**Media Release**

**17 November 2026**

## Safeguarding audit highlights embedded commitment to safeguarding across the Syro- Malabar Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle, Melbourne

The Syro-Malabar Eparchy is demonstrating strong safeguarding practices according to a new audit released today by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL).

The audit assessed the Eparchy's implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) and found that 96 per cent of indicators were either fully or substantially addressed, with the remaining 4 per cent in the developing stage of implementation.

ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens said that the work being undertaken is both culturally sensitive to the Syro-Malabar communities and reflects their deep commitment to children's safety.

'Our interviews with more than 50 clergy, staff, volunteers and students provided valuable insight into how safeguarding is lived across Eparchy's ministries.'

'ACSL has made four recommendations for improvement, one of which is to continue to support safeguarding practices in their overseas ministries. We have also noted some actions around supporting clergy and volunteers, to ensure that ongoing annual reviews and supervision plans for clergy and other personnel,' Dr Stephens said.

'Of particular significance is the high participation rate of volunteers contributing to the Eparchy's ministries and the weight the Eparchy safeguarding leadership gives to their volunteer leadership.'

Bishop John Panamthottathil CMI said: "Safeguarding is at the heart of our pastoral mission and our responsibility to uphold the dignity and wellbeing of every person. I welcome this independent audit by ACSL as an affirmation of the progress we have made as an Eparchy and an opportunity to reflect on where we can grow and improve.

We are committed to strengthening a culture of safety, accountability, care and respect throughout our Eparchy, so that every child, young person and adult at risk can experience the Church as a safe, caring and welcoming community.

I sincerely thank everyone who has contributed to this important work. I encourage all our clergy, religious and faithful to take an active role in safeguarding practices and embrace this shared responsibility".

The full safeguarding audit report for the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas is available on the ACSL website. www.acsltd.org.au