



SYRO MALABAR EPARCHY
OF ST THOMAS THE APOSTLE, MELBOURNE

Practice Guidelines

Safeguarding Children, Young People, and Adults at Risk

Enquiries & Contact

Professional Standards Division
Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St. Thomas Melbourne Australia (The Eparchy)
Email: safeguarding@syromalabar.org.au
Web: www.syromalabar.org.au

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 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. Our updated Practice Guidelines provide a comprehensive framework for effective safeguarding practices within our ministries, activities, and organizations. By embodying Catholic values of care, compassion, and unconditional love, we strive to protect those at risk and uphold the positive values –

The primary aim of this Guideline is to offer a clear vision and direction for parishes and Missions in **Syro-Malabar Eparchy Melbourne**, 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

GUIDELINES FOR SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND ADULTS AT RISK

Document number:	SMEST_PS2024_SCV03
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 Guideline
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.
Author:	Policy Division, Professional Standards Division, Syro-Malabar Eparchy
Approved by:	Bishop John Panamthottathil CMI
Publication date:	01 July 2024 (SMEST_PS2024_SCV03)
Next review date:	July 2029
Prot. number:	
Status:	Final
This policy applies to:	The Syro-Malabar Eparchy, Melbourne, Australia
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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INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF PRACTICE GUIDELINES

The Eparchy demonstrated its commitments to safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk by formalising the policy statement **SMEST_PS2024_SCV02**. The Eparchy is providing practice guidelines to further assist its leaders in ensuring safeguarding practices by all involved in ministry with children, young people and adults at risk in their leadership role. This is consistent with the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

The Eparchy's practice guidelines (**SMEST_PS2024_SCV03**) for safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk applies to all clergy, volunteers, visitors, contractors, and leaders who are responsible for safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk who are in the care or associates to the parishes/Missions. Any member who holds a leadership role and is involved in ministry in parishes/missions are required to foster safeguarding practices and ensure children, young people, and 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 ADULTS AT RISK

The below points indicate the extent of the duty of care expected from all who are involved in ministry with children, young people and adults at risk in a leadership role within the Eparchy, parishes/missions in Oceania.

- Create awareness among parishes/missions of child abuse and family violence and its effects on children young people and adults at risk.
- Identify situations that may cause harm to a child or young person or and adult at risk and be proactive in preventing further harm.
- Act in the best interest of children, young people, and adults at risk 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 adults at risk 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/missions leadership roles.
- Ensure all leaders involved with children, young people, and adults at risk have clear role descriptions and reporting pathways.
- Establish appropriate administrative processes for all child related programs within parishes/missions.

1.1 BREACHING DUTY OF CARE

- Failure to maintain full confidentiality regarding any matter related to children, young people, and adults at risk .
- 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 attend. 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/mission 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.
- 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 to a 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 parish's/mission's, 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 and 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 ADULTS AT RISK?

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 adults at risk 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, young people and adults at risk are competent in safeguarding practices and local procedures.

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

- All leaders and anyone involved in ministry with children, young people and adults at risk must be trained in safe church training and a refresher training every 3 years as a mandatory requirement .. This training encompasses the Eparchy's safeguarding policy including the definitions of abuse, neglect, adult at risk, 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 principals, 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 Mathruvedi, 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 state and territory child protection authorities as mandatory reporters or as non-mandatory reporters.

- If there is a reasonable belief that a child or adult at risk 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 Director 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 adults at risk as needed.

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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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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 Practice Guidelines. The Eparchy would like to thank these organisations and individuals for their work.

Enquiries & Contact

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