Nigerian Safeguarding **Handbook**

for spiritual directors and SDFP students



CACS

Creating a safe and sacred community

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Welcome **Message**



Here at the Centre for Applied Carmelite Spirituality (CACS), safeguarding is a core part of our mission to always be a safe and sacred community.

Carmelite spirituality is founded on a deep thirst for spiritual intimacy and friendship, recognising the divine indwelling in every single person. Because of this, we see every encounter as a kind of theophany – a manifestation of God – that must be respected and safeguarded. The dignity and sacredness of each person is paramount.

For us, safeguarding work takes many dimensions. It is not just a policy on a shelf or a box-ticking exercise. Instead, we are committed to promoting a genuine spirituality of care. As an international community of friars, laity, experts and volunteers, this work is challenging and demanding. But it is a journey we are committed to. A journey towards creating a sacred and safe place for spiritual growth, formation and wholeness for everyone.

Fr Alexander Ezechukwu, OCD
Director of CACS; Chair of Safeguarding Committee

The Carmelite Anglo-Irish Province Safeguarding **Policy Statement**

- It is the policy of the Discalced Carmelite Order Anglo-Irish Province to do everything in our power to safeguard the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk to whom we minister.

- We cherish and affirm each person as a gift from God with an inherent right to dignity of life and bodily integrity, which shall be respected, nurtured and protected by all. We strive to protect them from physical, sexual and emotional harm.

- Everyone in the Church has an obligation to ensure that the fundamental rights of all are respected.

- These guiding principles inform our Safeguarding Policy. This has been drawn up to ensure that we take every possible measure to prevent abuse. It aims to ensure that no personnel or volunteers engage in behaviour that could allow abuse or actions that could be misinterpreted by children, their families or other adults as constituting or leading to abuse to occur.

- Have a read of the safeguarding policies on the CACS website: *https://www.carmelite.uk.net/safeguarding*

Meet the **Safeguarding Team**



Fr Kelvin Ekhoegbe, OCD
Prior



Fr Alex Ezechukwu, OCD
Director of CACS
Chair of Safeguarding Committee



Fr Luke Onwe, OCD
Director of SEM
Safeguarding lead in SEM



Kate Keefe
Safeguarding lead 1
Lead of safeguarding development



Fr Liam Finnerty, OCD
Safeguarding lead 2
In-house pastoral & training lead



Fr Clement Obiorah, OCD
Safeguarding lead 3
DBS lead
Director of safeguarding communications



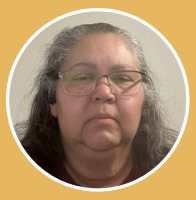
Judy Bartlett
Senior administrator at CACS
Safeguarding data lead
Safer recruitment lead



Christie Moreton
SDFP administrator
DBS deputy



Thelma Rogers
Safeguarding disability and diversity lead



Alma Castro
SDFP Alumni Committee link



Dr Kathleen Kelly
Leads committee's annual scrutiny of case work



Simon Bass
Consultant



Dr Barry O'Sullivan
Consultant

What Spiritual Directors Must Have in Place **Before Ministering** or **Studying** in the **SDFP**

- A CACS Level II Safeguarding Certificate as evidence that they have completed a comprehensive safeguarding course relevant to the ministry of the priory and their work at CACS.
- A police check, or two letters of endorsement as to their character.
- After six months, we hope they will be able to complete a police check available in Nigeria.
- For priests wishing to celebrate mass while a student on a CACS course, a celebrant card must be shown.

Who Are CACS Accountable to in Terms of Safeguarding?

As we are based in England, CACS is accountable to the following Church authorities:

Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA)
https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk

The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS)
https://religioussafeguarding.org

Additionally, CACS is accountable to secular authorities in the UK, which are not under the direction of the Catholic Church.

CACS is based in Oxford and must follow legislation and regulations on safeguarding provided by the UK government.

If any safeguarding case were to arise at CACS, the safeguarding lead (or deputy) would work alongside the local secular authorities, such as the Oxfordshire Local Authority, Thames Valley Police and other named agencies in the CACS safeguarding policy.

If a safeguarding issue were to arise for friars or laity working for CACS outside the jurisdiction of the UK government and the case could not be resolved by the CACS safeguarding lead (or deputy), they would contact the international desk at the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS). The RLSS would, in most instances, take over the case and work with the appropriate authorities in the particular region. The safeguarding lead would be kept informed as appropriate.

Safeguarding **Training** and **Formation**

Safeguarding formation is proportionate to the ministry undertaken. CACS defines a minimum training level for all spiritual directors and SDFP students. We ask that all students and ministers in CACS become familiar with the following:

- Understanding abuse: physical, sexual, emotional/psychological, spiritual, financial and neglect.
- Recognising grooming, coercion, manipulation, exploitation and boundary violations.
- Understanding power, authority and the risks within spiritual direction.
- Responding safely to disclosures: listen, reassure, do not interrogate, do not promise secrecy, record accurately and refer.
- Safeguarding children and adults at risk within Nigerian cultural, ecclesial and legal contexts.
- Digital and online safeguarding.
- Neurodiversity, disability, trauma and vulnerability.
- Reporting and referral procedures, including the distinction between Church processes and civil authorities.
- Self-care, supervision and appropriate consultation for spiritual directors.

Nigerian Authorities and **Legal Framework**

- **Child Rights Act 2003** and **state child rights laws**. The Child Rights Act is a central framework for children's rights, protection and wellbeing.

- State-level implementation and enforcement arrangements can be checked for the location in which ministry takes place by the RLSS, if a case is referred to them that takes place during a CACS ministry or programme.

- **Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 (VAPP)**. The Act addresses violence in private and public life and provides protections and remedies for victims. Its application must be considered alongside relevant State laws.

- **Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition), Enforcement and Administration Act 2015**. This is relevant where safeguarding concerns involve trafficking or exploitation; NAPTIP is the national agency concerned with trafficking in persons.

- **Criminal Code, Penal Code and state criminal laws.** Depending on the location, different criminal-law frameworks may apply.

- **Police and emergency response.** The Nigerian Police Force provides Police Character Clearance and maintains police services and emergency-response structures. The NPF website identifies 112 as an emergency number in its public service information.

- **Catholic safeguarding norms.** Nigerian Catholic safeguarding should also be read with the **CBCN's 2017 Guidelines** for processing cases of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, the CBCN's ethical standards for clergy and seminarians, and universal Church norms including Vos Estis Lux Mundi and the CDF/Vatican.

Allegations of Abuse in the **Sacrament of Penance** and Spiritual Direction

The Catholic Seal of Confession is sacred. Anything told to a priest in the confessional cannot be shared outside of this, including abuse.

This handbook distinguishes between the sacramental Seal of Confession and spiritual direction: the Seal of Confession is sacred, while spiritual direction outside the sacrament is not covered by the sacramental seal. In spiritual direction, where the Seal of Confession is not applicable, abuse must be reported to the appropriate authorities.

In Catholic practice, the sacramental seal is absolute. A priest who receives information solely within sacramental confession must not disclose the confession.

This, however, does not mean that safeguarding is ignored. Where appropriate, the priest should encourage the penitent to disclose the matter outside confession and to take steps to protect anyone at risk, while respecting the sacramental seal.

Where a disclosure is made in spiritual direction, pastoral counselling, a retreat conversation or another non-sacramental setting, the spiritual director should follow the normal safeguarding process. The director should not assume that the language of 'confession' makes a non-sacramental conversation subject to the sacrament seal.

Safeguarding Commitment to Survivors

If you have been wounded by the Church – by a priest, a religious, a minister or by the institution itself – we receive you with reverence. We believe you. We are sorry. What was done to you was wrong, and it will be met here with truth.

A Spirituality of Care

Carmelite spirituality holds that every person is a dwelling place of God – a dignity no harm can reach. Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross and Blessed Francisco Palau each knew suffering at the Church's hands, and each found God present within it, not beyond it. They give us permission to name what has gone wrong without abandoning what remains true.

We do not ask survivors to resolve these tensions quickly, or at all. We do not ask for forgiveness on a timeline. We do not ask anyone to return to the institution that harmed them. We ask only that they know they are welcome here, exactly as they are.

Commitments

CACS and all who minister in its name undertake:

- To believe you – without requiring proof before you are heard, and without minimising what you have experienced.
- To receive you with reverence – recognising in you a soul already held in the friendship of God, on a journey that belongs ultimately to the Holy Spirit.
- To accompany without fixing – sitting with the reality of your experience rather than rushing towards resolution, explanation or the rehabilitation of the Church's reputation.

- To guard your privacy – handling all disclosures with the utmost confidentiality, within the limits required by law and our safeguarding obligations, which we will always explain to you.

- To refer to statutory authorities where required – and to tell you in advance when that step must be taken, so that nothing happens without your knowledge.

- To offer independent support – including referral to external agencies and consideration of support on a case-by-case basis.

- To remain accountable to our safeguarding committee and to the Catholic Safeguarding Commitment.

Saint John of the Cross wrote: *Where there is no love, put love – and you will find love*. This is the spirit in which these commitments are made: not as an obligation undertaken reluctantly, but as an act of care for those who have already borne too much.

Those who come to CACS have the right to expect this to be honoured. Where concerns arise, please bring them to our safeguarding team.

The **Discalced Carmelite Code of Conduct** for Our Life and Ministry at CACS

Carmelite spirituality begins with a vision: every human person is a dwelling place of God. Saint Teresa of Ávila saw in the soul a castle of great beauty, radiant at its centre with the presence of the Trinity. Saint John of the Cross recognised in every person a capacity for union with God that no earthly love can exhaust. When we receive a retreatant, accompany a pilgrim, support the learning of a student or serve any who come to us, we encounter a soul already held in the friendship of God – and we are bound to meet them as such.

Our Commitments

The Discalced Carmelite Friars and all who minister in the name of CACS undertake to:

- Receive each person with reverence – recognising in them a soul beloved of God on a journey that ultimately belongs to the Holy Spirit.
- Honour the integrity of the person – offering ministry in a manner that is transparent and accountable, avoiding situations of undue privacy.
- Honour all the boundaries proper to the pastoral relationship, which is a sacred trust and never a space for control or over-familiarity.
- Guard the vulnerable with particular care – never ministering alone to a minor or vulnerable adult without another responsible adult present or nearby.
- Exercise prudence in all communication – whether in person, online or in writing, reflecting always the dignity of those we serve.

- Refuse what degrades – never acting in any way that shames, humiliates, coerces or manipulates. What cannot be done in the light cannot be done in the name of Carmel.

- Remain accountable – to our community, to those who lead CACS, and to the Church's safeguarding structures.

Saint Teresa, writing to her sisters in The Way of Perfection, calls true friendship the love that seeks nothing for itself but desires above all to lead the beloved closer to God (4:6). This is the spirit in which we make these commitments as an act of love – for those we serve, for the Order we represent, and for the God who first loved us.

Those who come to CACS have the right to expect this to be honoured. Where concerns arise, we ask that they be brought to the safeguarding leads.

Police Character Clearance and Safer Recruitment

The Nigerian Police Force provides a Police Character Clearance service, which checks whether an applicant has a criminal record. The Police Character Clearance does not inform whether a person is barred from working with children. Instead, it forms part of a wider safer recruitment process.

This process includes:

- Identity verification using reliable original documents.
- Police Character Clearance (where required by CACS).
- References and appropriate ministerial/academic references.
- Self-declaration concerning previous safeguarding concerns, disciplinary action or relevant criminal matters, subject to applicable law.
- Verification of previous ministry, formation and employment where relevant.
- Safeguarding interview or assessment for roles involving sustained pastoral access to children or adults at risk.
- If a past criminal record arises a risk assessment and meeting with one of the safeguarding team takes place.

Background checks reduce risk; they do not prove that a person is safe. Good safeguarding also requires formation, supervision, clear boundaries, appropriate recruitment, ongoing accountability and a culture in which concerns can be raised.

How to **Report an Allegation of Abuse** in CACS in Nigeria

If an allegation is made in any situation, it should first be discussed with the CACS safeguarding lead. This can be an allegation that arises:

- While you are working in any context for CACS.
- While in a CACS spiritual direction training group (either online or in person).
- While you are working as a volunteer spiritual director for CACS online or in person anywhere in the world.
- While you are working as a retreat guide for CACS.
- While attending an intensive in Nigeria.
- While you are leading a prayer group for CACS.
- While you are leading/facilitating the spiritual direction course or any other CACS course in Nigeria.

A concern must be referred promptly. The person receiving the concern should not attempt to establish whether the allegation is true, conduct an investigation, confront the alleged perpetrator.

Ensure immediate safety. If a person is in immediate danger, contact the Nigerian Police Force/emergency services.

Where the matter may constitute a crime or where civil reporting is required, the CACS safeguarding lead will take this forward. Please do not do this yourself if ministering or studying at a CACS event.

Make a factual written record as soon as possible, distinguishing what was seen or heard from interpretation using the form on the CACS website https://www.carmelite.uk.net/safeguarding

Record the person's own words as accurately as possible and include date, time, location and the people involved or let them record themselves on the form.

Do not promise absolute confidentiality. Explain that information will be shared only with those who need it to protect people and respond appropriately.

Do not contact or confront the alleged perpetrator.

Immediate **Response** to a **Disclosure** or **Allegation**

Listen

Remain calm. Allow the person to speak without interruption.

Take It Seriously

Do not dismiss, minimise, blame or express disbelief.

Reassure

Tell the person that they have done the right thing by speaking out. Do not promise secrecy.

Protect

Consider immediate safety, medical needs and the safety of other people.

Record

Write down the facts as soon as possible, using the person's own words where practicable.

Report

Pass the concern to the designated safeguarding lead and the appropriate civil/ ecclesial authority.

Do Not Investigate

Do not interview witnesses, confront an alleged perpetrator or try to prove the legitimacy of the allegation.

Where a child or adult at risk is in immediate danger, safeguarding action takes priority over convenience, reputation or institutional embarrassment. The aim is protection, justice, accountability and appropriate care.

The **Importance of the Covenant** When Ministering in Spiritual Direction

A covenant in spiritual direction is important because it establishes clear expectations and mutual commitments between the spiritual director and the directee.

It functions to:

- define the purpose of the relationship
- outline boundaries
- confirm confidentiality agreements
- agree on meeting frequency
- assign responsibilities.

This clarity fosters a safe, trusting environment where the directee or supervisee can be open and vulnerable, knowing there is a respectful, structured framework supporting their spiritual growth.

Additionally, it helps maintain the integrity and focus of the spiritual direction or supervision process. This can be put in writing, or you can at the beginning of your spiritual direction ministry speak this through with your directee and then make a note of this conversation with the date and what you shared.

Safeguarding for Individuals Who Are **Neurodivergent or Have a Disability**

Attention to neurodiversity and disability in spiritual direction and pastoral supervision is essential for fostering inclusive, compassionate and meaningful spiritual accompaniment. It highlights those amongst us who are dyslexic or have been diagnosed with ADHD or autism or another vulnerability. As we know from our safeguarding training, vulnerabilities signal that greater care might be needed.

For attention to be effective, we first need to become aware, and awareness for the neurodiverse and disabled people enables adaption, inclusion and a welcoming into our community of Carmelite Christian friendship in a safe and sacred way.

At CACS, we foster an atmosphere in which the spiritually accompanied are enabled to state plainly their needs and identity, thereby enriching the practice of spiritual care, and imaging a community rooted in the diversity of human experience.

By developing our community in this way, we challenge stereotypes and assumptions about disability and spirituality, allowing spiritual leaders to examine their biases, whilst attending to the rich spiritual lives of their directee or supervisee. These are often individuals with profound experiences of faith and connection to the divine, and their diversity essential in building the Kingdom in a safe and sacred way. This approach opens the heart of CACS to welcome all our brothers and sisters with their unique identities into community and sometimes into leadership roles.

Spiritual direction and pastoral supervision encompass the whole person: mind, body and spirit. Recognising neurodiversity and disability as integral to a person's identity allows a more comprehensive approach to spiritual care, one that respects and honours everyone's experiences.

Great care should be taken when establishing covenants to open a space for directees or supervisees to share their disability or neurodiversity, if they wish to do so. In response, we should adapt our approach and the environment in which we practice in welcome and friendship.

Children, **Young People** and **Adults** at **Risk** in Nigeria

Spiritual direction is normally a ministry with adults. Where CACS ministry involves children or young people, enhanced safeguarding arrangements should be established before the ministry begins. The same principle applies when accompanying adults whose circumstances may place them at heightened risk of abuse or exploitation.

- Use age-appropriate communication and obtain all required parental/ guardian and ecclesial permissions.
- Meet children and young people only within approved safeguarding arrangements and suitable settings.
- Never use secrecy, special status or spiritual authority to isolate a child or young person.
- Do not create unnecessary one-to-one situations that bypass normal safeguarding arrangements.
- Keep appropriate records of sessions and safeguarding concerns in accordance with policy and data-protection requirements.
- Know the local referral pathway for child protection and adult safeguarding in the State where ministry takes place.
- Consider risks associated with poverty, displacement, trafficking, conflict, disability, dependence, isolation or other forms of vulnerability.

Nigeria's **Child Rights Act 2003** is a central child-protection framework, but State-level implementation and enforcement arrangements must be checked locally

Referral and **Survivor Care** in Nigeria

Safeguarding is not only about reporting. A person affected by abuse may need medical care, psychological support, pastoral accompaniment, legal advice, practical protection and ongoing community support.

Key National and Specialist Routes

Nigeria Police Force
Use emergency services where there is immediate danger; the NPF public information identifies 112 as an emergency number
https://www.police.gov.ng/

NAPTIP
Relevant where trafficking in persons or exploitation is suspected. NAPTIP provides national anti-trafficking structures and referral/protection work
https://naptip.gov.ng/

Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)
Specialist centres may provide medical, counselling and referral support. A current Nigeria directory is available through HerStoryOurStoryNG/Sexual Violence Project Nigeria.
https://herstoryourstory.ng/get-help/

Local diocesan/religious safeguarding office
Every CACS Nigeria programme should record the correct diocesan or institute safeguarding contact before ministry begins. Examples of current specialist services include the Mirabel Centre in Lagos and other SARCs in several Nigerian States.

CBCN
The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) is the official assembly and unifying body of Catholic Bishops in Nigeria. It serves as an organ of unity, communion, and solidarity for over thirty million Catholics across the thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of the nation.
https://www.catholicsecretariatng.org/cbcn

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https://www.catholicsecretariatng.org/cbcn

For up to date information on Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Nigeria
https://www.catholicsecretariatng.org/?s=safeguarding

UK

Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA)
Website: https://www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk
(Sets safeguarding standards; can direct you to diocesan/religious order safeguarding contacts for Catholics in England and Wales)

Religious Life Safeguarding Service
Website: https://religioussafeguarding.org

The Vatican

Pope Francis' statement on abuse: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14VHtwuhPWc

Contact Information

Fr. .....

Nigerian Safeguarding CACS lead

Fr Thaddeus Ekuma, OCD

Safeguarding lead for the Discalced Carmelite Order Anglo Irish-Province

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Kate Keefe, Fr Liam Finnerty OCD and Fr Clement Oboriah OCD

Safeguarding leads for CACS

Email: safe@cacs.org.uk

Phone: 07300319055

The phone line is open 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. UK time (GMT or BST), Monday to Sunday.

Enquiries will be picked up by Kate in the first instance and forwarded when appropriate.