



## UNIVERSAL GUIDELINES FRAMEWORK

### INTRODUCTION TO THE UNIVERSAL GUIDELINES FRAMEWORK

The Universal Guidelines Framework (UGF) is being developed in three phases: **Phase 1**, the establishment of Safeguarding **Principles**. **Phase 2**, the establishment of **Criteria** to translate the *Principles* into policy and procedure. **Phase 3**, the establishment of **Indicators** to measure and review the effective implementation of policy.

Below are ten **Principles** which are now being offered in a draft form for use by Episcopal Conferences and Conferences of Religious to guide the development of their own safeguarding guidelines and criteria. Critical to a Church response is how we care for victims/ survivors; their families and all within the Church who have been hurt as a consequence of abuse.

These were issued in May 2023, they include feedback from a worldwide consultation from May-September 2023 and presented at the September Plenary. The *criteria* demonstrate how each *Principle* can be met through concrete action, they reflect detailed applicability to the *Principle*, and lay a firm foundation for future auditing.

We are driven by the teachings contained within the gospels and scriptures messages about the centrality of children in the life of the Church; our need to care for the wounded and love of Jesus who showed by his words and actions how to care safely for everyone, particularly the lost and vulnerable.

#### 1. **Commitment from Church Leadership**

Church leadership must ensure that Guidelines are structured around the fundamental principles of the Gospel and Catholic teaching and should state that the Principles are binding. Guidelines should include a strong statement of the bishop's moral, governance, and pastoral commitment to the outreach of those who have been harmed by those in service to the Church by abuse, and for creating and maintaining a safe environment for those who are at risk for abuse. The Church leadership ensures that their moral responsibility rests in the theological teaching of the Catholic Church based upon Jesus Christ. Church

leadership includes in the Guidelines the need to cooperate with civil authorities and international associations specializing in child sexual abuse. Church leadership will ensure their own safeguarding training and formation as well as the safeguarding training and formation of all Church personnel in charge of children.

Church Leadership is to be open and transparent in communicating with the public about sexual abuse of children by clergy within the confines of respect for the privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved. This is especially so regarding informing parish and other church communities directly affected by sexual abuse of a child.

## **2. Guidelines Structural Framework**

Guidelines should be structured around the fundamental principles of Gospel and Catholic teaching. It should be stated that Principles are binding. It should be remarked the need to cooperate with civil authorities and international associations specialized in child sexual abuse. Implementation of the Guidelines is the key to their effectiveness and should be actively addressed at each step of the implementation process.

## **3. Promoting Safe Environments and Empowering Children and Young People**

Church leaders must promote “safe environment” programs, in line with civil law and with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with children, parents/carers, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations. They should include education and training for children, parents/carers, ministers, employees, volunteers, and others about ways to sustain and foster a safe environment for all. Church Authorities must make clear to clergy and religious and all members of the community the standards of conduct for ministry with children; including how to communicate with children using digital media.

The church leader must ensure robust recruitment of all who engage in children’s ministry, including priests and religious, lay volunteer and staff. This should include background checks against police records (according to local practices), seeking references which specifically ask questions about the suitability of the adult to engage with children. For those who enter clerical and

religious life the Church leader must employ adequate screening and evaluative techniques in deciding the fitness of candidates for ordination/taking vows.

4. **Responding: Care and Outreach to Those Who Have Been Abused and Their Families**

The first obligation of the Church concerning victims is for healing. Church leaders must proactively reach out to victims and their families and demonstrate a sincere commitment to listen, and to respond with compassion and address their spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being which is to include counselling, and other social services agreed upon by the victim and the diocese, which may include but not limited to support groups. Church Leadership must put in place skilled and trained people to support and care for victims and their families, who understand the importance of listening to victims and for accompaniment during their journey toward healing. Accompaniment to victims should include reparation and redress and include concrete orientations regarding their accompaniment. Church communications must provide access to information about being safe from abuse and where victims can seek help if they feel unsafe. Victims should be included on protection teams.

5. **Working with Communities**

Critical to ensuring that the whole Church is involved in safeguarding is clarity around the participatory and inclusive engagement of communities – Children, Parents/carers, lay faithful, clerics, religious, volunteers and paid staff.

6. **Culturally Responsive**

The safeguarding policy is to be contextualized to the culture of the local Church, developing a living relationship with the social reality to effectively inform the life and behavior of the local Church. A key aspect of the Guidelines is that they must be implemented by the local Church. Codes of Conduct, protocols and concrete criteria must be locally rooted.

Whilst policies and procedures must be rooted in the local culture, in doing so, there is universal acceptance of abuse, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. No one has permission to dilute or lessen the reality of abuse, the requirement to respond with compassion and a zero tolerant approach to anyone who harms a child.

7. **Responding – Managing Allegations and Responding**

All Allegations, suspicions and concerns of abuse must be taken seriously and acted upon, in accordance with civil and canon law.

The Church leader must appoint trained and supported personnel who have the skills to listen to allegations of abuse, report these to the appropriate authority and thereafter assess and manage risk to children.

#### 8. **Education and Formation**

Church leaders, clerics, religious and lay personnel need to have knowledge and skills to enable them to safeguard children, respond to allegations and provide a compassionate response to those who have been harmed by abuse, in line with Catholic Social teaching. Clerics and religious undergo a process of formation within which they must consider their role in creating a safe world for children. Safeguarding education and awareness should form part of the criteria within the *Ratio Nationalis*, in line with requirements from the *Ratio Fundamentalis*. In addition, each church body should develop a program of training for all church personnel which covers all aspects of the principles outlined within this document.

#### 9. **Accountability and Governance**

All have a responsibility to safeguard children and to respond to allegations with compassion. However, those in a position of authority (Church leaders, clerics and religious) have additional responsibilities which demonstrate their commitment to promoting children's rights to be safe and free from harm; enabling a culture which is open, transparent, commitment to telling the truth and accepting responsibility for their own actions and those who they guide in pastoral ministry.

#### 10. **Continuous Quality Improvement in Safeguarding Ministry**

The Church leader ensures annual internal self-audits of safeguarding practice and establishes external independent audit processes.