

- MEDIA RELEASE -

Safeguarding audit highlights strong foundations and areas for growth in Missionaries of the Sacred Heart ministries

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The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) are demonstrating strong safeguarding practices during a period of transition, according to a new audit released today by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL).

The audit assessed MSC's implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS), the national framework for the safety of children and adults at risk across Catholic entities in Australia.

It found that 92 per cent of NCSS indicators were either fully or substantially addressed, with the remaining 8 per cent in early implementation stages.

'While MSC's Safeguarding Policy was under review at the time of audit, we saw evidence of solid safeguarding practices in place across its large array of ministries, which include parishes, retreat centres, and schools,' said ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens

'Our interviews with more than 40 clergy, staff, volunteers and students provided valuable insight into how safeguarding is lived across MSC's ministries.'

'ACSL has made five recommendations, all of which MSC leadership has committed to implementing within 12 months.'

'One recommendation is to introduce an overarching safeguarding implementation plan to unite the existing risk assessments in place.'

'We also noted that while there are effective strategies in place to engage children in safeguarding, more mechanisms could be put in place to engage with adults at risk in parish communities.'

'We have noted some actions for MSC around human resource management, to ensure that safeguarding is explicitly embedded from recruitment and induction right through to ongoing annual reviews and supervision plans,' Dr Stephens said.

Fr Stephen Hackett MSC, Provincial of MSC Australia said that throughout the Church there is now greater understanding of the lifelong impact of abuse on victims and survivors, their families and whole communities.

'I have come to see that improving and enhancing our safeguarding commitment requires real and lasting conversion, by which I mean a fundamental shift in the way we think and feel about safeguarding, not a small change in perspective, but a change in our consciousness and our awareness, so that we see and understand safeguarding in the ways children and adults at risk see and understand safeguarding. Our safeguarding policies and procedures need to be developed mindful of the perspectives of those who have been abused in the past and those who are at risk today.'

'In the end, safeguarding matters because the Gospel matters. Safeguarding, rightly understood, is not about adherence to standards – important as these are – but is about caring for all people, and especially anyone who is vulnerable, because the Gospel impels us to do nothing less if we are to be faithful to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ,' Fr Hackett said.

The full safeguarding audit report for the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart is available on ACSL's [website](#).

ACSL works with Catholic entities to promote and oversee a nationally consistent, comprehensive and sustainable framework for the protection of children and adults at risk within the Church in Australia.