

**“TOGETHER FOR A CULTURE OF CARE”**

**SAFEGUARDING HANDBOOK**

**Congregation Sisters of St. Joseph of Apparition**



**(October 2024)**

“The Church loves all her children like a loving mother, but cares for all and protects with a special affection those who are smallest and defenceless. This is the duty that Christ himself entrusted to the entire Christian community as a whole. Aware of this, the Church is especially vigilant in protecting children and vulnerable adults.”

(Pope Francis, Motu Proprio “As a loving mother”, 4.6.2016)

“The protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message that the Church and all its members are called to proclaim throughout the world. Christ himself, in fact, has entrusted us with the care and protection of the weakest and defenceless: “*whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me*” (Mt 18:5). Therefore, we all have the duty to welcome openheartedly minors and vulnerable persons and to create a safe environment for them, with their interests as a priority. This requires a continuous and profound conversion, in which personal holiness and moral commitment come together to promote the credibility of the Gospel proclamation and to renew the educational mission of the Church.”

(Pope Francis, Motu Proprio

“On the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, 26.3.2019)

“(As Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition we commit ourselves) to ensure that our Communities and Institutions are places where people are protected from abuse of power and psychological, physical and sexual abuse.”

(Final Document of the General Chapter 2019, 5<sup>th</sup> Intention)

## Introduction

Together with the Universal Catholic Church and all people of good will, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition commits itself to promote a “**Culture of Care**”. We desire that all our communities, all our work places and institutions (schools, hospital, dispensaries, hostels etc.) are safe for all. They should be places “... where people are protected from abuse of power and psychological, physical and sexual abuse” (Final Document of the General Chapter 2019, Intention 5) and where the dignity of each and every one is respected.

Since 2020 our General Team, together with all the members of the Congregation, worked on a Safeguarding Handbook. The subject was again studied during the Council of Congregation in February 2023, with the participation of the Leaders of our Provinces and the Sisters named to take charge in a special way of the promotion of Safeguarding in our Congregation.

You are holding in your hands the **revised new edition of our Safeguarding Handbook**. It has the following three parts:

- In the **First Part** (p.4) the importance of a “Culture of Care” as an integral part of our way of life as SJA is outlined.
- The **Second Part** (p. 5-8) speaks of the practical steps needed to live this “Culture of Care” and to prevent Abuse. These steps are the basis of our “Code of Conduct”. All sisters of the Congregation, all employees and volunteers who work with us, will be asked to commit themselves to it.
- The **Third Part** (p. 9-10) gives the Guidelines and Procedures in order to react to acts of Abuse of children or vulnerable persons, committed by our sisters or in our works and our institutions, or in case of suspicion of such Abuse. You will find the concrete steps to follow to file a complaint and its follow up.
- The **Annex of the Handbook** (p. 13-15) provides you with the Code of Conduct to be signed, a form of consent for the publication of photos, videos and texts, and a list of useful contact information.

## First Part

### **“Culture of Care” as an integral part of our way of life as SJA**

*“God is love.” (1 Jn 4,16)*

*“By the ‘works of charity’ to which the sisters dedicate themselves, the Congregation is by vocation a living sign today of the love of God which has become incarnate and which reaches the people through human actions.”*

*(Constitutions SJA C 4)*

*“In view of the ever-greater glory of God, (the Congregation) proposes as its aim the sanctification of its members and the good of the neighbour.” (C 3)*

*“The glory of God is the human person fully alive.”*

*(St. Irenaeus: Against Heresies: Lib. 4, 20, 5-7)*

These few lines from our tradition highlight the **vision of our Congregation**. We strive to realize it by our life as sisters in our communities, in our works and institutions, and wherever we are. We recognize the dignity of each human being as created and loved by God. We desire to promote the good of each and every one, regardless of gender, race, religion or social status. Any form of abuse – physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, spiritual or financial -, any form of harassment or exploitation, is contrary to this vision. Our behaviour must be marked by the utmost respect and care for each person, especially the children and the vulnerable.

St. Emilie de Vialar, our foundress, placed our Congregation under the **protection of St. Joseph**, foster father of Jesus, example of protection, safeguarding and care. He protected Mary, his vulnerable wife. After the birth of Jesus, he protected her and the child during their flight to Egypt (Mt 1-2).

**St. Emilie** herself was a caring person, always preoccupied by the wellbeing of her sisters and the people she served. We can find a lot of examples for this in her life. I would like to invite you all, especially our sisters, to (re)read the life of our Foundress, her letters and our Constitutions, in this perspective: as a witness and a person taking responsibility for a Culture of Care.

## Second Part

### Practical steps to live the “Culture of Care” and to prevent Abuse

It is our common goal as Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition to ensure that our communities, works and institutions are safe “**places where one feels life is good**” (Final Document of the General Chapter 2019, Int. 1, Orient. 1), and **where the dignity of each and every one, especially of the most vulnerable persons, is respected and protected.**

To reach this goal and to live according to our vision we need concrete steps and procedures concerning two areas: the first area is the prevention of abuse and the fight against it; and the second is the reaction if abuse occurred or is suspected to have occurred, in complete confidentiality.

For prevention and action, it is **first of all necessary to raise awareness** about abuse and about the factors putting at risk the safety of persons in our care.

In a place in which this Culture of Care is lived, there is no place for abuse of any kind. For this, **we commit ourselves** not to abuse others, to do all we can to stop abuse if it occurs and to support the victims of abuse, and we ask all those who live and work with us to do the same.

#### Self- Awareness and the call to become ourselves:

To know ourselves, and to undertake a **journey of inner healing** is one of the first preventive actions against abuse. Maybe we are ourselves victims of past or present abuse, and this may increase the danger of repeating parts of the behaviour which we experienced.

For the members of the Congregation, the General Chapter of 2019 “encourages each sister to find ways of healing her wounds and not to be afraid to enter into a movement of reconciliation so as to grow in inner freedom” (Int. 5, Orient. 1). We desire that our communities can be places of care for the members with an atmosphere of mutual trust and support which allows the journey of inner healing to happen.

#### Awareness and attention to the different kinds of abuse:

Abuse is the “cruel, violent, or unfair treatment of someone” (Cambridge Dictionary).

- **Physical Abuse** includes all forms of intentional or unintentional use of physical force that causes the risk of actual harm and injury (for example hitting, kicking, punching, shaking, tearing the hair etc.) In the past,

physical punishment was widely used to discipline children at home and at school. Today this practice is still used in several countries in the world and is sometimes considered as cultural acceptable. For this it has to be made clear that physical punishment is considered abuse in our Congregation, in all Church institutions and in the civil Guidelines of Child protection. We commit ourselves in the framework of Culture of Care to the principle of non-violence in our relationships.

- **Psychological/Emotional Abuse** is more difficult to detect. It is harm resulting from persistent or severe emotional mistreatment like humiliating, punishment, threat, provocation etc.
- **Sexual Abuse** is the actual physical intrusion or threat of sexual nature, whether by force or under coercive circumstances. It includes not only rape, but – among other behaviours – kissing, touching, exposure of parts of the body for sexual purpose and verbal advances with a sexual connotation. We also speak about sexual abuse if such actions are done through social media. Please note that all sexual activity with children (under the age of 18 years) is considered abuse.
- **Neglect** is the failure to provide basic needs, may they be physical, psychological, spiritual or educational to a person under the responsibility of the carer.
- We speak about **exploitation** when a person in authority uses his/her position, power or the fact of being trusted, to use another person for personal purpose. This includes sexual exploitation, financial exploitation and child labour.

**Sexual exploitation** is any actual abuse or attempt to use a position of vulnerability, strength or trust for sexual purposes, including but not limited to benefiting from monetary, social or political profits from the sexual exploitation of another person.

**Financial exploitation** happens when someone is deceived or coerced into handing over money or assets. Often, a relationship of trust is built to gain access to the person's property.

**Child labour** is any economic activity performed by a person under 15 years of age. The minimum age for employment (to be hired and paid for the work) is usually 18 years. Between 15 and 18 years a person is allowed to work under specific circumstances which do not affect his/her education, dignity or physical and mental development. It is strongly advisable not to allow any person under 18 years of age to be hired in a religious entity.

- **Financial Abuse** is the mistreatment of a person or an institution in terms of money or other property. It can include money being stolen or misused, fraud or putting someone under pressure in regards to their money or property. It can also include the misuse of donations for personal benefits or the benefits of friends and family members, falsifying of accounts etc.
- **Verbal Abuse and harassment** include all forms of intimidation, humiliation, threatening, shaming, disrespectful comments connected to gender, race, religion or personal history of a person, hurting remarks etc. Harassment can also pass through pictures and by the medium of social networks. One form of harassment is **bullying** where unwanted and unwelcomed behaviour over a long time create a hostile environment and a threat for the victim.
- **Sexual harassment** is any unwelcomed offer that includes the request for sexual favours, or any verbal or physical behaviour of a sexual nature, like vulgar behaviour and language, certain jokes, pictures etc.
- **Abuse of religious power (or Spiritual Abuse)** occurs when a spiritual leader or someone in a position of spiritual power or authority (whether organization, institution, church or family) misuses their power or authority and the trust placed in them, with the intention of controlling, coercing, manipulating or dominating. It may include enforced accountability and decision making, requirements for secrecy and isolation from others, the suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position and requires blind obedience, and superiority and elitism.

### **Awareness of others and of our relational life:**

One of the best preventive actions to fight against abuse is **team work**. We can help each other when under stress and pressure. We avoid being alone with children and vulnerable adults. This prevents abuse, and also eventual wrong accusations. Rooms where one to one meetings take place should have glass doors (or publicly accessible windows), or doors should be kept open. This includes: the **obligation to report** abuse we witness to the competent person in charge of Safeguarding.

## Formation

In order to raise awareness, we need **formation**. In each Province of our Congregation a **Sister in charge of Safeguarding** was named in order to promote this formation. She, or another trained person who is named by the Provincial Superior in collaboration with the sisters in charge of Safeguarding, will read and explain this handbook to all our Sisters, Associate Members, Aspirants, Postulants, Novices, Employees, persons in formation and volunteers. She will assure herself that all understand the contents, and be the witness of the signature by which each one of us and all together commit ourselves to the Code of Conduct.

## Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct

This written **Safeguarding Policy** and the obligation of all our members, our employees, our collaborators and our volunteers **to sign the Code of Conduct** are means of raising of awareness, prevention and effort to increase the level of awareness and transparency. No one of us can say any more that he or she didn't know what kind of behaviour is appropriate and what is not appropriate in a culture of care!

By signing the Code of Conduct we commit ourselves to actively promote the Culture of Care in our Congregation, in our activities and institutions. We commit ourselves not to abuse any person, to do all we can to alert, denounce and to stop all forms of abuse if it occurs and to support the victims of Abuse. Among other commitments this includes the following points:

- I will take care of myself and seek help and healing where I am wounded.
- I will treat everyone with respect and value his/her rights.
- I will respect private space and boundaries.
- I will not use offensive or suggestive language.
- I will report any concern or suspicion of misconduct.
- I will encourage others to point out situations and behaviours they don't like.
- I will not inflict corporal punishment.
- I will not establish a preferential relationship with a person under my care.
- I will plan and organize activities with a minimum risk, especially I will avoid to be alone with children and vulnerable persons in a closed space.
- I will not ask a person under my responsibility to keep secret my words or actions.
- I will not photograph, film or publish pictures without the written consent of the person or their legal guardian.



- I will keep financial accounts with transparency and accountability.
- I will not give or receive expensive personal gifts, or accept any benefits for myself or members of my family in the framework of my activities with the Sisters of St. Joseph.

### **Third Part**

#### **Guidelines and Procedures:**

#### **Actions to be taken in case of Abuse or suspicion of Abuse**

The victims of abuse themselves taught the Church to act with determination against all forms of Abuse.

*“I’ve learned about how abuse devastated your confidence in yourself and others, your relationships, your family, and in some cases your spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well-being. Abuse broke your heart and spirit, and sometimes you couldn’t tell anyone for years. And then – when all you wanted was to be believed and supported by the Church, and your abuser to be stopped from harming others – there were too many failures to listen, to understand, and to do what was right and just.”*

(Archbishop Eamon Martin, Derry Diocese Ireland, after meeting with victims of sexual abuse, cf. B. Hughes in The Irish News 20.02.2019)

This **Third Part** of the Handbook describes Guidelines and Procedures in case of Abuse of children or vulnerable persons committed by our sisters or in our works and institutions, or in case of suspicion of such Abuse. Here you will find the concrete steps to follow if you receive a complaint, or if you need to file a complaint. We will also explain the follow up of the complaints.

A **complaint** is the expression of actions or omissions which violate the Code of Conduct, may it be abuse (physical or sexual abuse, harassment, exploitation, intimidation, humiliation etc.), financial conduct (corruption, fraud, exploitation) or the failure to ensure the protection of children and vulnerable persons. **Anyone can file a complaint**, it may be a Sister, a beneficiary, a partner, employees, donor or someone from the general public. It is **obligatory** for anyone who knows or who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child or a vulnerable person has suffered **abuse in any form to file a complaint without delay**.

In our Congregation there are two ways to file a complaint: you can turn either to one of the **Sisters in Charge of Safeguarding** (list and contact details in the Annex) or directly to the **SJA Safeguarding Committee** under the

responsibility of the General Superior of the Congregation (list of the members of the Commission and contact details in the Annex).

It is important to note that filing a complaint to a person in the Congregation **does not replace other obligations of reporting to the Diocese, the Police or to other Government Authorities**, according to the laws and procedures in the country where we live and work. Also the investigation done by the Congregation does not replace other investigations and is not replaced by other investigations. These are **parallel procedures**.

A complaint can be filed by the victim or by another person. It can be filed anonymously or not. The **first priority** of the person receiving the complaint is to **assure the safety of the victim** and to give **support to the victim**. The one receiving the complaint will listen carefully and **refer** the victim if needed to receive professional medical, psychological, spiritual or legal help.

After assuring safety and support of the victim, the **complaint will be written down**, with the help of a form with questions. With the permission of the person filing the complaint, it will be **passed on to the SJA Safeguarding Committee**.

The Committee will respond to the one who filed the complaint within 5 days. After a first **determination of the credibility of the report**, the Committee will appoint an **Investigator** with qualifications according to the kind of abuse.

The investigator will inform the Committee about his/her **findings and recommendations** and it is then the task of the SJA Safeguarding Committee to determine the **next steps** to be taken. This may include disciplinary measures against the perpetrator. In any case, the one who filed the complaint will be informed when the investigation is finished. If the victim had filed the complaint, he/she will also receive information about the result.

It is important that during the whole process **the person is always in the centre of the care**. The alleged victim, the alleged abuser and all other persons involved have the right to receive psychological and spiritual support if they wish. Two other principles guide the response: **Confidentiality** (only the person **who really needs to know** will know about it) and **Proportionality** to the gravity of the alleged abuse. Confidentiality is kept throughout all the procedures, to protect the victim but also to protect a person who may be falsely accused.

The SJA Safeguarding Committee and the Sisters in Charge of Safeguarding in the different Provinces of the Congregation are trained to receive persons who are affected by abuse or who witness abuse. Don't hesitate to contact them!

## “Culture of Care” ... for today and tomorrow

As Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition we are committed to work against all forms of abuse by raising awareness, by prevention, and by taking action in each case of suspected abuse. To see and to acknowledge reality is the only way leading to change, leading to a better world.

As the Leader of the Congregation, I entrust this new addition of the Handbook to the whole family of SJA, to each one of you. May it be an inspiration and a support to help us to put into practise more effectively our desire of a safe and loving environment for us and for all those in our care.

Rome, 7<sup>th</sup> October 2024



Sr. Monika Duellmann (General Superior)  
and the whole General Team

P.S.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> Mai 2023, the day we were finishing to write the first edition of this handbook, **Pope Francis** pronounced on St. Peter's Square after the Midday Prayer the following words:

*“I greet the Meter Association and its founder Don Fortunato Di Noto, who continue their **commitment to preventing and combating violence against minors**; today they celebrate the 27th Day of Child Victims; for 30 years they have been defending childhood from abuse and violence. **I am close to you**, brothers and sisters, and I accompany you with my prayers and affection. **Never tire of being on the side of the victim**, there is the Christ Child waiting for you, thank you!”*

## **Acknowledgement**

In the name of the General Team and the whole Congregation I would like to express our profound gratitude to Mrs. Natalie Baddour, the Safeguarding Officer of the Diocese of Jerusalem, for her help and support on our journey towards this Safeguarding handbook. She animated the session on Safeguarding at the Council of Congregation in Manila in February 2023, trained the General Team, the Leaders of Provinces and Delegations and our six first Safeguarding Sisters.

## Annex 1: Code of Conduct of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition

I, the undersigning \_\_\_\_\_,  
born on \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_,  
Sister of St. Joseph of the Apparition O, Associated Member O, Aspirant,  
Postulant, Novice O, Employee, in Formation, Volunteer O  
(please put a X in the corresponding O)

Declare the following:

- I read and understood the Safeguarding Handbook “Together for a Culture of Care” in its Edition of \_\_\_\_\_. I had the possibility to ask questions and receive further explanation by (name)\_\_\_\_\_. I commit myself freely to act accordingly and not abuse of any person in my care in any form.
- Some of these commitments I take are repeated here:
  - I will take care of myself and seek help and healing where I am wounded.
  - I will treat everyone with respect and value his/her rights.
  - I will respect private space and boundaries.
  - I will not use offensive or suggestive language.
  - I will report any concern or suspicion of misconduct.
  - I will encourage others to point out situations and behaviours they don't like.
  - I will not inflict corporal punishment.
  - I will not establish a preferential relationship with a person under my care.
  - I will plan and organize activities with a minimum risk, especially I will avoid to be alone with children and vulnerable persons in a closed space.
  - I will not ask a person under my responsibility to keep secret my words or actions.
  - I will not photograph, film or publish pictures without the written consent of the person or their legal guardian.
  - I will keep financial accounts with transparency and accountability.
  - I will not give or receive expensive personal gifts, or accept any benefits for myself or members of my family in the framework of my activities with the Sisters of St. Joseph.
  - I also commit myself to keep the rules and regulations concerning Safeguarding of the Institution, Diocese and country where I work.
  - I know that behaving against the Code of Conduct by words, actions or omissions can lead to disciplinary measures which can go until my dismissal.
  - I agree that this signed declaration is kept in Congregation-Archives.

Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of the Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Annex 2:

### Consent form for the use of your image (photo or video) or text

This form asks you to consent to the use of your image (photo or video) or the text you wrote (with the title: \_\_\_\_\_) by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition (SJA).

Your image or text **may be used** in our printed publications for promotional purposes, in press releases, on videos, on social media channels, in presentation materials and on our website. It may also appear in the local/national media.

The image(s) or text(s) will remain the **property of SJA** and will only be used for increasing awareness about the impact of our work. Your personal contact details will remain strictly confidential.

**Place of processing:** The data are currently processed and archived at the headquarters of the 'PROCURA GENERALIZIA' OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF THE APPARITION, in Via Paolo III, 16 - 00165 ROME. They are also processed, on behalf of the Data Controller, by professionals and/or companies in charge of carrying out technical, development, management, administrative and accounting activities.

**Storage times:** For the purpose of dissemination, the retention period established does not exceed the time required to fulfil the above mentioned dissemination purposes and in any case until the person concerned decides to submit a request to object to the processing. Some selected images may be kept indefinitely for the purpose of historical archiving by the Data Controller.

- I consent for my image or text to be used for the following purposes: In the SJA publications, on their social media channels and on their website.
- By signing this release form, I hereby grant the Congregation SJA the absolute right to reproduce, display and disseminate worldwide and in perpetuity, in any traditional or electronic media format, my likeness as shown in the photographs/films taken at this time for the purposes given above.
- If I decide at any point in the interim that I no longer want it to be used, I will contact [congsjasafeguarding@gmail.com](mailto:congsjasafeguarding@gmail.com).

Full Name: .....

Address: .....

Email address: .....

Phone number: .....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

**If subject is under 18 years of age:** I confirm that I am the legal guardian of the child named above and therefore may grant permission on behalf of the child:

Name of Guardian: .....

Relationship to Child: .....

Guardian signature: ..... Date: .....

### Annex 3: Contact Information

“SJA Safeguarding Committee” of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition

Members (as by 2023):

Sr. Monika Duellmann, Superior General

Sr. Marilena Argentieri, General Bursar

Sr. Milagros Cornejo, General Councillor

Sr. Thaddeus M. Chinnapan, Provincial Superior of India

Email: [congsjasafeguarding@gmail.com](mailto:congsjasafeguarding@gmail.com)

<b>Sisters in charge of Safeguarding in the different Provinces (as by 2024):</b>		
Sr. Rachel Rahault	Europe (Language: French)	<a href="mailto:prendsoinsjaproeu@gmail.com">prendsoinsjaproeu@gmail.com</a>
Sr. Joany Rose Augusta	India (English, Tamil, Hindi)	<a href="mailto:safeguardingindsja@gmail.com">safeguardingindsja@gmail.com</a>
Sr. Sarah Ghneim	Middle East (Arabic, English, French, Italian)	<a href="mailto:safeguard.prov.ipje@outlook.com">safeguard.prov.ipje@outlook.com</a>
Sr. Carmen Rosa Pérez	Latin America (Spanish)	<a href="mailto:proteccionamericalatina@gmail.com">proteccionamericalatina@gmail.com</a>
Sr. Caroline Su Su	Myanmar/Philippines /Singapore (Burmese, English)	<a href="mailto:safeguardingmyanmar@gmail.com">safeguardingmyanmar@gmail.com</a>
Sr. Nittaya Haewtana	Thailand/ Australia (Thai, English)	<a href="mailto:thailandaustraliasafeguarding@gmail.com">thailandaustraliasafeguarding@gmail.com</a>

In some countries, a sister or a lay person living in this country may have to be named by the Congregation as responsible for Safeguarding, as requested by the law in this country. This person will collaborate closely with the Safeguarding Sister of the Province and with the “SJA Safeguarding Committee”.



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