



SYRO MALABAR EPARCHY
OF ST THOMAS THE APOSTLE, MELBOURNE

Policy Statement

Safeguarding Children, Young People, and Adults at Risk

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FOREWORD

The Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle, Melbourne, reaffirms its commitment to safeguarding children and adults at risk. This second version of our policy aligns with the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards Edition 2 and reflects our dedication to promoting Safe Church initiatives in Australia, in collaboration with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC).

The first edition of this policy, endorsed by Bishop Bosco Puthur, demonstrated our leadership and established governance structures to ensure compliance. Building on this foundation, the current edition incorporates updates in standards and legislative requirements, in line with the ten National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

The primary aim of this policy is to offer a clear vision and direction for parishes and Missions in Oceania, facilitating the identification and protection of those in need. It establishes explicit processes for safeguarding individuals entrusted to our care, ensuring that our commitment to their welfare is articulated and practiced consistently.

We call upon all leaders and members to adopt and implement these guidelines in their daily Church life, focusing on safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk. Our communities are expected to collaborate with the Eparchial Professional Standards Division to develop and maintain robust safeguarding practices within our parishes and missions.

May the gracious Father watch over us and all those under our care as we carry on this vital mission.

Yours in Jesus Christ,

Bishop John Panamthottathil CMI

03 July 2024, Feast of St Thomas the Apostle

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Document number:	SMEST_PS2024_SCV02
Functional sub-groups:	<i>The Eparchy:</i> Governance
	<i>Apex Board:</i> Monitoring compliance
	<i>Professional Standards Division:</i> Implementation
	<i>Individuals:</i> Compliance with this policy statement
Summary:	This policy statement demonstrates the commitment, values and principles of the Eparchy, while providing guidance to establish practice standards to safeguard children, young people, and vulnerable adults who are in the care of or in contact with the Eparchy and its parishes/Missions.
Author:	Policy Division, Professional Standards Division, Syro-Malabar Eparchy
Approved by:	Bishop John Panamthottathil CMI
Publication date:	03 July 2024 (SMEST_PS2024_SCV02)
Next review data:	July 2029
Prot. number:	
Status:	Live
This policy applies to:	The Syro-Malabar Eparchy, Melbourne, Oceania
This policy is distributed to:	Parishes and Missions

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 eparchy of Melbourne is a member of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC). Compliance to the legislative requirements for safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk as stipulated by Australian States and Territories are mandatory.

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1 INTRODUCTION AND POLICY CONTEXT OF SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND ADULTS AT RISK

The Eparchy is committed to the safety, wellbeing, and welfare of children, young people, and adults at risk who are members of the Syro-Malabar Church community, and the wider community who associates directly or indirectly with the Eparchy for care and support. We uphold children’s right to be safe, valued, and cared for. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Australia has a responsibility to protect children, provide the services necessary for them to develop and achieve positive outcomes, and enable them to participate in the wider community, which includes the Eparchy’s parishes/missions.

This policy has been formalised by the Eparchial Professional Standards Division in the context of recommendations from the Royal Commission to religious institutions on safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk in Australia.

Indeed it was Jesus who, when his disciples were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest, directed his attention to a little child and said to his disciples, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9.37)

2 PURPOSE AND DIRECTION OF SAFEGUARDING IN THE EPARCHY

The purpose of this policy statement is to enable a National Framework for safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk who associate with the Eparchy in Oceania. It proposes to establish professional practice standards required for clergy, visitors, volunteers, parishes/missions leaders, and contractors to ensure safe church practices by all its members. This policy also outlines the action taken by the Eparchy to promote the welfare of children and young people and protect them from harm and to ensure that “safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility”. In addition, we are confident that safeguarding children from abuse and maltreatment, preventing risk of harm, and addressing issues causing children’s emotional health and development, ensure safe and effective care, and allows all children to achieve the best outcomes in our parishes/missions. All members of the Eparchy who work with vulnerable groups, including children, must always act in their best interests and ensure they take all reasonable steps to prevent harm to themselves. Having safeguards in place within an organisation not only protects and promotes the welfare of children but also enhances the confidence of all involved in leadership roles within the Eparchy.

The Eparchy is committed to promoting the protection of adults at risk from abuse and other types of exploitation while they associate with the Eparchy. We are committed to supporting individuals in taking control over their lives and in making informed choices without coercion.

The Eparchy's role in safeguarding adults at risk includes:

- providing the vision and direction for their safety,
- ensuring that its policies and practices articulate its commitment to their protection,
- establishing clear and concise processes for their safeguarding,
- addressing poor practices, exploitation based on gender, age, and ethnicity,
- establishing safeguards for positive care and support,
- providing leadership in the prevention of further issues, and their protection and empowerment, and
- providing the least intrusive responses appropriate to the circumstances.

We believe that safeguarding adults at risk is everybody's responsibility, with communities playing a part in promoting welfare, preventing further abuse, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse of children and adults at risk. The Eparchy is committed to protecting those least able to protect themselves. We should achieve this through partnerships between local government organisations, parishes/missions, individuals, and families.

The Eparchy is confident in its community member's ability to practice within acceptable standards of ethical and professional conduct that are required of everyone who associates with the parishes/missions. We are committed to maintaining the Code of Conduct, with any unacceptable behavior not tolerated. Our professional conduct will assist in building a healthy and safe environment for all, especially the children, young people, and adults at risk. The intent of the policy is to provide a framework to promote ethical everyday conduct. It does not and cannot cover every situation that can arise in the parishes/missions and encourages the need for common sense in how members conduct themselves.

In addition, the Eparchy embraces collaborative management of complaints relating to children, young people, and adults at risk with relevant State and Territory Government departments.

3 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The Eparchy upholds the following principles which underpin our commitment to the children, young people, and adults at risk in our parishes/missions. The below principles are based on our belief that children and young people have a right to be raised in an environment free from neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and domestic and family violence.

- The safety, welfare, and wellbeing of all children, young people, and adults at risk are paramount in our Eparchy.
- We uphold the rights of children and young people to be safe, nurtured and cared for.
- We are committed to working in partnership with State and Territory child protection departments to promote the welfare of children and young people.
- We are committed to the best interests of children, young people, adults at risk and believe that “protecting children is everyone’s responsibility”.
- We undertake and promote safe selection and recruitment processes to establish safeguarding practice for anyone involved in the ministry with children.
- We value appropriate training programs for anyone involved in the ministry with children, young people and adults at risk as required.
- We are committed to maintaining National Catholic Safeguarding Standards in the Eparchy.
- We embrace a child-focus in our Eparchy.

4 GOVERNANCE

Whilst upholding the duty of care, the Eparchy would oversee the implementation of safeguarding practices across our parishes/missions. We are committed to establishing and maintaining a child-focused, safe church environment to ensure ongoing safeguarding of children, young people, and adults at risk . The Eparchy would:

- Establish a fundamental understanding of the duty of care required towards those who associate with parishes/missions.
- Establish an Eparchial Professional Standards Division for safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk .
- Recruit appropriate professionals with competencies to undertake Parish Safeguarding Officer(PSO) roles.
- Establish risk mitigation processes and appropriate escalation processes at all levels. This may be achieved by establishing nationwide network of safeguarding Officers and formalising an Apex Board at an Eparchial level to act as a review panel.
- Commit to safeguarding education and training provisions in parishes/missions. This involves ensuring mandatory completion of appropriate training modules and competencies on child abuse and neglect, indicators, disclosure management, and mandatory reporting as a basic requirement to the entry in to parish leadership roles.
- Ensure all church leaders and volunteers have Working with Children Checks as a mandatory requirement for eligibility to offer the role.
- Ensure anyone involved in ministry with children undergo a thorough recruitment check to determine suitability for ministry including, selection, screening, and appointment processes.

- Foster a child-focused approach.
- Ensure all parishes/missions leaders understand the Work Health & Safety legislation requirements and the need for safe environment.
- Develop additional policies, procedures, guidelines, and other relevant documents to support implementation of this policy in the Eparchy.
- Monitor implementation of policies and practice standards in parishes/missions.
- Work towards obtaining accreditation from Australian Childhood Foundation.

5 GLOSSARY

Child	A person below the age of 18 years.
Child abuse	An act, or failure to act, on the part of a parent or other care providers that results in the death, serious physical or emotional harm, neglect, sexual abuse, or exploitation of a child, or which places the child in an imminent risk of serious harm.
Child emotional abuse	Serious psychological harm can occur where the behaviour of their parent or caregiver damages the confidence and self-esteem of the child or young person, resulting in serious emotional disturbance or psychological trauma. Although it is possible for 'one-off' incidents to cause serious harm, in general it is the frequency, persistence and duration of the parental or carer behaviour that is instrumental in defining the consequences for the child or young person. This can include a range of behaviours such as excessive criticism, withholding affection, exposure to domestic violence, intimidation or threatening behaviour.
Child neglect	Child neglect is the continued failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child with the basic things needed for his or her proper growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care and adequate supervision. Emotional neglect when depriving of their psychological needs.
Child physical abuse	Physical abuse is a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child or young person caused by a parent, caregiver or any other person. It includes but is not limited to injuries which are caused by excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings, cigarette burns, attempted strangulation and female genital mutilation. Injuries include bruising, lacerations or welts, burns, fractures or dislocation of joints. Hitting a child or young person around the head or neck and/or using a stick, belt or other object to discipline or punishing a child or young person (in a non-trivial way) is a crime.
Child sexual abuse	Sexual abuse is when someone involves a child or young person in a sexual activity by using their power over them or taking advantage of their trust. Often children or young people are bribed or threatened physically and psychologically to make them participate in the activity. Sexual abuse is a crime.

Domestic and family violence	Domestic and family violence includes any behaviour in a domestic relationship, including intimate partner relationships and family relationships which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear for their own or someone else's safety. It is usually manifested as part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.
Professional standards	The qualities essential for the ethical and safe practice of pastoral ministry.
The Eparchy	Diocese of Eastern Church.
Young person	A person between the ages of 16 and 17 years.
Adult at risk	A person who has recently suffered bereavement, marriage breakdown or other such adversity making them in particular need of pastoral support, or a person with an intellectual disability, mental illness or other impairment that makes it difficult for that person to protect themselves from abuse or exploitation.

6 REVISION HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Amendments
V1 October 2017 SMEST_PS2017_SCV01	Bishop Bosco Puthur	N/A

7 APPENDICES

- Practice guidelines for safeguarding children and adults at risk
- Code of Conduct
- Child safe recruitment and selection of parishes/missions leaders
- Indicators of child abuse and neglect
- Dealing with disclosure of child abuse
- Mandatory and voluntary reporting obligations in States and Territories
- Safeguarding training manual

8 REFERENCES

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9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Eparchy acknowledges that we have reviewed and used information and themes from various child protection sites of the State Government and various Dioceses in Australia to assist the compilation of this policy. The Eparchy would like to thank these organisations and individuals for their work.

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