United States Safeguarding **Handbook**

for spiritual directors and SDFP students



CACS

Creating a safe and sacred community

Table of **Contents**

- Welcome Message from the Director of CACS
- The Carmelite Anglo-Irish Province Safeguarding Policy Statement
- Meet the CACS Safeguarding Team
- Safeguarding in the United States
- Local Policies & Civil Law Framework in the United States
- Who Are CACS Accountable to in Terms of Safeguarding?
- What Spiritual Directors Must Have in Place Before Ministering in CACS or SEM
- The Importance of the Covenant When Ministering in Spiritual Direction
- How to Report an Allegation of Abuse in CACS
- How to Report an Allegation of Abuse Outside of CACS
- Allegations of Abuse in the Sacrament of Penance and Spiritual Direction
- Safeguarding for Individuals who are Neurodivergent or Have a Disability
- Important Websites for those in the United States
- US-based Support Groups and Organisations
- UK-based Support Groups and Organisations
- Contact Information

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 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



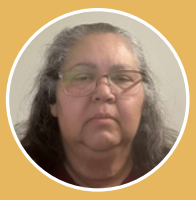
Judy Bartlett
Senior administrator at CACS
Safeguarding data lead
Safer recruitment lead



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

Safeguarding in the United States

The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in the US Church is commonly called *The Dallas Charter*. It is the foundational safeguarding document, adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2002 and revised through 2018.

It commits to providing:

- Safe environments for children and youth
- Healing and reconciliation for survivors
- Prompt, effective response to allegations
- Cooperation with civil authorities
- Accountability mechanisms, including the Secretariat and National Review Board

Key elements:

- Safe environment programs and training
- Background checks and screening
- Codes of conduct
- Reporting requirement
- Review boards

Canon Law and the Reporting of Abuse

Within Canon Law, the Church recognizes the gravity of abuse and mandates appropriate responses. Vos Estis Lux Mundi (2019) established norms for the reporting and investigation of abuses by clerics and religious. It requires every international diocese in the world to establish procedures that ensure reporting of abuse, cooperation with civil authorities and accountability within the Church.

We recommend that all CACS SDFP students and SEM ministers based in the United States learn about the arrangements for safeguarding in their diocese particularly if they wish to work outside of CACS as a student or graduate. Whilst in CACS as a student or minister in SEM, you work within the safeguarding policies of CACS.

Local Policies & Civil Law Framework in the United States

State and Federal Law in the US

In the United States, safeguarding also means complying with state and federal law. Sometimes the term “safer environment” is used in place of safeguarding.

Mandatory Reporting Laws

Most states designate groups of professionals as mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect, which often include clergy and individuals in positions of trust (e.g. counsellors or teachers), though the exact language and exemptions vary by state.

Some states explicitly include clergy as mandatory reporters; others define reporting duties for “any person.”

Clergy-penitent privilege may exempt communication received during confession or spiritual counsel in some states, but this depends on local law. This is different from in the UK and Europe.

Federal Legislation Related to Child Safety

Federal statutes such as the PROTECT Act of 2003 strengthen child abuse prevention and prosecution of crimes against children.

Civil Penalties & Legal Duty

Failure to report suspected abuse under mandatory reporter laws can carry civil and/or criminal penalties, depending on the jurisdiction. Established by the USCCB, it requires:

- Safe environment training
- Background checks
- Mandatory reporting
- Codes of conduct

Diocesan Policies

Every diocese has its own safeguarding office and policies. If you serve as an Independent Spiritual Director outside of CACS you are advised to contact your diocesan safer environment officer first.

Civil Law by State

Each state has mandatory reporting laws, definitions of abuse and neglect and legal consequences for failure to report. We recommend students and alumni of the SDFP take the time to get to know the laws in your state with regard to safeguarding.

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

Any student and lay or religious member studying or ministering in CACS is accountable to these authorities.

Additionally, CACS is accountable to secular authorities in the UK, which are not under the direction of the Catholic Church. If on the intensive in the US, we are accountable to the secular authorities both nationally and in the state the intensive is in.

If any safeguarding case were to arise at CACS in the UK, the safeguarding lead (or deputy) would work alongside the local secular authorities, such as 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, such as in the US, and the case could not be resolved by the CACS safeguarding lead (or deputy), CACS 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 state and in the US diocese.

What Spiritual Directors Must Have in Place **Before Ministering in CACS or SEM**

- Ministers should be in pastoral supervision and have a spiritual director. This could be a minister from the Sacred Encounter Ministries, or from outside.

- Students on the SDFP programme and spritual directors living in the US must have a police check carried out before studying or ministering. Undertaking the police check is the responsibility of the US SDFP student or the SEM spiritual director minister.

- A CACS Level II Safeguarding Certificate as evidence that they have completed a comprehensive safeguarding course relevant to the ministry of at CACS. Students on the SDFP course will be directed to complete this course in the first term of their enrollment.

- We also welcome members undertaking local or additional programmes in their own diocese, local church community on for free on the CSSA website.

- Friars or priests arriving from outside the UK are required to present ‘Celebrandi', which verify their status to act as a priest.

- Insurance. UK ministers in SEM are insured by CACS automatically if they have fulfuled the above criteria. US SEM members will need to find their own limited liability insurance, which will be refunded by CACS. US members ministering during or after graduating from the SDFP should arrange their own limited liability insurance.

Supervision, Accountability and Ongoing Formation

You should have:

- Regular supervision
- Annual safeguarding refreshers
- Ongoing theological and psychological formation
- Peer consultation group (without violating confidentiality)
- Isolation increases risk to and who you minister to.

Digital Communication and Online Direction

Online spiritual direction requires additional safeguards:

- Use secure platforms
- Avoid informal late-night messaging
- No disappearing-message apps
- Clear communication policy
- Professional email address from CACS if ministering for CACS
- No social media friending of directees
- Always use the waiting room in Zoom or Teams
- Only use a specifically dedicated Facebook page to your ministry

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.

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

If an allegation is made in any situation described here, you must immediately refer it to one of the safeguarding leads (Fr Liam, Fr Clement or Kate Keefe):

- 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 in the United States.
- While you are working as a retreat guide for CACS.
- While attending Mass at the priory or at an intensive.
- While you are leading a prayer group for CACS.
- While you are leading/facilitating the spiritual direction course or any other CACS course.

Contact details for the safeguarding leads can be found on the last page of this handbook.

How to Report an **Allegation of Abuse Outside of CACS**

Contact Law Enforcement

If the victim is a minor or there is immediate danger, call 911. Otherwise, contact the local police, county sheriff or your district attorney.

Report within the Catholic Church (Diocesan Process)

Each diocese has a victim assistance coordinator / reporting line. Find your diocese's reporting page via USCCB: https://www.usccb.org/offices/child-and-youth-protection/report-abuse

Report to the Religious Order

If the accused is in a religious order (Jesuits, Franciscans, etc.), reporting may go to the religious order as well as the diocese where it occurred.

If Unsure

If you're not sure where it happened or who oversees it, SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) can help you identify the right entity to contact: https://www.snapnetwork.org

BishopAccountability can help you locate documentation and jurisdiction info: https://www.bishop-accountability.org

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.

In spiritual direction, where the Seal of Confession is not applicable, abuse must be reported to the appropriate authorities. This is the case in the UK, however this has been challenged in states in the US. Your diocese can inform you of the law in your state.

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.

Important Websites for Those in the United States

SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests)

Website: https://www.snapnetwork.org

Survivor-led peer support groups (often local chapters + virtual options).

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)

Website: https://rainn.org/

Phone: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Chat: https://hotline.rainn.org/online

Local provider search: https://www.rainn.org/get-help

Connects individuals with local rape crisis centres. They also run many support groups. Enquire about support groups and advocacy when you contact them.

VictimConnect

Website: https://victimconnect.org/

Phone: 1-855-4-VICTIM (1-855-484-2846)

Chat: https://victimconnect.org/get-help/

Legal resources and referrals to local groups.

Bishop Accountability

Website: https://www.bishop-accountability.org

Can help you locate documentation and jurisdiction info.

US-based **Support Groups** and **Organisations**

National Sexual Assault Hotline (run by RAINN)
Phone: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
Chat: https://hotline.rainn.org/online

National Domestic Violence Hotline
Phone: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
Text: Text START to 88788
Chat: https://www.thehotline.org
Website: https://www.thehotline.org

National Child Abuse Hotline (Childhelp)
Phone: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)
Website: https://www.childhelp.org/hotline/

National Human Trafficking Hotline (Polaris)
Phone: 1-888-373-7888
Text: Text BEFREE to 233733
Chat: https://humantraffickinghotline.org/chat
Website: https://humantraffickinghotline.org

VictimConnect Resource Center
Phone: 1-855-4-VICTIM (1-855-484-2846)
Chat: https://victimconnect.org/get-help/
Website: https://victimconnect.org
(referrals for many victimization types)

StrongHearts Native Helpline (for Native/Indigenous survivors)
Phone: 1-844-7NATIVE (1-844-762-8483)
Chat: https://strongheartshelpline.org
Website: https://strongheartshelpline.org

National Center for Victims of Crime
Website: https://victimsofcrime.org
(Provides info, advocacy and resources; can help connect to local services.)

SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests)
Website / contact: https://www.snapnetwork.org
(Provides peer support, advocacy, and local chapter connections; includes a contact form and chapter listings.)

BishopAccountability.org
Website: https://www.bishop-accountability.org
(Not a hotline, but a major resource for finding documentation and links to survivor support.)

USCCB (US Catholic Bishops' Conference)
Website: https://www.usccb.org/offices/child-and-youth-protection/report-abuse
(Directs you to diocesan victim assistance coordinators and reporting instructions.)

The Catholic Project
Website: https://catholicproject.catholic.edu
(Not a crisis line; offers resources and information around Church-related abuse.)

Loveisrespect
Website: www.loveisrespect.org
(Focuses on providing support to young people in abusive relationships)

Men Can Stop Rape
Website: www.mencanstoprape.org
(Works to engage men and boys in preventing sexual violence)

Heal Our Church
Website: www.healourchurch.com
(Seeks a collaborative, transparent Church where all are welcome)

UK-based **Support Groups** and **Organisations**

These maybe helpful to US directees ministering within SEM to UK directees.

Catholic (UK wide / national)

Safe Spaces England & Wales
Website: https://safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk
Phone: 0300 303 1056
Free, independent support service for anyone abused in a Church-related context (Catholic Church in England & Wales; also covers Church of England.)

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

Survivors Trust
Website: https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org
Helpline: 0808 801 0818
(Umbrella organisation; includes faith-context survivors.
Directory of specialist rape/sexual abuse support services across the UK.)

Catholic Dioceses & Religious Orders (Local)

Diocesan Safeguarding Offices
Go to your diocese website and search “Safeguarding”.
(Every diocese has a safeguarding team to report concerns and access support.)

Religious Order Safeguarding Contacts
(e.g., Benedictines, Jesuits, Carmelites, etc.)
Orders have safeguarding leads; usually listed on the order’s UK website under “Safeguarding”.

Christian (multi-denominational /Church-linked) in England & Wales

Thirtyone:eight
Website: https://thirtyoneeight.org
Helpline: 0303 003 1111
(Christian safeguarding charity. Advice, training, and a safeguarding helpline used by many churches; can signpost survivors too.)

NAPAC (National Association for People Abused in Childhood)
Website: https://napac.org.uk
Support Line: 0808 801 0331
(Not specifically Christian, but widely used and relevant support line for adult survivors of childhood abuse. Can help if abuse happened in a church setting.)

UK-wide Specialist Abuse/Violence Services

These aren't "Christian" organisations, but they're often the most effective route to trauma-informed support and are highly reccomended to be used alongside Church support.

NSPCC Helpline
https://www.nspcc.org.uk
0808 800 5000
(To report concerns about a child.)

Childline
https://www.childline.org.uk
0800 1111
(For under 19s.)

Samaritans
https://www.samaritans.org
116 123
(24/7 emotional support.)

Rape Crisis (England & Wales)
https://rapecrisis.org.uk
(Local centres listed on website)

Victim Support
https://www.victimsupport.org.uk
0808 168 9111
(Crime-related victim support)

Refuge
https://refuge.org.uk
0808 2000 247
(Domestic abuse support)

Women's Aid
https://www.womensaid.org.uk
(Domestic abuse services)

Men's Advice Line
https://mensadviceline.org.uk
0808 801 0327
(Domestic abuse support for men)

First Light
https://www.firstlight.org.uk/our-services/safe-spaces
(Supports and empowers survivors of sexual violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse and domestic abuse)

Contact Information

Fr Thaddeus Ekuma, OCD

Safeguarding lead for the Discalced Carmelite Order Anglo Irish-Province

Email: safeguarding@carmelite.org.uk

Phone: +447438916700

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.