Within 12 months

- Expand the safeguarding policy or develop a separate guidance to include further clarification on how victims and survivors will be supported.
- Expand the safeguarding policy or develop a separate policy to include further clarification on how members subject to allegations will be supported.
- Align the three-year safeguarding implementation plan with the eight National Safeguarding Standards.
- Members should consider how best to gather feedback from children accessing support to assess whether safeguarding messages are understood and consider what improvements can be made.
- Consider the development of a website to include safeguarding communications.
- All members, but particularly the local leader, need to ensure that they are confident in providing a trauma informed response to survivors of abuse, accessing training and case scenarios would build knowledge in this area.
- Develop an enculturation package for overseas visitors and members.
- Members to share experiences of safeguarding training and reflect as to how learning will be applied to ministry, this should be formally recorded.
- Develop a training needs analysis.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In accordance with the overall rating of Firm Progress further audit by the CSSA should take place after a minimum two-year period, subject to no new risk factors arising.

8. Appendix

Evidence provided

Meeting minutes including evidence of safeguarding discussions
Photographs of various posters and noticeboards
Religious life group constitutions
Safeguarding action plan 2024 – 2027
Safeguarding policy and procedure for the international religious life group
Safeguarding policy for the religious life group in England and Wales
Safety management plan for a member and related records
Testimonial of suitability and other safer recruitment evidence
Training records and certificates