



Congregation of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE PREVENTION OF ABUSE OF MINORS AND VULNERABLE PERSONS



June 2025

INTRODUCTION

We, the Daughters of the Holy Spirit, are a Catholic, international and religious Congregation, animated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ at work in our world.

We seek, with others, to respond to the needs of the people among whom we live.

We believe that the Spirit of God dwells in the heart of every person, bestowing upon them a human dignity worthy of fundamental respect.

For this reason, *“we contribute with others –children, youth, adults– in creating conditions which enable all persons to liberate themselves and live more open and loving relationships.”* RL 10.3

This document is intended to help each Unit of the Congregation to understand, adhere to and develop a policy for the prevention of abuse of all kinds. Our Congregation recognizes the seriousness of abuse in all its forms. Consequently, each Unit must implement a policy, taking into account local realities, diocesan orientations, civil and international law, and our Rule of Life. In the event of accusations of abuse of any kind, a core group of DHS, delegated in consultation with the competent local teams, will quickly take appropriate measures to defend the rights of the alleged victim and to accompany the accused person.

I. IN KEEPING WITH OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

Our inspiration and values drawn from the Word of God and the Rule of Life.

Gal. 5:14 *"For the whole law has found its fulfilment in this one saying, You shall love your neighbour as yourself."*

Luke 4:18 *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...
He has sent me to bring Glad tidings to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives,
recovery of sight to the blind
and release to prisoners."*

Cf. RL p. 27

MT 11:29 *"Learn of me, that I am gentle and humble of heart."*

"They will practice this humility and gentleness, not only among themselves, but even towards the people of the world, the poor and the children."

First Rule 1730, Art. 11

Mk 10:42.45 *"Their great ones make their importance felt. It cannot be like that with you...
The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve."*

RL 60.2

"Conscious of our weakness, we rely on the fidelity of God. We recognize the need for... a certain vigilance in our relationships."

RL 15.2

"Wherever we are, we all have a certain power. Our way of exercising power must be purified over a period of time if we are to understand Gospel obedience."

RL 32.2

II. CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

What do we mean by “vulnerable person”?

- **Obvious situations of vulnerability:**
Childhood, physical, psychological or mental illness, disability, old age, human poverty (material need, little or no education, lack of social or family support, etc.).
- **Less obvious, but real, situations of vulnerability...**
All “asymmetrical” relationships where one person has a form of authority over another (hierarchical relationship, caregiver, teacher/student, in accompaniment).

All abuse involves a misuse of power. The following are some of the ways:

- **In our mission:** proximity to children, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, migrants, displaced persons and refugees, persons with different sexual orientation and religion...
- **In our religious life:** relationship with mentors or formators, those who accompany us, our hierarchical leaders. We are particularly vulnerable in stages of Formation, in our relationship and understanding of authority and obedience.
- **At certain stages of our human development:** a certain dependency in sickness, old age, but also, in our trials, great or minor, transitions, mission in a culture with a different context from ours.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF VIOLENCE:

- **Verbal/psychological:** Insults, harassment, discrimination, pressure, humiliation, isolation, racism, threats, manipulation, bullying...

- **Physical/Sexual:** pushing, slapping, hitting/harassment, inappropriate gestures of affection that can be experienced by some as real assaults, touching, rape.
- **All forms of abuse:** abuse of authority and power, of conscience (forcing someone to go against their conscience), spiritual (telling someone what God wants for them), financial (lack of transparency or mismanagement of money and property entrusted to them).

DIFFERENT ACTORS IN SITUATIONS OF VIOLENCE

We can be:

- The perpetrator of one of these situations of violence.
- The “victim” of one of these situations of violence.
- The witness to one of these situations of violence, which calls into question our professional, pastoral and moral responsibility.

III. PREVENTION POLICY

- A DHS delegate is appointed by the General Council and a team of 2 in each Unit of the Congregation is named by the Provincial or Vice-Provincial.
- The mission of the Generalate Delegate is to encourage and ensure the implementation of the Congregation's protection policy in the Units.
- Each Unit team is responsible for ensuring the understanding and diffusion of the Congregation's policy for the prevention of abuse in conjunction with the leader of the Unit and the Delegate named by the General Council.

- The Unit team, therefore, ensures that all the DHS in their Unit are formed with a view to the proper application of this safeguarding policy.
- The Unit team, in conjunction with the leader of the Unit, will be responsible for supervising all the institutions and public places where the sisters serve to raise awareness of this policy for preventing abuse. She is a resource person in her Unit when needed.
- The Unit team will collaborate with the safeguarding teams of the local conferences of religious and/or the national conferences of bishops that exist, depending on the local situation.

IV. PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS OF ABUSE

In each Unit, the Sisters will be clearly informed as to who they can safely talk to if they are experiencing or witnessing violence.

- ***Internally:*** Either to the local community leader, or to the leader of the Unit, or to the Superior General.
- ***Externally:*** Each Unit must make known to its members competent people from outside the Congregation who can listen to a sister who prefers an external resource.
 - E.g.: Resource persons designated by religious or episcopal Conferences (psychologists, lawyers, mediators, doctors, etc.) or whom the civil law in the country has already designated.
 - Of course, this does not replace designated people in professional or pastoral situations.

COMMITMENT

Faithful to our Foundresses, each of us has to be vigilant concerning our own behaviour and that of our collaborators, towards children, the sick and all vulnerable people.

We commit ourselves:

- to denounce all sexual aggression, as well as abuses and negative influences of all kinds (of power, authority, spiritual, etc.) committed by priests or religious, or any other person, in the Church and in society;
- to update procedures concerning the protection of minors and vulnerable people in all the places and activities for which our Congregation is responsible;
- to actively participate in the proposals made by the Church and the Conferences of Religious of our Units, to fight against these scandals.

cf. General Chapter 2021

REVISION

This document will be re-evaluated during the General Chapter and the Council of the Congregation whenever deemed necessary. This is to take into account any regulatory changes.

