

Union of Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

United States Unit

Child Safeguarding Policy and Standards

We commit ourselves to a spirituality of being in a communion that seeds God in the inter-connectedness of the whole of creation and empowers active love for self, others and all of nature. (Congregational Gathering 2006)

Every Unit Community shall have, in keeping with civil and legal requirements of the respective country, and with canonical and congregational requirements, a policy for safeguarding minors. (Our Way of Life – Directives of the Congregation (D10))

We are committed to safeguarding and respecting the sacredness of all life. This commitment is exercised in accordance with Gospel-based values, or Charism, our Constitutions and Directives, Congregational Gathering Documents and the U.N. Convention Guidelines on the Rights of the Child. (Congregational International Child Safeguarding Statement)

We are particularly committed to safeguarding the dignity and fundamental rights of all people in our care, especially children, and to ensuring their safety and well-being. We will work in partnership with parents/guardians to do this. We recognize each child as a gift from God, and we value and encourage the participation of children in all activities that enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development. (Congregational International Child Safeguarding Statement)

All members of the United States Unit and all those who work with us under our authority (clergy, religious staff and volunteers) have a responsibility to safeguard children through promoting their welfare, health and development in a safe and caring environment that supports their best interest and prevents abuse. (Congregational International Child Safeguarding Statement)

This notice is to be posted in a prominent position in all places of Presentation Ministry. (See form on page 7 of this document.)

If you are concerned about the welfare and safety of a child, please contact the Designated Person in our Unit:

Sister Lois Byrne, PBVM

Phone: (320) 368-8466

Email: byrnemn987@gmail.com

Guiding Principles:

1. **Gospel:** - Children have a key place in the heart of Jesus who said: *Whoever welcomes one such child for my sake welcomes me. On the other hand, it would be better for anyone who leads astray one of these little ones who believe in me, to be drowned by a millstone around his neck, in the depths of the sea.* (Matthew 18:5-6) and *Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.* (Luke 18: 17) This places a sacred obligation on the Church to ensure that children are welcomed, cherished and protected in a manner consistent with their central place in the life of the Church.
2. **Children's Rights:** - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines forty-two fundamental rights to be implemented in national law by signatories to the Convention. Full realization of these rights will ensure that children will be 'brought up in a spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity'.
3. **Civil Law and Canon Law:** The United States Unit of the Presentation Congregation commits to upholding our obligations under the civil legislation of the United States and the requirements of Church law.
4. **Vos Estis Lux Mundi:** In his Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis quotes the following verse from Sacred Scripture: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Mt 5:14). He reminds us that: *Our Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to be a shining example of virtue, integrity and holiness. All of us, in fact, are called to give concrete witness of faith in Christ in our lives and, in particular, in our relationship with others. This responsibility falls, above all, on the successors of the Apostles, chosen by God to be pastoral leaders of his People, and demands from them a commitment to follow closely the path of the Divine Master. What more closely concerns the successors of the Apostles concerns all those who, in various ways, assume ministries in the Church, or profess the evangelical counsels, or are called to serve the Christian People. Therefore, it is good that procedures be universally adopted to prevent and combat these crimes that betray the trust of the faithful.* (Vos Estis Lux Mundi, May 7, 2019 - introduction)

Scope of the Policy:

This policy applies to all members of the United States Unit of Union of Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all staff members and volunteers who minister in any of our convents and ministries. Everyone has a role to play in creating an environment in which children can develop and be safe.

Declaration of Adherence: Attached to this Policy is a **Declaration of Adherence** to be signed by all persons to whom the policy applies. (See form on page 6 of this document.)

Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments:

In all of our convents and ministries we will:

- ❖ Create safe environments for children, in safe, secure premises.
- ❖ Ensure that all Sisters, employees and volunteers who work with children have law enforcement clearance, are properly recruited, and are adequately trained in maintaining attitudes, skills and knowledge for keeping children safe. Training shall be updated annually. Accurate record keeping is to be maintained.
- ❖ Maintain appropriate staff to child ratios according to the norms of the state.

- ❖ Ensure that there is appropriate supervision for all activities.
- ❖ Have clear procedures regarding visiting personnel with sign in and sign out procedures.
- ❖ Receive written parental consent for all off site activities. Consent forms must be dated and signed by a parent or guardian.
- ❖ Use a child-centered approach, where full participation of all children is encouraged and facilitated. Practicing positive engagement with children, we do not allow corporal punishment.
- ❖ Ensure that suitable codes of conduct for children and adults are drawn up and distributed.
- ❖ Ensure that bullying, in any form, is not tolerated.
- ❖ Have a safe use of digital media policy to be used by all involved with the children and distributed to parents/guardians.
- ❖ Have a policy for electronic communication with children to be used by all involved with the children and distributed to parents/guardians.
- ❖ Have appropriate procedures for responding to and reporting any form of suspected child abuse.

Principles for Responding to Suspected Child Abuse:

- a. Every Sister in our Unit and every staff member and volunteer involved in any of our ministries is a mandated reporter of any form of suspected abuse of a minor.
- b. Responsible whistle blowing is encouraged.
- c. All applicable state and Archdiocesan/Diocesan statutes regarding the abuse of a minor will be complied with in all cases.
- d. All involved personnel shall cooperate fully in the investigation of alleged child abuse.

Procedures for Processing an Allegation of Child Abuse:

- Any person who has actual knowledge of or who has reasonable cause to suspect an incident of abuse of a minor by any personnel in a Presentation Ministry, by a Presentation Sister or by any other person shall comply with all applicable reporting requirements of local, state and federal law as well as the requirements of this Unit of the Congregation.
- A verbal report of any incidence of suspected child abuse shall be immediately communicated to the ministry supervisor, or the Designated Person in our Unit, to the Unit Leader and to the local civil authority.
- The Unit Leader or her delegate with another person, selected by the Unit Leader, will meet with the person making the allegation to hear the details of the charge.
- The person making the allegation will be requested to submit a written, signed and dated statement of the allegation. If the person making the allegation does not wish to submit the allegation in writing this refusal will be noted in the Unit record of the meeting with the person making the allegation. In the case of a minor at the time of the allegation, the minor's parent(s) or legal guardian will be brought into the discussion and the appropriate authorization obtained.
- The person against whom the allegation has been made will receive notification of the allegation and will be placed on administrative leave pending further decision. He/she will be informed of the investigative process and of the expectation of his/her full cooperation and participation in the process. He/she will be directed to remain away from the place of ministry until a resolution of the complaint is concluded. He/she will be directed not to contact the alleged accuser or any member of the accuser's family.

- The person against whom an allegation has been made is to be advised of his/her right to obtain civil and/or canonical counsel.
- All communication between priest-penitent and attorney-client will, for all purposes, be deemed privileged.
- If the allegation is proved to be false, any suspension of activity of the accused will be revoked and every effort shall be made to restore his/her good name.
- A Presentation Ministry in which an allegation of abuse of a minor has occurred shall maintain on file in strict and secure confidence all records and reports of the abuse, all relevant evidence and comment concerning the alleged abuse, all actions taken by the Unit and or the Arch/Diocese in response to such reports, as well as copies of original statements provided to law enforcement. For the protection of all parties involved, records shall be kept for fifty years after the date of the initial complaint.

Additional Procedures if the Allegation Involves a Sister Member of the United States Unit:

- If the allegation received involves a member of this Unit, the Unit Leader, or her delegate, with another person will meet with the Sister who has been accused in order to inform her of the allegation, to apprise her of her rights under civil and canon law and to offer appropriate assistance.
- The Unit Leader will ensure that the accused Sister has legal counsel separate from that of the Unit.
- If the allegation of abuse by a member of this Unit is made to the Arch/Diocese the Unit Leader will cooperate with the Arch/Diocese.
- As soon as the Unit Leader is privy to credible information regarding an allegation of abuse by a Sister, she will present the information to the Congregational Leader.
- The services of a licensed professional with expertise in dealing with abuse cases involving minors shall be procured to assist and advise the Unit Leader on procedure once an allegation has been received. He/she shall assist her in determining the veracity of the allegation and advise her on the moral and legal responsibilities of the Unit. He/she shall also provide counsel on the appropriate pastoral response to all persons involved in the alleged or confirmed incident of abuse of a minor.
- If the allegation is found to be credible, the accused sister will be suspended from activities involving minors.
- The Unit Leader will inform the Sister's employer of the allegation.
- The Unit will cooperate with any criminal investigation.
- The Unit Leader or her delegate will urge the Sister to undergo an appropriate assessment, recommended treatment and follow-up care. Recommendations of the treatment program will be followed regarding future ministry and other interactions of the Sister.
- A professional with training in dealing with abuse cases shall be assigned as a case manager. The case manager will serve as a facilitator between the victim and the Unit Leader to determine how to provide the victim with appropriate ongoing psychological and pastoral care.
- Where there is doubt regarding the credibility and sustainability of the accusation the case shall be presented to the local Arch/Diocesan Independent Review Board for advice as to how to proceed. Legal Services of LCWR may also be consulted.
- The Unit Leader is obliged to inform her successor of the abuse allegation against a member of the Unit.
- The Unit Leader shall maintain a confidential permanent file of all records and reports of the abuse, all relevant evidence and comment concerning the alleged abuse, all actions taken by the Unit and or the Arch/Diocese in response to such reports, as well as copies of original statements provided to law enforcement. This file shall be placed in the archives and will be available to the Congregational Leader and the succeeding Unit Leaders.

- If a complaint is received about a deceased or former member of the Unit the Unit Leader, insofar as possible, will use this procedure as a guide to her response.
- If the allegation is proved to be false, any suspension of activity of the Sister will be revoked and every effort shall be made to restore her good name.

The Unit Team develops a plan of action each year which includes training, updating, monitoring and evaluation. An annual audit is submitted to the Congregational Leadership Team.

Signed: *Katherine Fennell*

Unit Leader

Effective Date: 5-16-2020

Date Reviewed: 5-11-2023

The next Review date of this policy will be May 2026.

UNION OF SISTERS OF THE PRESENTATION
OF THE
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
UNITED STATES UNIT

DECLARATION OF ADHERENCE
to the
UNIT POLICY AND STANDARDS
REGARDING CHILD SAFEGUARDING

I, _____

have read the above named policy and have understood my responsibilities in relation to its contents.

I will abide by the directions of the policy.

I will attend all information and training sessions required in relation to this policy.

Signed: _____

Position held: _____

Date: _____