



SYRO MALABAR EPARCHY
OF ST THOMAS THE APOSTLE, MELBOURNE

Practice Guidelines

Safeguarding Children, Young People, and Vulnerable Adults

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FOREWORD



Inspired by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we the members of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle, Melbourne, are starting a journey to safeguard vulnerable persons. We follow the path taken by the ACBC to promote Safe Church initiatives in Australia.

Our Practice Guidelines offers us a direction for establishing positive safeguarding practices in our ministries, activities and organisations. It helps us to uphold Catholic ethos and values by showing care, compassion and unconditional love to the vulnerable. It gives us an opportunity to further uphold the positive values of our adopted country.

The aim of this Guideline is to provide a vision and direction for parishes and Missions in Australia on identifying and protecting those who are in need. It is to ensure that we articulate our commitment in establishing clear and concise processes for safeguarding those who are entrusted into our care.

I would ask every one of our leaders and members to accept and practice this guideline for safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults in their everyday Church life. Our communities are expected to partner with the Eparchial Professional Standards Division and work together to establish safeguarding practices in our parishes and Missions.

The intent of this Guideline and Policy is to provide a framework for ethical everyday conduct. Every member is encouraged to demonstrate a professional attitude and respectful behaviour while dealing with children, young people and vulnerable adults, and all individuals in need.

May the merciful Father bless us and all who are entrusted into our care!

Yours in Jesus Christ,

Bishop Bosco Puthur

29 September 2017

Feast of Holy Angels, Michael, Gabriel & Raphael

GUIDELINES FOR SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

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Summary:	This guideline establishes practice standards for the Eparchial leadership group and anyone involved in ministry with children to safeguard children, young people, and vulnerable adults who are in the care of or in contact with the Eparchy and its parishes/Missions.
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Note: The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church is a Major Archiepiscopal Church in full communion with the Apostolic See of Rome. The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church is one of 23 Eastern Catholic Churches in the Catholic Communion. It is the second largest Eastern Catholic Church that follows the East-Syrian liturgy. Australia has had a large presence of Syro-Malabar followers since the widespread migration of Catholics from the Indian subcontinent.

Holy Father, Pope Francis, established the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne (Australia) in December 2013 with the Bishop Bosco Puthur as its first Eparchial Bishop. The formal inauguration was on 25 March 2014 in Melbourne. It has 42 parishes/Missions across Australia.

The Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese is a member of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC). Compliance to the legislative requirements for safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults as stipulated by Australian States and Territories are mandatory.

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INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF PRACTICE GUIDELINES

The Eparchy demonstrated its commitments to safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults by formalising a policy statement **SMEST_PS2017_SCV01**. The Eparchy is providing practice guidelines to further assist its leaders in ensuring safeguarding practices by all involved in ministry with children in their leadership role. This is consistent with the ACBC's standards for safeguarding.

The Eparchy's practice guidelines (**SMEST_PS2017_SCV02**) for safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults applies to all clergy, volunteers, visitors, contractors, and leaders who are responsible for safeguarding children, young people, and vulnerable adults who are in the care or associates to the parishes/Missions. Any member who holds a leadership role and is involved in ministry with children in parishes/Missions are required to foster a child-focussed practice and ensure children, young people, and vulnerable adults remain safe from harm when associated with the organisation.

As leaders of the parishes/Missions we are expected to represent the values of the Syro-Malabar church, present ourselves with compassion and care, and respect the dignity of every person as a child of God. As leaders, we must be proactive in modelling respectful behaviours.

The Eparchy established the below described standards for all who take on a leadership role within its parishes/Missions as per the standards described below.

1 DUTY OF CARE TO THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

The below points indicate the extent of the duty of care expected from all who are involved in ministry with children in a leadership role within the Eparchy, parishes/Missions in Australia.

- Create awareness among parishes/Missions of child abuse and family violence and its effects on children and young people.
- Identify situations that may cause harm to a child or young person and be proactive in preventing further harm.
- Act in the best interest of children, young people, and vulnerable adults always and especially when they are presented as a victim.
- Report allegations or disclosures of child physical abuse, child sexual abuse, child emotional abuse, and child neglect.
- Make appropriate decisions that are in the best interest of the child.
- Keep all information regarding child protection concerns confidential, only discussing information with relevant and appropriate people according to the reporting procedures.
- Work in partnership with Government departments to address significant risk of harm presented.
- Protect welfare of all children while promoting a culture of safeguarding in church community.
- Empower children and encourage their participation in decision making.
- Respond to safeguarding concerns and complaints in a manner that is compassionate and supportive to all involved in the process, but especially victims.
- Demonstrate care and compassion to vulnerable adults e.g. persons affected by recent divorce, family breakdown, bereavement, mental health issues, family violence, and an addiction to substances.

- Monitor performance of all staff and volunteers recruited to parishes/Mission leadership roles.
- Ensure all leaders involved with children, young people, and vulnerable adults have clear role descriptions and reporting pathways.
- Establish appropriate administrative processes for all child related programs within parishes/Mission.

1.1 BREACHING DUTY OF CARE

- Failure to maintain full confidentiality regarding any matter related to children, young people, and vulnerable adults.
- Failure to abide by the Code of Conduct
- Ignoring risk of harm and failing to report child abuse.
- Working against the organisation's policy.
- Trying to cover up issues and not following procedures.
- Not providing role clarifications for people associated with the Eparchy.
- Failing to follow recruitment and monitoring processes.
- Absence of administrative processes in parishes/Missions to support the processes.

2 PROMOTING SAFEGUARDING PRACTICES WITHIN THE EPARCHY

This standard intends to promote safeguarding practices in parishes/Missions to create a safe and nurturing environment where all members can safely frequent. The following is a guide for promoting safety in parishes/Missions.

- Ensure the Eparchy's mission and vision statement includes child safety messages.
- Create awareness among parents about protective behaviours and positive parenting.
- Beware of boundaries when dealing with children.
- Always ensure appropriate approvals are sought before transporting children in a third party's vehicle. A signed consent should be sought for transporting children to events or for activities outside of routine.
- Be aware of "stranger danger".
- Maintain an ethical and professional conduct.
- Ensure two adults accompany children and young people when interacting with them in parishes/Missions.
- Always provide adult supervision for children in social gathering, church events, and parish sponsored programs.
- All leaders maintain appropriate professional boundaries in all settings including virtual settings, and social media.
- Always maintain appropriate physical contact that is open and observable. **NCPS-Appropriate Touch link**
- Behaviour management of children should be a positive and fun experience. Ensure it is not an aggressive, ridiculing, or naming and shaming experience for the child.
- Educate children and young people about their rights and what it means to be a safe place
- Obtain knowledge of age appropriate behaviour patterns and refrain from being critical of young people.
- Medicine should not be administered on child without written parental consent. Should medicine be required in an emergency situation where parental consent has not been

received, child health and wellbeing will be prioritised. Such cases will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Eparchy.

- Children are to be photographed with written parental consent only. All photos should be taken in public setting if parents have consented.
- Ensure parish seeks consent and signed approval from parents if it wishes to publish child photos in parishes, internet site or social media.
- Conduct risk assessment from a work health and safety perspective to ensure physical safety of the premises. For example building, car park, trip & fall hazards, smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, presence of a first aid kit and an identified first aid officer, appropriate signage, handling of hot food, electrical equipment etc.
- Ensure the environment is free from bullying, harassment, maltreatment, verbal or emotional abuse.
- Display safe practice flowcharts in facilities.

2.1 BREACHING SAFEGUARDING PRACTICES

- Hitting, slapping, pushing, verbally abusing or ignoring a child.
- Punishing, isolating, emotionally abusing or hurting the feelings of a child.
- Treating a child “special” and spending excessive time with a child or young person in isolation.
- Engaging in inappropriate conversations or belittling a child.
- Targeting a child.
- Touching a child unless it is warranted for the safeguarding of the child.

3 EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The aim of this standard is to demonstrate ways to empower children and young people to feel free to speak up, question and provide feedback as necessary. Children’s participation in policies relating to child protection and their input in decisions made on their behalf by the organisation is crucial to ensure a child safe organisation. The Eparchy further demonstrates its commitment to children and young people by recommending the following steps:

- Ensure all policies and procedures relating to children and young people are written in simple English and is publicly available online, and if possible ensuring children’s participation in the development, implementation and review of the policies and guidelines.
- Ensure children and young people recognise that the Eparchy cares about them and their feelings and shows an interest in “child inclusiveness”.
- Educating children on child safety and empowering them to disclose child abuse.
- Assist children to develop their self- esteem and foster their participation.
- Develop pathways for communication between children and organisations.
- Use child friendly language in everyday organisational activities and communication.
- Educate children on inappropriate adult conduct and empower them to report this.
- Value children’s contribution to the organisation and respect them as individuals.

4 EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR SAFEGUARDING

This standard describes the mandatory training and education requirements of everyone who associates with children, young people and vulnerable adults in The Eparchy. As a general

rule any policy will work as desired if its users understand the concept. The Eparchy envisages that training and education on safeguarding policy and guidelines would inspire its members and community, thus creating a safe place for all. It will assist its members to have the right knowledge, attitude, skill set and administrative/escalation processes involved in dealing with a given situation for safeguarding. The aim of this standard is to ensure our church leaders and anyone who involves in ministry with children are competent in safeguarding policies and local procedures.

The following indicates the type of training offered for parishes/Missions:

- All leaders and anyone involved in ministry with children must be trained in basic training and a refresher every 3 years at a minimum for safeguarding children. This training encompasses the Eparchy's safeguarding policy including the definitions of abuse, neglect, vulnerable person, identifying and responding to suspected risk of harm, understanding the escalation process within the Eparchy, and the role of the Professional Standards Division and Government Departments. In addition this training will offer State and Territory specific information on mandatory reporting and management of child abuse allegations.
- Advanced training is offered to parishes/Missions safeguarding officers, clergy, catechism head master, and other relevant persons and a refresher on a regular yearly basis when significant changes to child protection legislation or standards occur.
- New recruits to undertake an induction on safeguarding policies of the Eparchy as part of selection process.
- Online refresher training will be offered for those who need annual refreshers.

5 CHILD SAFE SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT PROCESSES

A detailed selection process would encourage selection of the right person for the right task. It also enhances the organisations' capacity to demonstrate safeguarding practices. The Eparchy encourages the below practices in parishes/Missions:

- Accept written application forms as an expression of interest for a church leadership role involving ministry with children. Examples of roles include mathru jyothi, volunteer, youth group leader, and choir leader.
- Complete a declaration about their safeguarding history.
- Have a task description for each role.
- Conduct an interview.
- Conduct two referee checks, Working with Children Check, National Police Check.
- Provide an offer letter and indicate term of service.
- Book in for safeguarding training.
- Read, understood and agreed to abide by the Code of Conduct. A signed copy is kept.
- Complete details on a volunteer register.
- Provide a termination letter if no longer engaged with the Eparchy.

6 ESCALATION OF DISCLOSURES

This standard provides guidance for timely management of disclosures locally and in partnership with relevant child protection authorities as mandatory reporters or as non-mandatory reporters.

(See mandatory reporter link)

- If there is a reasonable belief that a child or vulnerable adult is in imminent danger due to abuse or risk of harm and/or if they are experiencing serious threat to their health and welfare, call 000 and report to police immediately.
- If you suspect child abuse or neglect on reasonable grounds, you may contact the Eparchial safeguarding officer for support and guidance.
- If the disclosure is serious you may contact the Eparchial safeguarding officer and take guidance for contacting local child protection agency.
- If the disclosure is relating to clergy, liaise with the Eparchy Vicar General and Professional Standards Division immediately.

The Eparchy encourages all members of its church community to engage with child protection authorities and relevant departments to safeguard children, young people, and vulnerable adults as needed.

(See Child Protection Authorities link)

At the Eparchial level, the safeguarding coordinator will assist follow up of reported matters and work with the mandatory reporters and welfare agencies as needed.

6.1 BREACHING ESCALATION DISCLOSURE PATHWAYS

- Investigate child abuse matters and ask inquisitive questions to the victim. The investigation of child abuse is the role of the Government agencies and/or Police who deals with child abuse matters in your State or Territory.

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