

## - MEDIA RELEASE -

### **St Columbans Mission Society safeguarding audit report shows child safety taken seriously**

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A safeguarding audit report of the St Columbans Mission Society published today by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL) has found the Order is well progressed in its implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

The 10 National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) create a framework for Catholic entities to promote the safety of children. The NCSS incorporate recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and also the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, contextualising these requirements for the Catholic Church in Australia.

Commenting on the findings of the safeguarding audit, ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens said that while the Society has little direct contact with children, it takes implementing a safeguarding culture very seriously, which is demonstrated through their proactive work over the last 10 years and their score of 96 per cent compliance with the NCSS.

‘Our audit found that the Society has put the work into developing an appropriate safeguarding culture, and developing and implementing the policies and procedures which support a safe community. While there are fewer than 30 ordained Members of the Society in Australia, several of whom are in retirement, the Society is still engaged in ministry work throughout its religious communities, and through associates including students, lay missionaries, associate priests, paid employees, volunteers and contractors.’

‘Every Catholic entity, ministry and organisation needs to take deliberate steps to protect children from physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse showed us that all organisations need to take steps to invest in risk management, in people, management and culture, and continuous improvement.’

‘Our audit found good practices in the Society’s commitment to record keeping and regular risk assessments. The movement of ordained Members across religious communities is also well monitored, with all Members (except those in retirement) using the Australian Catholic Ministry Register.’

‘We were also able to identify some areas for improvement. We’ve provided five recommendations to the Society which will help to further embed their safeguarding policies and procedures, and ultimately, create a safe environment for people who interact with the community. These recommendations include tightening their Code of Conduct to reflect a zero tolerance to abuse, developing role descriptions for members of their safeguarding committee, ensuring leadership is regularly reviewing member appraisals in relation to safeguarding, providing plain language complaints handling information materials, and finalising a Privacy and Information Sharing Policy so it can be fully implemented,’ Dr Stephens said.

The audit report of the St Columbans Mission Society is available through the Publications and Reports area of [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.*