

RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF CHARITY

SAFEGUARDING
POLICY

*Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable
Adults*

OCTOBER 2022

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RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF CHARITY – HISTORY

The Congregation of the Religious Sisters of Charity was founded in Ireland in 1815 by Mother Mary Aikenhead to serve the poor. The Congregation is an international Religious Congregation of Pontifical rite Incorporated in Nigeria and committed to its own particular Constitutions and Charism. It has spread to many parts of the world. The Sister first came to Nigeria in 1961 where they set up a school for the blind and partially sighted in Surulere, Lagos. Students from all over the country attended this school and achieved remarkable results. Many went for further studies to universities in the USA, Scotland and other institutes of learning. The school was handed over in 1980 to a Nigerian Congregation who still runs the school.

In the 1960's the congregation took over a hospital (St. Camilus Hospital) and set up a Midwifery Training School in Uromi, Edo State. This was a centre of excellence where the sick were treated with compassion and respect and where many Nigerians were trained as midwives. This Institution was also handed over to a Nigerian Congregation in 1992.

We now have ten communities in five Dioceses: Lagos, Port Harcourt, Warri, Ibadan and Bomadi.

The motto of the Congregation is “The Charity of Christ urges us on” and all our ministries are at the service of the poor. We minister in a hospital, clinics, care of polio victims, Primary Health Care with an emphasis on HIV/AIDS and home based care, Correctional Service, school leaver programmes empowering women and youth, adult literacy; catechesis and RCIA programs; advocacy for justice and peace, Anti-Human Trafficking, care of the earth, social and parish ministries and primary education.

Our Postulancy is in Ibadan, Nigeria and our Novitiate is in Zambia where the initial Formation of our sisters is a priority.

SAFEGUARDING AND PROTECTION POLICY STATEMENT

Each child shall be cherished and affirmed 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.

Everyone in the Nigerian Region of the Religious Sisters of Charity has an obligation to ensure that the fundamental rights of children are respected. All employees, staff, volunteers, are required to undergo the following:

1. Satisfactory clearance through a recommendation letter from a well-respected member of the society.
2. Acceptance of and commitment to our Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct of behaviour for working with children.
3. Sign a personal declaration stating any criminal convictions, including spent convictions.
4. Provide the name and contact information of two character references they have known for no less than two years, excluding family members.

These guiding principles inform this policy. The policy has been written to ensure that the Religious Sisters of Charity takes every possible measure to prevent abuse. It aims to ensure that none of its personnel, co-workers or volunteer engages in behaviours that could allow abuse to occur or action that could be misrepresented by children, their families or other adults as constituting or leading to abuse.

Signed by the Regional Leader:

Dr. Michael O'Donnell

Date: 19th October 2022

CATEGORIES OF CHILD ABUSE AND DEFINITIONS

Child abuse includes maltreatment or cruelty to children. It constitutes all forms of physical, emotional, sexual, ill-treatment, neglect / negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation, denying access to resources resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, holistic development or dignity. It also includes a deliberate failure to prevent serious harm to a child. Any action that negates the holistic development of a child within the context of the child's existence is considered an abuse. There are five major abuses that are traumatic to children.

Neglect: An omission, where a child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation and medical care. The persistent lack of appropriate care of children, including safety discrimination, harassment, and bullying are all forms of neglect.

Emotional Abuse: is the continuous emotional ill-treatment of a child which causes severe and lasting harmful effects on the child's emotional development. It occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. This also includes depriving a child of Love or not allowing the child to express his or her opinion.

Physical Abuse: includes corporal punishment, biting, slapping, hurting or injuring a child, inflicting pain, poisoning, drowning, or smothering. It is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from deliberate failure to protect a child. This includes the use of excessive force in handling a child.

Sexual Abuse: occurs when a child or young person is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others. This includes touching a child inappropriately, sexualizing children with certain kind of music.

Spiritual Abuse: It could be called Religious abuse and it is abuse administered under the guise of religion, including harassment or humiliation that may result in psychological trauma. It involves psychological manipulation and harm caused on a person by using the teachings of that religion. Spiritual abuse can be hard to identify and it is not limited to a certain religion or denomination. Any person of any belief system is capable of perpetuating spiritual abuse, just as any person could be victim of it. Examples of spiritual abuse includes ridicules or insults on the other person's religion, creating a culture of fear and shame, misuse of religion for selfish, secular reasons, abuse of clerical position, creating toxic culture within the church or group, forcing someone to act against their spiritual or religious obligation and misusing spiritual or religious beliefs to justify other types of abuse and violence. Abuse manifests in cultures that facilitate early marriage, forced marriage and widow inheritance.

SECTION ONE

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Child Safeguarding/Vulnerable and Child Protection Policy is guided by the following principles:

1. Each Child should be cherished and affirmed as a gift from God with an inherent right to dignity and bodily integrity which shall be respected, nurtured and protected by all.
2. Provide an example of good conduct you wish others to follow
3. Be visible to others when working with children wherever possible
4. Challenge and report potentially abusive behaviour
5. Develop a culture where children can talk about their contacts with staff and others openly.
6. Respect each child's boundaries and help them to develop their own sense of their right, as well as helping them to know what they can do if they feel there is a problem.
7. The Religious Sisters of Charity ensure that staff are appropriately prepared and trained for their roles, and are supported in carrying out their responsibilities concerning children and young / vulnerable people.
8. The Religious Sisters of Charity child protection policy will be reviewed annually.
9. All children whatever their age, culture, differently abled, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity, have the right to protection from abuse.
10. All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
11. A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years (The Children Act 1989).

SECTION TWO

REPORTING PROCEDURES AND RESPONDING TO CHILD ABUSE ALLEGATIONS AND SUSPICIONS

1. When an allegation or suspicion of child abuse arises against a sister, staff or volunteer, the Religious Sister of Charity have two responsibilities:
 - **The safeguarding of children:** This at all times takes priority. The Religious Sisters of Charity will ensure that all procedures are followed in relation to reporting the matter to the civil authorities and to safeguarding children from abuse.
 - **Dealing with the person accused:** The Regional Leader will ensure that proper procedures are followed in relation to the person against whom the complaint has been made, in line with fair procedures and natural justice. The accused person is to be treated as innocent unless and until the contrary is established.
2. The Religious Sisters of Charity have a responsibility to protect from abuse persons in their care, namely children, young people and vulnerable adults.
3. The Religious Sisters of Charity have a responsibility to respond promptly and appropriately to complaints of abuse.
4. The Religious Sisters of Charity have a responsibility to report to the civil authorities each formal complaint of abuse received and the Religious Sisters of Charity will encourage each complainant to report any claim of abuse to the civil authorities.
5. a) The Religious Sisters of Charity have a responsibility to offer emotional and spiritual support to the complainant.

b) The Religious Sisters of Charity also have a responsibility to have regard for the rights and the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the person who has been accused of abuse and to uphold and respect the presumption of innocence of that person unless and until contrary has been established.
6. As the handling of the examination of complaints of abuse is difficult and requires both special training and great sensitivity, the Religious Sisters of Charity will appoint a Designated person and a Deputy Designated person to be responsible for the process.

7. Each member of the Religious Sisters of Charity and each staff member and volunteer of the Religious Sisters of Charity who become aware of a complaint of abuse must be conscious of the need for confidentiality and should only discuss the complaint with the Designated person or the Deputy Designated person.

DESIGNATED PERSON AND DEPUTY DESIGNATED PERSON / MEDIA:

The Regional Leader of the Religious Sisters of Charity in Nigeria:

- a) Nominated a Designated Person and a Deputy Designated person and arranged for them to be trained appropriately.
- b) Agreed that the Regional office will deal with media queries concerning complaints of abuse.

ROLE OF THE DESIGNATED PERSONS

1. The Designated person or the Deputy Designated person appointed by the Religious Sisters of Charity has the responsibility for handling the examination of all complaints of abuse received by the Religious Sister of Charity.
2. Handle the examination of complaints of abuse in accordance with the policy and on the basis of best professional practice, having regard for their own practical experience.
3. Be available to meet with any member of the Religious Sisters of Charity or any member of staff or volunteer of the Religious Sisters of Charity Services or any other person who has suspicions, information or concerns in relation to possible abuse.
4. Receive and consider all child protection concerns within the Religious Sisters of Charity, and where appropriate within their Services and ensure that policy and procedures are followed.
5. If appropriate, inform parents/carers if a referral is being made to the Child Protection Officer, Health Services, Local Chief or the Police.
6. Make referral to the Health Service Area Child Protection Officer/Office.
7. The Designated person and deputy maintain appropriate records. Records are kept by the Designated persons and a copy kept in the Regional office.

**NAMES AND CONTACT DETAILS OF DESIGNATED PERSON, DEPUTY
DESIGNATED PERSON AND REGIONAL LEADER FOR CHILD
SAFEGUARDING/PROTECTION POLICY**

DESIGNATED PERSON

Sr. Gloria Ozuluoke, RSC, Religious Sisters of Charity
Regional House, P.O. Box 706, Satellite Town, Lagos
Phone: +234 8144239865 Email: gloriaoz90@yahoo.com

DEPUTY DESIGNATED PERSON

Sr. Perpetua Ihejirika RSC,
Religious Sisters of Charity Ibadan,
P. O. Box 37222, G.P.O Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.
Phone: + 234 8134844321. Email: ihejirikaperpetuaada@gmail.com

REGIONAL LEADER:

Sr. Micheline O'Donnell RSC
Religious Sisters of Charity
Regional House, Navy Town Road
P. O. Box 706
Satellite Town, Lagos State
Phone: +234 7068447376
Email: annemmodonnell@gmail.com

PROCEDURES

1. All members of the Religious Sisters of Charity, staff and volunteers MUST read and be familiar with the policy and procedures.
2. Know the identity of the individuals who are the designated persons appointed to handle the examination of complaints of abuse and how they can be contacted.
3. A person receiving a complaint from an adult on their behalf or on behalf of a suspected abuse victim should:
 - Listen carefully to the complaint. Take what he/she says seriously. Give the young person/adult time to speak about the disclosure at his/her pace.
 - Be as calm and natural as possible. Remember that you have been approached because you are trusted and /or liked – not because you are an expert or counsellor.
 - Be aware that the disclosure is very difficult for the child/young person/adult involved.
 - Remember that initially a child/young person may be testing your reactions and may only fully open up over a period of time.
 - Do not question the young person/adult directly about intimate details of the abuse or seek to interpret for the person – this could later complicate the official investigation; avoid leading questions; do not make the young person/adult repeat the story unnecessarily.
 - Do not promise the young person/adult that you will keep secret what has been revealed.
 - Offer him/her reassurance that they have done the right thing by talking to you and tell him/her that you are willing to give help and support. Reassure the person that your relationship towards him/her has not been affected in a negative way as a result of what has been disclosed.
 - Explain what will happen next and seek their consent to this, if possible. Tell the young person that you will keep him/her informed of anything that you will do based on what you have been told.

- Try not to become over involved with the person, lest you become part of the problem rather than the solution.
- Take in writing the name, address and telephone number(s) of the person making the complaint.
- Explain the procedures and particularly the Religious Sisters of Charity policy on reporting complaints of abuse to the civil authorities.
- Explain that the Religious Sisters of Charity have a Designated person specifically trained to handle the examination of complaints of abuse and offer to accompany the complainant to meet the designated person.
- Make a careful written record of what the complainant has said and give this to the Designated person.
- Do not express a personal opinion to the complainant relating to the complaint being made.
- Parents or guardian should be informed unless to do so would put the child at further risk.

4. A person receiving a complaint of abuse directly from a child should:

- Take what the child says seriously.
- Listen carefully to the child and while not asking leading questions, check that an accurate understanding of what the child has said has been noted.
- Take accurate written information – name, address, telephone number of the child/contact, and the account of what is said by the child, in the words of the child.
- While reassuring the child, make no promise which cannot be kept.
- Accompany the child to his or her parent(s) or guardian(s) to inform them of exactly what the child has said unless the child's complaint is against a parent or guardian.
- Explain to the parent(s) or guardian(s) the procedures and particularly the Religious Sisters of Charity policy on reporting complaint of abuse to the civil authorities.

- Inform the Designated persons of what has occurred and provide to the Designated person a carefully written record of what the child has said together with the view expressed by the child's parent(s) or guardian(s).
 - Do not express a personal opinion to the child or the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) relating to the complaint being made.
5. Once the Designated person has received details of the complaint, the Religious Sisters of Charity's response to the complaint and its examination will be coordinated by the Designated person. Where a member of the Religious of Sisters of Charity, a staff member with the Religious Sisters of Charity or volunteer working with the Religious Sisters of Charity is made aware in advance that the purpose of a meeting with an adult or child is in relation to a complaint of abuse, it may be appropriate to ensure that the Designated person attends the meeting in order to handle the situation from the outset.
 6. Once the Designated person takes over coordination of the examination any enquiries and information received by any sister, staff member or volunteer of the Religious Sisters of Charity concerning the particular complaint should immediately be directed to the Designated persons.
 7. Any information received by the Religious Sisters of Charity in relation to the complaint of abuse must be treated in confidence during the process of examination in order to respect the rights of both the suspected abused person and the alleged abuser. However, because of the Religious Sisters of Charity policy on reporting such complaints to the civil authorities, no absolute guarantee of confidentiality should be given.
 8. Where a person has reason to be suspicious, or has received information anonymously, that there has been an abuse, such suspicious should immediately be passed to the Designated persons.
 9. In some situations, staff and volunteers may receive information that adults who are not involved with the Religious Sisters of Charity Services, but whom they believe present a risk, are in contact with children through others organisations. The matter should be reported by the staff member or volunteer to the Designated persons.
 10. It is important that everyone in the Religious Sisters of Charity and its Services know that if they, in good faith, raise a concern which through the process of investigation, is not validated, they continue to be supported in their initial action. The Religious Sisters of Charity encourage responsible action and are committed to supporting a sister, staff member or volunteer who has received a disclosure by a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

A child may be subject to more than one form of abuse at any time during his/her childhood. Vulnerable children – for example those with disabilities, children who are separated from family and are reliant on others for their care and protection, and homeless children are recognised to be at particular risk of being abused.

Every form of abuse constitutes a betrayal of trust and an abuse of power by an adult over a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

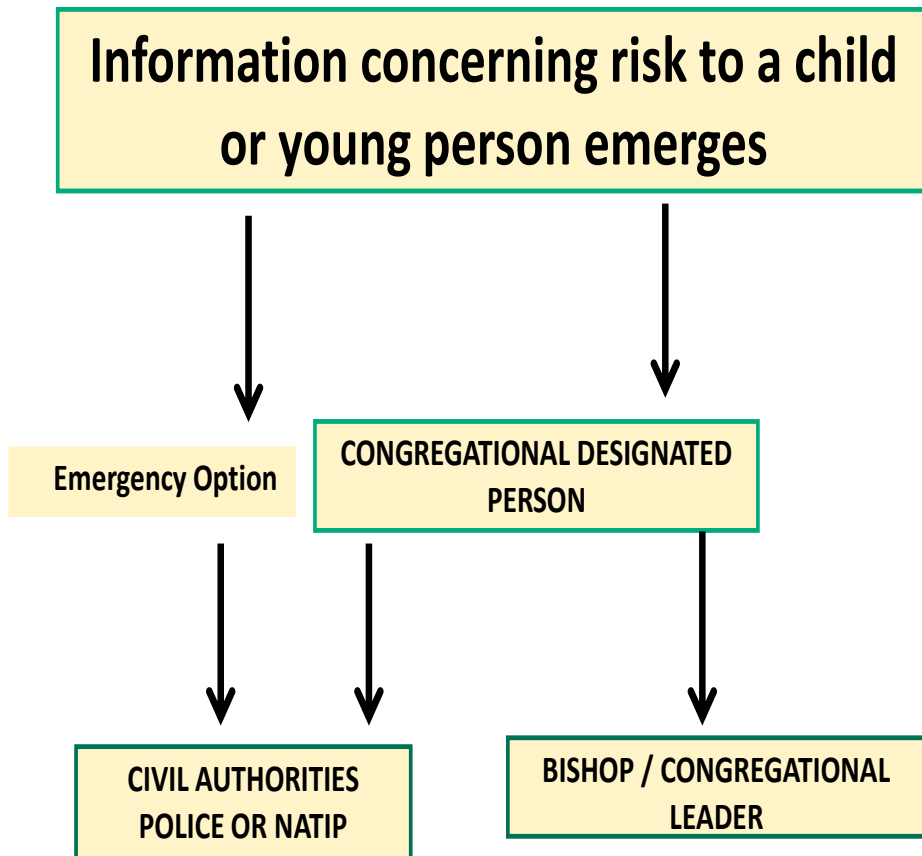
Each form of child abuse must be treated seriously – there can be no assumption that some forms are of less significance than others. It is accepted, however that there is a distinction between sexual abuse and the other ways in which children can be harmed in that the motivation and circumstances for the sexual abuse of children/vulnerable adults can be very different from those which are involved when people physically or emotionally abuse children, or cause them to be neglected.

PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING

Once an allegation has been reported regarding alleged abuse of a minor or other vulnerable person the Designated persons or staff member will initiate the following process:

- Ensure as far as possible that the child or vulnerable person receives any emergency medical care required.
- Ensure as far as possible that the child or other vulnerable person is in a safe location.
- Obtain the information required on the standard reporting form
- If there is reasonable cause to believe that there was in fact abuse, report the matter both verbally and in writing to the following persons: *Parent of a minor (provided the parent is not the alleged abuser) or guardian(s) of other vulnerable persons. *Area Child Welfare Officer or supervisor; Local Chief, sub Chief; Area Police.
- Copies of any documents are maintained in a confidential file.
- In the event that a sister or other staff member is implicated in a complaint of abuse the person who receives the complaint will notify the Designated person, who will then immediately notify the Regional Leader.
- Then the remaining steps listed above will be initiated as indicated. Any public statements regarding the alleged abuse will be provided by the Regional Leader or the person she delegates.

REPORTING FLOW CHART



SECTION 3

PREVENTING HARM TO CHILDREN
SAFE RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT PROCEDURE

Training and Education

All sisters and those employed by the Religious Sisters of Charity to work with children and other vulnerable persons should be offered child safeguarding and safe protection training. It is necessary that all maintain the necessary attitudes, skills and knowledge to safeguard children.

Safeguarding children involves creating safe environments for Children. It is a process of:

- Protecting children from abuse or neglect,

- Preventing impairment of their health and development

- Ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.

- Taking preventative action, and is not limited to reacting to existing harm.

- Primarily pro-active, but will respond to any concern.

- It includes recognising, responding to and reporting abuse.

Policies and procedures are only effective if children and adults are familiar with them, understand their purpose and know how to use them.

The Regional Leader of the Religious Sisters of Charity in Nigeria:

- Nominated a Safeguarding committee comprising of seven sisters and arranged for them to be trained appropriately.
- Setup safeguarding representative in each service run by the Religious Sisters of Charity.

ROLE OF SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE

The primary duty of the Safeguarding committee is to train and educate sisters, staff members and volunteers on issues of child safeguarding and protection. It is crucial that the committee functions within the context of each sector and environment.

Members of the Safeguarding Committee are required to be proactive in:

- Offering advice; being supportive; ensuring the development of best practice in relation to all safeguarding activities
- Ensuring the provision of training and safe recruitment of sisters, volunteers and staff members.
- Being primarily focused on creating, maintaining and monitoring a safe environment for children.
- Conducting regular audits of Safeguarding practices

N.B.: The Committee is not involved in managing cases

The Safeguarding Committee should receive reports from Safeguarding Representatives on:

- Programmes with Children in their Services
- Procedures on creating and maintaining safe environments
- Difficulties / Issues that have arisen
- Annual Audits
- Recruitment Activity
- Health & Safety
- Accident Reporting.

RECRUITMENT

Applicants to any Religious Sisters of Charity service must present a clean record of behaviour in relation to children, young persons and vulnerable adults.

The following questionnaire should be included in the interview process:

Have you ever been convicted of offences involving children?

Are you being investigated for possible criminal offences involving children – or have you ever been investigated for such offences?

Have you ever been dismissed from employment for reasons relating to children?

Do you know of any other reason why you could be considered unsuitable for working with children?

Do you consent to the Religious Sisters of Charity checking the above statements against police records?

I understand that if I withhold any relevant information, I may render myself liable to disqualification from the recruitment process or - if appointed – to summary dismissal and contract termination.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

SECTION 4

OPERATION OF SAFE ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

Sisters, Employees, Volunteers and others must never:

1. Use corporal punishment in any form under any circumstances or in any situation.
2. Develop sexual relationships with children
3. Develop relationships with children which could in anyway be deemed exploitative or abusive
4. Act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse

Sisters, Employees, Volunteers and others must avoid actions or behaviour that could be construed as poor practice or potentially abusive. For example they should never:

5. Use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
6. Behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative.
7. Have a child/children with whom they are working stay overnight at their home unsupervised.
8. Sleep in the same room or bed with a child whom they are working.
9. Do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves.
10. Condone, or participate in behaviour of children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
11. Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade a child (children).
12. Discriminate against, show different treatment, or favour particular children to the exclusion of others.

Good supervision is essential at all time when interactingwith / caring for children.

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (Article 19)

Children have the right to be protected from violence and harmful treatment. They must be kept safe from harm including pornography, inducement to sexual activity or prostitution. They must be given proper care by those looking after them.

THE CHILD’S RIGHT TO EXPRESS OPINIONS (ARTICLE 12)

The UN convention states that the child has, “The right to express views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity of the child”.

- Nigeria ratified the above UN CRC on April 16th, 1991 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 2000.
- This therefore placed a moral burden and commitment to implement these international and regional instruments.

The Child Rights Act (CRA) was passed into law in Nigerian in July, 2003.

It defines a child as a person who has not attained the age of eighteen. It also:

- Provides for freedom from discrimination on the grounds of belonging to a particular community or ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion, the circumstances of birth, disability, deprivation or political opinion; and it is stated that the dignity of the child shall be respected at all times.
- Provides that no Nigerian child shall be subjected to physical, mental or emotional injury, abuse or neglect, maltreatment, torture, inhuman or degrading punishment, or attacks on his/her honor or reputation.
- Every Nigerian child is entitled to rest, leisure and enjoyment of the best attainable state of physical, mental and spiritual health.

SECTION 5

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The Religious Sisters of Charity Nigerian Region are committed to implementing and monitoring their Child Protection Policy.

Implementing and Communicating the Religious Sisters of Charity Child Protection Policy to all sisters, volunteers and staff members by:

- Appointing a Safeguarding Committee and safeguarding representatives (see Section 3).
- Organising Regional Seminars for all Sisters.
- Promoting on- going Education through staff seminars in all our Services.
- Promoting good communication between staff and parents, informing parents and guardian of our Child Protection Policy.
- Ensuring that strict records of all related matters are kept in a safe place. These records should be clearly dated, timed and signed by the interviewer and designated persons.
- Having up to date information available on how and where to get advice and support for all who may need it.
- Commitment to review this policy annually.
- This policy will be updated every three years.

The motto of the Religious Sisters of Charity

“The Charity of Christ Urges us On”

Calls us to reach out with the compassion of Christ to all, especially the most vulnerable and those in greatest need.

RELIGIOUS SISTERS OF CHARITY

ACCIDENT/INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Date of accident/incident: _____

Reported by: _____

Details: _____

Location of activity: _____

Type of activity: _____

Time: _____

Parties involved: _____

Parent/Guardian informed: Yes or No (Please circle)

Date _____

Form completed and signed by: _____

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

RESPONSE

Date: _____

Abuse: _____

Action
taken: _____

Signed: _____

Comment: _____

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT – SPECIAL ACTIVITY

Activity: _____

Group: _____

Coordinator: _____

Name of young person: _____

Age: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Other relevant information about the young person (e.g. medical conditions, special needs, dietary requirements): _____

I have read and I understand the activity outline accompanying this parental permission slip.

I am satisfied that I have been sufficiently informed by the activity and I agree to allow the young person named above to take part in the outlined activity.

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____

Relationship to the young person: _____

This form is for activities outside the routines of the service.

STAFF DECLARATION FORM

Religious Sisters of Charity Staff Declaration Form.

DECLARATION FORM

I, _____ Date of Birth _____

Surname First Name

Phone Number: _____

Present Address: _____

L.G.A: _____

Employed in the Religious Sisters of Charity as _____

Declared that I have read and understood all that is contained in the Code of Behaviour and Conduct in the Religious Sisters of Charity, which fosters best practice and the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults who come to our institution.

I understand that as a member of staff in this institution, I am expected to comply wholeheartedly with all the rules and regulation as stated in the document.

I declare that I have never been convicted of any criminal offence threatening the safety of children and vulnerable adults and I do not intend to physically, emotionally or sexually harm any person in my care.

I accept all the Terms and Conditions of Service for employment in the Religious Sisters of Charity services and the Child Safeguarding and Protection Policy and Conduct for best practice.

I promise to ensure the safety of every child and vulnerable persons in the Religious Sisters of Charity community. The consequences of my failure to do so shall be my sole responsibility and not the responsibility of the Community or the Congregation of the Religious Sisters of Charity and I am liable for legal prosecution if any.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name/Signature of Witness: _____