

Melkite Catholic Eparchy Child and At-Risk Adult Safeguarding Policy



Purpose

“In our Byzantine liturgical rites and traditions, children hold a central and sacred place. From their very infancy, through the Holy Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation, children are welcomed as full and active members of God's family. They are not merely the future of our Church; they are the active present.”

Most Reverend Robert Rabbat DD, Eparch of Australia, New Zealand and All Oceania

The Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Australia, New Zealand and All Oceania has zero tolerance for any conduct, omission, or activity that compromises the dignity, safety, or well-being of children, young people, and at-risk adults. Safeguarding is a sacred duty entrusted to us by Christ Himself.

The Eparchy recognises that a strong safeguarding culture is essential to preventing harm and abuse. This includes maintaining an open, transparent, and equitable environment in which everyone feels safe to raise concerns, report unacceptable behaviour, and seek support.

All suspected breaches of the Eparchy's Child and At-Risk Adult Safeguarding Policy (Eparchy Safeguarding Policy) are taken seriously. Where misconduct, inaction, or failure to comply with safeguarding responsibilities is identified, the Eparchy will respond promptly and take appropriate action, including disciplinary action where required.

The Eparchy takes a risk-based approach to safeguarding, informed response in case management and outlines mandatory reporting obligations.

All adults associated with the Eparchy share a duty of care to protect the children, young people, at-risk adults, and other people with whom they come into direct or indirect contact.

Guided by the Holy Gospel, the Eparchy, embeds the National Child Safe Principles (Australian Human Rights Commission) and the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) Edition 2 into our daily operations, ensuring safe, nurturing, and transparent environments where everyone is respected and protected.

Eparchial Commitment Statement

Under the pastoral guidance of His Grace, The Most Reverend Robert Rabbat DD, Melkite Eparch of Australia, New Zealand and All Oceania, the Eparchy is committed to fostering a culture of safety, well-being, respect, and support for all children, young people, and at-risk adults.

The Eparchy acknowledges its legal, moral, cultural, and spiritual responsibility to provide safe and respectful environments across all parishes, ministries, agencies and eparchial activities.

The Eparchy therefore maintains a strict zero-tolerance approach to child abuse, neglect, exploitation, grooming, boundary violations, and any conduct that compromises the dignity, safety, or well-being of children, young people, or at-risk adults.

Every child, young person, and at-risk adult has the right to feel safe and to be safe. Safeguarding is the shared moral and legal responsibility of our entire clergy, staff and parish communities. To uphold this right, the Eparchy commits to the following safeguards—

National compliance— implementing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (Australian Human Rights Commission) and the [National Catholic Safeguarding Standards \(NCSS\) Edition 2](#) to build proactive and preventative safeguarding environments across all parishes.

Safe and welcoming environments— providing inclusive, respectful, and nurturing places where the talents, voices, opinions, and rights of children, young people, and at-risk adults are heard, respected, and protected.

Zero tolerance for harm— ensuring that children, young people, at-risk adults, parish communities, volunteers, and contractors are not exposed to physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, or financial mistreatment, neglect, or boundary failures.

Participation and support— empowering children, young people, and at-risk adults to participate in decisions that affect them, actively listening to their feedback, and prioritising their well-being.

Clear and supportive reporting— providing accessible reporting pathways so communities know how to raise concerns and can trust that all matters will be handled safely, carefully, and in a trauma-informed way.

Ongoing education— continuously educating and equipping clergy, employees, and parish volunteers to understand, prevent, and respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns.

Eparchy safeguarding standards

The Eparchy Safeguarding Policy is aligned with the Child Safe Standards that were recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and adopted by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian to facilitate a Child safe culture. The Eparchy Safeguarding Policy is also aligned to the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) Edition 2. The Eparchy Safeguarding Policy is embedded into its parish operations, ministry practices, and governance structures. The Eparchy Safeguarding Policy is broad in its commitment and extends protection to children, young people and at-risk adults. The Eparchy responds to at-risk adults with support, compassion, respect, and practical safeguarding measures that uphold their dignity and well-being.

Safeguarding framework and resources

To fulfil its safeguarding responsibilities, the Eparchy has developed and maintains a coordinated suite of safeguarding documents and resources, including—

- The Child and At-Risk Adult Safeguarding Policy
- The Safe Ministry Framework
- The Code of Conduct
- Local Safeguarding Officer handbook
- Fact sheets, protocols, and procedures that support safe ministry practice.

Roles and responsibility

The Eparchy affirms that safeguarding is a shared responsibility of all adults associated with it— Board members, advisors, parish priests, agency heads, clergy, religious appointees, invited visitors, permanent, part time and temporary employees, sponsors, partners, volunteers, parish communities and contractors— who must help protect the safety, well-being and dignity of children, young people and at-risk adults involved in its parishes, ministries, agencies and eparchial activities. Key Responsibilities—

- Treat children, young people and at-risk adults with care, respect, and compassion.
- Comply with all safeguarding laws and requirements, including relevant screening obligations.
- Promptly report any concerns about the safety, well-being, or dignity of a child, young person, or at-risk adult to the appropriate person or authority. Where there is immediate risk or a possible criminal matter, this includes notifying your Australian state or New Zealand Police or the relevant statutory authority.
- Cooperate with any internal or external investigation concerning the safety, well-being, or dignity of a child, young person or at-risk adult.
- Follow this Safeguarding Policy, and sign and comply with the Code of Conduct.

The primary persons and offices with responsibility for dealing with safeguarding in the Eparchy are the Bishop and the Safeguarding Office. Parish Priests and Agency Heads are also responsible for dealing with safeguarding complaints that arise in the parishes and agencies of the Eparchy.

Each person's roles and responsibilities are set out in the Chart of Eparchy Safeguarding Roles and Responsibilities.

Covered parishes and Eparchial entities

The Eparchy Safeguarding Policy is binding and applies to all pastoral, liturgical, and missionary outreach settings operating under the canonical and legal authority of the Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Australia, New Zealand and All Oceania including—

New South Wales: Our Lady of the Dormition Parish, St Elias the Prophet Parish, St John the Beloved Parish, St Michael the Archangel Cathedral Parish, and St Rita Parish.

Victoria: St Elias the Prophet Parish, St Joseph Parish, and St Peter and Paul Parish.

Australian Capital Territory St George Mission.

Queensland): St Clement Parish.

South Australia: St Anthony Mission.

Western Australia: Our Lady of the Annunciation Parish.

New Zealand: St Elias Parish.

Agencies: Holy Saviour School, Greenacre, NSW and the Melkite Charitable Foundation.

Holy Saviour School Governance

Holy Saviour School at Greenacre, Sydney, NSW maintains its own independent, standalone Child Protection and Safety Policy governed by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) requirements and applicable state education laws. Holy Saviour School's policy represents the authoritative safety standard for all day-to-day school employees, registered students, school-parent communications, and educational operations.

The Eparchy Safeguarding Policy operates in addition and as a supplementary framework specifically governing clergy, religious, and pastoral personnel who minister at Holy Saviour School, for chaplaincy, sacramental preparation, liturgical events, and pastoral care. The Eparchy Safeguarding Policy functions to ensure compliance with the National Standards for the Eparchy's religious personnel, without overriding the primary statutory and regulatory duties of Holy Saviour School under NESA. In any instance of operational conflict, Holy Saviour School's primary NESA-compliant Child Protection and Safety Policy will prevail in the school setting.

Governance, delegation and independent escalation

The Eparchy's governance structure sets clear accountability, reduces conflicts of interest, and provides independent pathways for safeguarding escalation and reporting.

Leadership accountability— The Eparch (Bishop) has ultimate responsibility for safeguarding culture, adequate resourcing, and formal oversight. He receives quarterly compliance reports and an annual comprehensive review.

Operational safeguarding— The Safeguarding Office maintains controlled policies, updates compliance registers, conducts audits, coordinates training, and supports safe practices across all parishes.

Local parish coordination— Local Safeguarding Officers are appointed in each parish to coordinate evidence, verify volunteer compliance, and report through the Eparchy Executive Assistant for recordkeeping.

Independent escalation— Dr Shukri Sanbar, Independent Safeguarding Complaints Contact, receives and manages concerns involving the bishop, senior clergy, or safeguarding office staff.

Alternative independent contact— Mr. Michael Suliman acts as the alternative contact if the primary contact is unavailable, involved in the matter, or has a potential conflict.

Conflict management— No person may manage, review, or decide a safeguarding matter where they have an actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest. Delegations, reporting frequencies, and recordkeeping boundaries are reviewed and verified annually.

Records, privacy and retention

The Eparchy maintains strict records, privacy, and retention requirements to support accountability, compliance, and safe safeguarding practice.

Permanent retention— The Eparchy keeps safeguarding records in append-only, permanent storage. Safe-checking records, Working with Children Checks, and signed agreements must not be destroyed or deleted, including when a volunteer resigns.

Timely and factual recording— Safety concerns and disclosures must be recorded promptly, objectively, and factually. Records must preserve exact words where possible and clearly distinguish facts, allegations, and administrative decisions.

Secure, access-controlled storage— Safeguarding records must be stored only in approved secure locations. Personal devices, personal email accounts, unencrypted USBs, and shared public cloud folders must not be used.

Lawful and necessary sharing— Safeguarding information may be shared only where it is lawful, necessary, and proportionate. This may include sharing information for safety, mandatory reporting, support services, investigations, or a fair administrative process.

A person accused of a child abuse offence, or a person subject to an internal or external investigation, will not ordinarily be given access to records relating to the matter while safety, legal, procedural, or investigative considerations apply. The Eparchy, parishes, ministries and agencies must not promise absolute secrecy where a person's safety or well-being may be at risk.

The Eparchy and its agencies will handle personal information in accordance with the Eparchy's Privacy Policy and any applicable legal obligations.

Disposal holds— Records must not be altered, deleted, or destroyed while an active concern, investigation, claim, audit, or legal matter is underway or reasonably anticipated.

Training

The Eparchy recognises that training on the Eparchy Safeguarding Policy is essential to ensure—

- safeguarding awareness issues are maintained;
- guidelines for appropriate conduct with children, young people and at-risk adults are understood, and inappropriate conduct is recognised;
- each person understands and can meet their obligations under the Eparchy Safeguarding Policy and is able to act accordingly;
- awareness of any changes to the Eparchy Safeguarding Policy are communicated and understood.

The Eparchy requires all clergy, religious, lay staff, and volunteers to complete mandatory learning requirements, background screening clearances, and specialised continuing education to maintain active status within the Eparchy, its parishes, and parish communities.

Support

Safeguarding advice and support may be sought from the Safeguarding Office at any time. If appropriate, further advice may be obtained from the Eparchy. To assist the parish priests and affiliate heads and promote continuous improvement, the Safeguarding Officer will audit at least a minimum of 10% of parishes and affiliates which will support an environment of continuous improvement.

Policy review and updates

The Eparchy will review its Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct annually to identify any changes needed to strengthen safeguarding for children and at-risk adults. The Eparchy will consider the views of children and at-risk adults when reviewing the Child Safeguarding Policy and related safeguarding materials.

Any revisions to the Child Safeguarding Policy will be made available on the [Eparchy's website](#).