

Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy

Protection from Abuse and Exploitation Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)

1.1 Introduction

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) holds as its utmost priority the creation and maintenance of a safe, nurturing, and respectful environment for all individuals who engage with its mission and activities. Recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of every person, the FABC is deeply committed to safeguarding the rights and well-being of those who interact with its various offices and initiatives, including the Central Secretariat in Bangkok and the numerous specialized offices under its aegis.

The FABC acknowledges that safeguarding is not merely a set of policies or procedures but a fundamental expression of the Church's mission to serve humanity with a profound responsibility to ensure that its spaces are sanctuaries of safety, respect, and care. This Safeguarding Policy is a testament to the unwavering commitment of FABC to this mission - a commitment that is rooted in the Gospel's call to love and protect the most vulnerable among us, reflecting the values of compassion, justice, and the protection of human dignity.

The FABC recognizes the right of children and vulnerable adults to protection, and, therefore, commits itself to creating and maintaining an environment that protects these individuals, regardless of gender, race, culture and disability. The FABC also recognizes the power dynamics inherent in working with children and vulnerable adults and the potential for abuse and exploitation by people involved with FABC.

Children, by virtue of their age and developmental stage, are particularly susceptible to various forms of abuse and exploitation. Similarly, young adults, who are navigating critical stages of personal and spiritual development, require an environment where they can grow in safety and with confidence in their inherent worth. This policy also extends robust protection to other vulnerable groups, including the elderly, those with disabilities, and those who may be marginalized or at risk due to social, economic, or other factors.

This Safeguarding Policy is not just reactive but proactive. It seeks to establish preventive measures that mitigate the risk of harm before it occurs. This includes rigorous vetting, orientation, and training of all **FABC staff**¹ and **beneficiaries**², the establishment of safe environments for all activities, and the implementation of a Code of Conduct that sets the highest standards for behavior. The FABC staff and beneficiaries are expected to uphold the dignity of all people with whom they come into contact by ensuring that their personal and professional conduct is of the highest standards at all times. They are equally expected to serve with integrity and promote the right relationships while taking their responsibilities.

This Safeguarding Policy is founded on five key principles that reflect FABC's deep commitment to creating a secure and supportive community for all: Dignity and Respect, Zero Tolerance, Empowerment, Confidentiality, and Accountability.

¹ For the purposes of this Safeguarding Policy, "**FABC staff**" refers to the Central Secretariat in Bangkok, all Office, bishops, secretaries, and other volunteers who would be involved during a workshop, seminar or conference including the consultants or speakers.

² **Beneficiaries** refers to all who attend FABC events, including the bishops, clergy, religious and lay faithful.

- The belief that every individual is created in the image of God drives the organization's commitment to treating all with dignity and respect, while actively promoting their well-being.
- FABC's Zero Tolerance policy against abuse or exploitation affirms its dedication to maintaining a safe environment, with immediate action taken against any misconduct.
- Empowerment involves educating and encouraging individuals, especially the vulnerable, to speak up and protect themselves and others.
- Confidentiality protects the privacy of those involved in safeguarding issues, handled discreetly to maintain trust.
- Accountability holds all members, from leadership to volunteers, responsible for fostering a safe environment, with regular monitoring and transparency embedded in their actions.

This Safeguarding Policy is a comprehensive framework designed to ensure that all individuals, especially the most vulnerable, can engage with the Church's mission in an environment that is free from fear, abuse, and exploitation. The FABC is committed to continuously reviewing and improving these safeguards, in alignment with both global best practices and the specific needs of the communities it serves across Asia.

The FABC will follow up with all of the **Member Conferences**³ and **Associate Members**⁴ ecclesiastic jurisdictions to ensure that they have their own polices and mechanism to safeguard children and vulnerable adults.

This policy outlines the comprehensive measures and guidelines that have been established to protect all individuals, particularly children and all those who are most vulnerable.

1.2 Purpose

This policy represents a call to action for all who are involved in the work of the FABC. The FABC aims to uphold the dignity of every individual, create and maintain an environment that prevents abuse and sexual exploitation, and reflect the love and compassion that is central to the Christian faith.

Purpose: The primary purpose of this policy is to establish clear and actionable guidelines that safeguard vulnerable individuals, including children, young adults, the elderly, and those who may be marginalized or at risk due to various social, economic, or personal factors. These guidelines are not merely recommendations but are imperative protocols that must be adhered to by the Central Secretariat and across all FABC offices and activities.

Another purpose of this policy is to promote a culture of safety, respect, and dignity within all FABC offices. A culture of safety is one in which every individual feels secure and protected, not only from physical harm but also from emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse.

³ The **Member Conferences** of FABC are the conferences of Catholic bishops from different countries within Asia. They are full members of the FABC and participate in its decision-making processes and activities, representing the Catholic hierarchy in their respective countries.

⁴ The **Associate Members** are ecclesiastical jurisdictions that do not have any Episcopal Conference. They are full members of the FABC.

This policy also aims to ensure that all FABC staff and beneficiaries, regardless of their role or level of involvement, fully understand their responsibilities in safeguarding vulnerable individuals and are knowledgeable about the signs of abuse, the appropriate steps to take when concerns arise, and the legal and moral implications of their actions. This understanding is not limited to mere awareness but extends to a deep comprehension of the ethical and moral obligations that come with their positions.

This Safeguarding Policy outlines clear and effective procedures for responding to any concerns or allegations of harm. The procedures are designed to be both accessible and straightforward, ensuring that anyone who has witnessed or experienced harm can report it without fear of reprisal or retribution. The procedures also include provisions for supporting victims and survivors, recognizing the importance of addressing the needs of those who have been harmed.

Immediate Goal: The immediate goal of this policy is to ensure that all FABC staff and beneficiaries fully understand their responsibilities in safeguarding vulnerable individuals, recognize the signs of abuse, know the appropriate steps to take when concerns arise, and comprehend the legal and moral implications of their actions.

Long-Term Goal: The long-term goal is to cultivate a culture of safety, respect, and dignity across all FABC offices and activities, ensuring that these principles are consistently upheld in every aspect of the works of FABC. The FABC is committed to continuously review and update its procedures to align with the latest best practices and legal requirements, and maintain the highest standards of integrity. The FABC will enhance and expand its support systems for victims and survivors for healing and empowerment.

To achieve the immediate and long-term goals, this policy will serve as an instrument to implement the following measures:

Prevention Measures

- Implementing awareness programs and workshops to educate everyone about potential risks and preventive actions.
- Regularly updating and distributing comprehensive safety guidelines to keep everyone informed.

Response to Victims

- Providing immediate support and resources to victims, including counseling and medical services.
- Ensuring confidentiality and respect throughout the entire process.

Accountability of Perpetrators

- Conducting thorough investigations and holding perpetrators accountable through appropriate disciplinary actions.
- Collaborating with legal authorities, when necessary, to ensure justice is served.

Standards and Procedures

- Establishing clear protocols for reporting incidents and ensuring timely response.
- Regularly reviewing and updating procedures to align with best practices and legal requirements.

1.3 Scope

This policy applies universally to all individuals who are employed by, volunteer with, or act on behalf of the FABC. It encompasses every office, program, and activity under the FABC's umbrella, reflecting the Church's commitment to creating a safe environment where the dignity and rights of all, especially the most vulnerable, are respected and upheld.

Given the diverse and expansive nature of the FABC's activities, which span across multiple offices and countries, it is crucial that this policy is consistently applied and adhered to, regardless of the specific context or location. Whether an individual is involved in administrative work, theological research, pastoral care, education, or communication, the principles and guidelines set forth in this policy remain the same. Every person, from the highest levels of leadership to the volunteers who serve in various capacities at FABC activities, is bound by this policy and is expected to contribute to a culture of safeguarding.

This policy applies directly to the following categories:

1. **The Central Secretariat in Bangkok**, which serves as the central coordinating body of the FABC, as well as **all the FABC specialized offices**.
2. Those involved in the FABC programs, activities and support mechanisms.
3. Staff and beneficiaries of Member Conferences and Associate Members, but only when they hold a position within any of the FABC offices, or are involved in any FABC activities.

In general, each Bishops' Conference in Asia is expected to develop its own safeguarding policy tailored to its specific context and circumstances. However, this policy will apply when any member of a Bishops' Conference participates in an FABC event or activity or holds a position within any of the FABC offices. In cases of abuse, one of the first considerations will be determining which safeguarding policy is applicable and who holds jurisdiction over the case to ensure proper handling and accountability.

1.4 Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults

The FABC prohibits all forms of exploitation and abuse, namely:

- The FABC staff and beneficiaries are prohibited from engaging in sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18, regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally). Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defense.
- The FABC staff and beneficiaries are prohibited from causing any physical or emotional harm to children or vulnerable adults.
- The FABC staff and beneficiaries are prohibited from the exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, or sexual favors with children or vulnerable adults.
- The FABC staff and beneficiaries are prohibited from any form of humiliating, degrading, or exploitative behavior toward children, and vulnerable adults.
- The FABC staff and beneficiaries are not to use their power or position to withhold assistance or services, or to give preferential treatment to children and vulnerable adults.
- The FABC staff and beneficiaries are prohibited from using their power or position to request or demand payment, privilege, or any other benefit from children and vulnerable adults.

More detailed information on the guidelines outlined in this section are in the Appendices and Indexes, which provide further clarification on the specific prohibitions and expectations regarding the conduct of FABC staff and beneficiaries in relation to children and vulnerable adults (see **Annex 1: FABC Code of Conduct**, **Appendix 1A: The FABC Standards of Behavior towards Children** and **Appendix 1B: The FABC Standards of Behavior towards Vulnerable Adults**).

1.5 Code of Conduct

All FABC staff and beneficiaries are required to adhere to the FABC Code of Conduct, which includes explicit provisions related to safeguarding (see **Annex 1: FABC Code of Conduct**). This Code of Conduct outlines the expected behaviors and standards of practice for everyone involved with the FABC (see also its **Appendix 1A: The FABC Standards of Behavior towards Children** and **Appendix 1B: The FABC Standards of Behavior towards Vulnerable Adults**). They ensure that interactions with others are always respectful, safe, and protective of human dignity.

The safeguarding provisions within the Code of Conduct provide clear guidance on acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, particularly in relation to interactions with children, young adults, and vulnerable groups. All FABC personnel are expected to demonstrate their commitment to upholding the highest standards of ethical conduct and ensuring the safety of those they serve.

1.6 Safeguarding Officer

Appointment

The FABC Assistant Secretary General, as designated by the Central Committee, shall serve *ex officio* as the Safeguarding Officer of the FABC. This means that by virtue of holding the office of Assistant Secretary General, the individual shall automatically assume the responsibilities and authority of the Safeguarding Officer, without requiring a separate appointment to the role. This arrangement shall be in effect to ensure continuity, accountability, and direct linkage between senior leadership and safeguarding oversight within the FABC structure. The email address safeguarding@fabc.org is established for reporting purposes.

Functions of the Safeguarding Officer

The Safeguarding Officer shall hold a central role in ensuring the integrity, implementation, and continuous improvement of safeguarding practices within the FABC. In fulfilling this role, the Safeguarding Officer shall carry out the following responsibilities:

- **Oversight and Compliance.** Provide strategic leadership and oversight to ensure that all FABC activities, programs, and member entities strictly adhere to the safeguarding principles, standards, and procedures outlined in this policy. This includes promoting a culture of safety and vigilance across all levels of the organization.
- **Policy Implementation.** Facilitate and support the effective implementation of safeguarding measures throughout the FABC's offices, commissions, and affiliated initiatives. This involves ensuring the consistent application of safeguarding best

practices, protocols, and procedures, in accordance with both ecclesial directives and civil legislation where applicable.

- **Reporting and Case Management.** Supervise the intake, documentation, investigation, and resolution of safeguarding concerns, disclosures, and incidents. Ensure that all cases are managed in a timely, just, and transparent manner, following applicable legal frameworks and Church norms, and that the rights of all parties are respected.
- **Training and Awareness.** Organize and/or oversee the delivery of regular training, orientation, and awareness-raising activities related to safeguarding. These programs shall be tailored for bishops, clergy, religious, lay personnel, and other stakeholders, aiming to build capacity, promote accountability, and prevent harm.
- **Monitoring and Review.** Establish mechanisms for the regular evaluation and review of safeguarding practices across FABC entities. Provide feedback and recommendations to the FABC Central Committee for policy refinement and to address emerging risks or challenges in safeguarding.
- **Liaison and Collaboration.** Act as the principal point of contact and representative of the FABC in relation to safeguarding matters. Foster cooperation and coordination with relevant ecclesiastical authorities, civil authorities, child protection agencies, and safeguarding networks to ensure alignment with broader safeguarding frameworks and to strengthen institutional responses.
- **Confidentiality, Pastoral Care, and Sensitivity.** Ensure that all safeguarding issues are addressed with the highest level of confidentiality, discretion, and sensitivity. Provide or coordinate appropriate pastoral support to victims/survivors and those affected, upholding the dignity and rights of each individual while maintaining justice and transparency in all safeguarding procedures.
- **Communication, Publication, and Dissemination.** Ensure the clear and consistent communication of the FABC Safeguarding Policy to all relevant stakeholders, including bishops' conferences, commissions, staff, volunteers, and partner organizations. This includes the publication and regular updating of the policy through appropriate channels, and the dissemination of key safeguarding information and expectations in ways that are accessible, understandable, and culturally appropriate.

1.7 Safeguarding Team

To strengthen the coordination, implementation, and contextualization of safeguarding initiatives across the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), a **Safeguarding Team** shall be established under the leadership of the Safeguarding Officer. The creation of this team shall be **initiated, structured, and coordinated** by the Safeguarding Officer.

The primary purpose of the Safeguarding Team is to assist in ensuring effective communication, capacity building, implementation, and observation of safeguarding policies and practices in the FABC.

The Safeguarding Team shall be composed of the Safeguarding Officer, who shall serve as the Team Leader, and three designated Safeguarding Point Persons. These point persons shall be nominated from among the member episcopal conferences of the FABC, including, if possible, from the following regions: Central Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Asia-Missio Regional Desk.

Nominees must possess relevant experience, personal integrity, and a demonstrated commitment to promoting and maintaining safe environments, particularly for minors and vulnerable adults. All appointments to the Safeguarding Team must be formally endorsed by their respective episcopal conferences and approved by the FABC Central Committee.

Responsibilities of the Safeguarding Team

Under the leadership of the Safeguarding Officer, the Safeguarding Team shall play a vital role in strengthening the FABC's commitment to safeguarding. In addition to supporting the coordination and implementation of safeguarding measures, the team may also act as first responders and handlers of safeguarding concerns, particularly in cases requiring local insight, immediate response, or cross-regional coordination.

The responsibilities of the Safeguarding Team shall include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Policy Dissemination and Implementation Support**, Assist in the effective dissemination and local implementation of the FABC Safeguarding Policy and related protocols, ensuring that the safeguarding vision and standards of the FABC are understood, embraced, and practically applied within the FABC.
- **Local Resource and Contact Points**. Serve as designated resource persons and accessible contact points for safeguarding inquiries, reports, and support within the FABC territory. They shall facilitate the flow of information between the local churches and the FABC safeguarding structure.
- **Continental Engagement and Capacity Building**. Participate in and contribute to continental or regional meetings, training sessions, workshops, and consultation processes organized or facilitated by the Safeguarding Officer. They shall also help identify local training needs and promote contextualized safeguarding education.
- **Monitoring, Reporting, and Feedback**. Regularly monitor safeguarding efforts and challenges within the FABC and report progress, concerns, and recommendations to the Safeguarding Officer and the FABC Central Committee. Their input shall contribute to the ongoing development and review of safeguarding strategies.
- **Initial Handling of Safeguarding Issues**. As a coordinated body, the Safeguarding Team may function as a **first-level response group** for safeguarding incidents reported to the FABC. This includes supporting the intake of complaints, advising on immediate protective actions, facilitating communication with the Safeguarding Officer, and ensuring that cases are documented and referred to in accordance with the policy and applicable Church or civil processes. While the Safeguarding Officer retains overall responsibility, the team shall work collaboratively to ensure a timely, sensitive, and just response to all safeguarding matters.

Through these responsibilities, the Safeguarding Team will serve as a responsive mechanism for implementing, sustaining, and advancing a culture of safeguarding within the life and mission of the FABC.

1.8 Reporting and Responding to Concerns

All FABC staff, beneficiaries, and individuals who interact with the FABC have an obligation to promptly report any concern or suspicion of exploitation or abuse of a child or vulnerable adult. Failure to report such concerns not only endangers the welfare of victims but also

exposes the FABC to significant risk and constitutes a breach of this Safeguarding Policy and the FABC Code of Conduct.

Reports of concerns or incidents of harm should be made immediately to the designated Safeguarding Officer or through established reporting channels. The email address safeguarding@fabc.org is established for reporting purposes. It is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Officer to receive all reports with the utmost seriousness, confidentiality, and urgency, and to act accordingly in accordance with this policy and relevant Church and civil procedures.

The FABC has established clear and accessible procedures for the reporting and response to safeguarding concerns (refer to Annex 2: Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures on Safeguarding Concerns). These procedures are designed to guide staff and stakeholders in promptly identifying and addressing potential risks to children and vulnerable adults. The initial step in the reporting process involves determining the appropriate channel to raise the concern and confirming that there are reasonable grounds for reporting a possible breach of the Code of Conduct and/or the Safeguarding Policy. Once this is established, the reporter is encouraged to complete the Report Form (see Appendix A: Report Form) to document the concern formally.

Upon receipt of a report, the Safeguarding Officer will conduct a preliminary assessment to evaluate the seriousness of the concern, verify its credibility, and decide on the immediate actions required. This assessment may involve gathering initial information and, when necessary, consulting with internal experts or external safeguarding professionals to ensure a comprehensive and accurate evaluation.

Where applicable, the preliminary inquiry and subsequent investigation will be conducted in accordance with the canonical norms relating to delicts reserved to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF), as established by the Holy See (11 October 2021). This ensures that cases involving serious clerical misconduct are handled consistently with Church law and universal safeguarding standards.

The investigation process will be conducted with impartiality, thoroughness, and respect for the rights and dignity of all parties involved. The Safeguarding Officer will assist in the initial stages by gathering relevant information, facilitating communication, and ensuring proper referral of cases to competent ecclesiastical authorities. The lead responsibility for investigating abuse committed by clerics rests with the designated Church authorities, in accordance with mandates from the Holy See.

In cases involving sexual misconduct, abuse, or other grave offenses under ecclesiastical jurisdiction, reporting to appropriate Church authorities—including the Apostolic Nuncio, diocesan bishops, or religious superiors—is mandatory. The Safeguarding Officer will ensure full compliance with procedural requirements outlined in key ecclesiastical documents such as the Holy See's *Motu Proprio Vos Estis Lux Mundi* and the *Vademecum on Certain Points of Procedure in Treating Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Committed by Clerics* (Version 2.0, 5 June 2022).

If an investigation confirms a breach of safeguarding policies, the FABC will take prompt and appropriate action in line with its policies and applicable civil laws to address the violation, ensure accountability, and protect all those affected.

All cases reported and investigated will be managed in accordance with the detailed Case Management Procedures stipulated in this policy (see Section 1.9), which provide a clear

framework for ensuring a timely, transparent, and just process respectful of all parties involved.

Communication with Parties Involved

All reports will be handled with a commitment to confidentiality and utmost protection of the privacy and dignity of all persons involved, including the victim, the reporter, the respondent, and other individuals. The FABC's response to safeguarding concerns will be guided by both local laws and internal procedures, and will ensure that actions taken are legally compliant, ethically sound, and aligned with best practices in safeguarding. This includes conducting thorough investigations, providing support to affected individuals, and taking appropriate corrective measures to prevent future incidents.

1.9 Case Management Process

(Based on Canonical Procedures and Best Practices)

Receipt and Acknowledgment of Complaint or Report

- The Safeguarding Officer or an authorized member of the Safeguarding Team receives a safeguarding concern, allegation, or disclosure from any source (victim/survivor, witness, third party, or anonymous).
- The report is recorded carefully, including the identity of the complainant (unless anonymous), the accused (if known), date, time, place, and detailed description of the allegation or concern.
- An immediate acknowledgment is made to the complainant (if identifiable), assuring them of confidentiality, seriousness, and a commitment to follow due process.
- The complainant is informed of available support services, their rights, and the limits of confidentiality (e.g., mandatory reporting obligations).

Initial Assessment and Triage

- The Safeguarding Officer conducts an initial evaluation to determine whether the allegation falls within the remit of safeguarding concerns requiring canonical and/or civil investigation.
- The Officer determines if there is an immediate risk to the complainant or others, or if the allegation suggests criminal conduct.
- If there is an immediate risk, protective actions (e.g., temporary removal or suspension of the accused from ministry) are considered and recommended to the competent ecclesiastical authority.
- The Officer confirms jurisdictional matters and whether civil authorities must be notified, according to local laws and Church directives.

Preliminary Canonical Inquiry (*Inquisitio*)

- Under *Canon 1717*, the competent ecclesiastical authority (often the diocesan bishop or the competent Ordinary) initiates a preliminary canonical inquiry to determine if there is a **semblance of truth** (*semblance of culpa*) to the allegation.
- This inquiry is factual and confidential, carried out by a delegate appointed by the Ordinary or the Safeguarding Officer acting under delegated authority.
- The accused is notified of the inquiry, informed of the allegations, and given the opportunity to respond.
- Evidence is gathered discreetly, including witness testimonies and any pertinent documentation.

Implementation of Immediate Protective Measures

- During the preliminary inquiry, the Safeguarding Officer collaborates with the competent authority to ensure that appropriate protective measures are in place to safeguard minors, vulnerable persons, and the community.
- Measures may include temporary suspension from public ministry, restriction of access to vulnerable persons, or other precautionary actions.
- All actions respect the canonical rights of the accused, maintaining fairness and presumption of innocence.

Formal Preliminary Investigation

- If the preliminary inquiry finds sufficient grounds, the competent ecclesiastical authority formally opens a preliminary investigation.
- A qualified investigator or tribunal official is appointed to conduct a comprehensive and impartial investigation.
- The investigator gathers evidence, interviews the complainant, accused, witnesses, and experts, and compiles a detailed report.
- The accused is guaranteed the right to defense, to know the charges, and to present evidence or witnesses in their favor.

Reporting the Outcome of the Investigation

- Upon completion, the investigator submits the report to the competent ecclesiastical authority (e.g., the bishop or archbishop).
- If the case is substantiated, the authority refers the case to the Promoter of Justice for further canonical prosecution or administrative action.
- If the case is not substantiated, the authority documents the decision to close the case, informing the complainant and the accused as appropriate.
- Throughout this process, the Safeguarding Officer ensures pastoral care and support are provided to all parties.

Cooperation with Civil Authorities

- Where allegations constitute potential violations of civil law, the Safeguarding Officer facilitates prompt reporting to the appropriate civil authorities, respecting local legal requirements.
- The FABC and its members cooperate fully with civil investigations, while maintaining respect for canonical processes.
- Civil reporting does not replace canonical procedures but runs parallel to them to ensure comprehensive justice and protection.

Pastoral Care and Support

- The Safeguarding Officer, together with designated pastoral care personnel, ensures that victims/survivors receive ongoing spiritual, psychological, and social support.
- Support may include counseling, accompaniment, and referrals to specialized services.
- The accused is also entitled to pastoral care, respect, and a fair, transparent process that upholds their rights.

Communication and Confidentiality

- All information related to safeguarding cases is handled with the highest level of confidentiality.

- Disclosure of case details is limited strictly to those directly involved in the investigation or with a legitimate need to know, such as Church authorities or legal entities.
- Public communication, if necessary, is coordinated by the Safeguarding Officer to balance transparency, respect for privacy, and the protection of all parties.

Resolution, Sanctions, and Follow-Up

- Upon conclusion of canonical trials or administrative procedures, appropriate sanctions, penalties, or remedial actions are implemented according to Church law.
- The Safeguarding Officer ensures these measures are monitored for compliance and effectiveness.
- Affected communities are supported in healing and reconciliation efforts.

Review, Learning, and Prevention

- The Safeguarding Team, in coordination with the Safeguarding Officer, reviews each case upon closure to identify lessons learned and to strengthen safeguarding policies and practices.
- Recommendations for policy updates, training improvements, or systemic changes are submitted to the FABC Central Committee.
- Ongoing education, awareness campaigns, and prevention initiatives are promoted to build a culture of safeguarding within the FABC.

1.10 Data protection

The FABC is committed to applying the highest levels of protection in the processing of personal data. Personal information acquired during investigations related to the breach of the FABC Code of Conduct and the FABC Child and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy will be treated in accordance with the *Data Privacy, Ethics and Protection*, United Nations Development Group 2017 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data.

1.11 Alignment with Legal, Ecclesiastical, and International Safeguarding Standards

This Safeguarding policy is meticulously aligned with the relevant legal frameworks of Thailand, the Holy See's ecclesiastical norms, and key international conventions.

In Thailand, this policy adheres to the legal requirements set forth by the Child Protection Act B.E. 2546 (2003), which mandates the protection of children from abuse, exploitation, and neglect. This policy also complies with the Criminal Code of Thailand, which provides legal frameworks for addressing and prosecuting violence against women, children, and other vulnerable groups. The policy also respects the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA), ensuring that all personal information related to safeguarding matters is handled with the highest level of confidentiality and care.

On an ecclesiastical level, the policy is in strict accordance with the Holy See's directives, particularly those outlined in the *Motu Proprio Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (2019), which establishes universal norms for addressing cases of sexual abuse and misconduct within the Church. This policy also aligns with the Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*, which sets forth the Church's protocols for ensuring accountability and justice in safeguarding matters.

On the international stage, this policy is consistent with several key conventions and treaties, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which emphasizes the protection and promotion of children’s rights globally. The policy also aligns with the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

1.12 Prevention

Creating and maintaining a safe environment is a fundamental aspect of this safeguarding policy. The Central Secretariat and each office within the FABC is responsible for ensuring that all activities, events, and interactions are conducted in environments that prioritize the safety and well-being of all participants. This involves conducting regular risk assessments to identify and address potential hazards, implementing appropriate supervision and security measures, and ensuring that physical spaces are safe and accessible. The FABC is committed to fostering a culture of openness and transparency, where individuals feel empowered to speak out if they observe any unsafe practices or conditions.

The FABC is also adhering to the highest human resource and recruitment standards to safeguard people against exploitation and abuse. This includes:

- Safe recruitment – referencing prospective office bearers with emphasis on a track record in carrying out their work in conformity with the Code of Conduct. Every new office bearer, or staff for an office will be checked/vetted, so as to ensure that the person has not committed any crime and/or act that is not in conformity with FABC’s Code of Conduct
- Orientation – all staff have completed an orientation on the FABC Code of Conduct, the Standards of Behavior toward Children and Vulnerable Adults, Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures on Safeguarding Concerns, the FABC Child and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy, and the Glossary of Terms.
- Acknowledgment – all staff have read, understood and signed the Child and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy and the FABC Code of Conduct.

1.13 Publication and Dissemination of the Safeguarding Policy

Upon formal approval of this Safeguarding Policy by the FABC Central Committee, the policy shall be immediately published and disseminated to all member Episcopal Conferences, associated commissions, institutions, and other relevant stakeholders of the FABC.

The FABC Central Secretariat shall oversee the communication and distribution of the policy through official channels, including electronic copies, printed materials, and presentations where necessary. Efforts shall be made to ensure that the policy is accessible, clearly

communicated, and understood across the diverse linguistic, cultural, and ecclesial contexts represented within the FABC.

This includes:

- Direct transmission of the policy to the heads of all member Episcopal Conferences;
- Distribution to safeguarding point persons and pastoral leaders at the conference level;
- Posting the approved policy on the official FABC website and other appropriate digital platforms;
- Organizing orientation sessions or briefings to ensure awareness and understanding of the policy's contents and expectations.

All stakeholders are expected to uphold and integrate the provisions of this policy within their local safeguarding protocols and practices, ensuring a shared commitment to the protection of children and vulnerable adults throughout the FABC network.

Acknowledgement

All the FABC staff and beneficiaries must read, sign, and abide by the FABC Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy, which prohibits abuse and exploitation of a child or vulnerable adult.

Approved by:



His Eminence Felipe Neri Cardinal Ferrao

President

Date: 04 March 2026

Place: Bangkok, Thailand



His Eminence Isao Cardinal Kikuchi, SVD

Secretary General

Date: 04 March 2026

Place: Bangkok, Thailand



Fr. William LaRousse

Assistant Secretary General

Date: 04 March 2026

Place: Bangkok, Thailand

Appendices and Annexes:

Appendix I - Glossary of Terms

Appendix II - Acknowledgment Form

Annex 1 - Code of Conduct for the Staff of the FABC Central Secretariat and All FABC Offices

Appendix 1A - Standards of behavior towards children

Appendix 1B - Standards of behavior towards vulnerable adults

Annex 2 - Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures on Safeguarding Concerns

Appendix 2A - Reporting form

Appendix I: Glossary of Terms

CHILD:

Any person under the age of 18. National law or local customs may use a different definition; however, the FABC's position is that all persons under the age of 18 should receive equal protection regardless of local age limits.

VULNERABLE ADULT:

Vulnerable adults are individuals aged 18 years and over who are at greater risk of significant harm due to factors such as gender, age, mental or physical health, [disability](#), or as a result of poverty, inequality, or experience of displacement or crisis.

SAFEGUARDING:

The responsibility that organizations have to make sure their staff and programs promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults and do not expose them to the risk of harm and abuse. PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) and child protection come under this umbrella term.

PROTECTION:

The responsibility and measures taken to prevent and respond to abuse and exploitation of a child or vulnerable adult. This includes building awareness, promoting training, identifying and responding to all complaints, monitoring and evaluating protection structures, and taking personal responsibility.

CHILD PROTECTION:

Child protection is about preventing and responding to violence, exploitation, and abuse against children, including sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking, child labor and harmful traditional practices. It is part of the broader area of work known as Safeguarding.

PSEA (Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse):

All measures that protect people from crisis-affected communities from sexual exploitation and abuse by staff (e.g., of NGOs, the UN, and other actors).

ABUSE:

Any action or inaction that causes harm to another person. It can include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. It also includes abuse online and/or through mobile technology. There are various types of abuse including:

1. **Sexual abuse:** Any actual or threatened sexual act of violence perpetrated against a child or adult, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. Examples of sexual abuse include rape, abusive sexual contact like unwanted touching and non-contact sexual abuse such as sexting, pornography and verbal or behavioral sexual harassment.
2. **Physical abuse:** The actual or likely physical injury to a child or adult, such as hitting, kicking or shaking, where there is definite knowledge, or reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented.
3. **Emotional abuse:** Harm done by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection, such as degrading punishments, threats, bullying, and not giving care and affection.
4. **Neglect:** When basic needs such as food, warmth and medical care are not met, or when there is a failure to prevent exposure to any kind of danger.

EXPLOITATION:

Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust to profit monetarily, socially or politically. There are various types of exploitation including:

1. **Sexual Exploitation:** The actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.
2. **Child Labor:** The term “child labor” generally refers to any economic activity performed by a person under the age of 18.
3. **Trafficking:** The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of children or vulnerable adults for the purpose of exploitation such as for labor, body parts, prostitution, or sexual exploitation.
4. **Survival Sex:** Occurs when a child or vulnerable adult living in poverty or in an emergency situation chooses to engage in or is coerced into sex as a last resort for survival. It is transactional sex in exchange for food, water, drugs, shelter, money and any other essential needs for integral human survival.

RESPONDENT:

An individual who is suspected of having abused, exploited, or knowingly allowed the ill treatment of a child or vulnerable adult. Such abuse or exploitation may cause physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or other harm to an individual. Investigation by the FABC would determine whether the respondent is guilty or not.

REPORTER:

An individual who identifies and reports suspected incidents of abuse or exploitation of a child or vulnerable adult. All the FABC staff and beneficiaries are required to report whenever a suspicion of abuse or exploitation involving other FABC staff, beneficiaries or other workers is raised, even when they may not have all the facts at hand.

MEMBER CONFERENCES:

The conferences of Catholic bishops from different countries within Asia. They are full members of the FABC and participate in its decision-making processes and activities, representing the Catholic hierarchy in their respective countries.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

They are ecclesiastical jurisdictions that do not have any Episcopal Conference. They are full members of the FABC.

FABC STAFF:

refers to the Central Secretariat in Bangkok, all Office bishops, secretaries, and other volunteers who would be involved during a workshop, seminar or conference including the consultants or speakers.

BENEFICIARIES:

refers to all who attend FABC events, including the bishops, clergy, religious and/or lay faithful.

Appendix II: Acknowledgment Form
The FABC Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy

NAME:.....

I understand the FABC commitment to protect the rights and dignity of children and vulnerable adults and to safeguard them from abuse and exploitation as defined in the FABC Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy.

I have read the FABC Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy in its entirety and understand the following:

- ☐ The definitions of abuse and exploitation;
- ☐ That I am required to report any abuse and exploitation of a child or a vulnerable adult;
- ☐ How to report, in accordance with the FABC reporting procedures, maintaining confidentiality;
- ☐ That I am required to uphold the standards of behavior described in the FABC Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy and the FABC Code of Conduct;
- ☐ That I am required to complete an orientation on the FABC Code of Conduct, the FABC Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy, the FABC Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures and familiarize myself with related documents including:
 - 1.14 The FABC Code of Conduct
 - 1.15 The FABC Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure
 - 1.16 Member organization Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure (if applicable)
 - 1.17 Annex I- Glossary of Terms
 - 1.18 Annex II- Standards of behavior towards children
- ☐ That if I have any questions, it is my responsibility to ask the Safeguarding Officer/Consultant of the FABC;
- That breach of the Policy and failure to report may lead to disciplinary action including termination or dismissal.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Annex 1: Code of Conduct for the FABC Staff Offices Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

Preamble

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is an ecclesial body dedicated to fostering communion, dialogue, and collaboration among the Catholic local churches of Asia through their Bishops' Conferences. As the administrative and operational backbone of the FABC, the Central Secretariat in Bangkok, along with all FABC offices throughout Asia, plays a pivotal role in supporting the Church's mission in this diverse and dynamic region.

As representatives of the Church, the staff members of the FABC Central Secretariat and all FABC offices are entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out their duties with the utmost dedication, integrity, and respect for the teachings of the Church. Their work not only supports the daily operations of the FABC but also reflects the Church's commitment to serving the people of Asia with compassion, professionalism, and ethical conduct.

This Code of Conduct has been established to provide clear guidance on the expectations for behavior, ethics, and professional conduct for all staff members. It outlines the principles that should guide their actions and decisions, ensuring that their work is carried out in a manner that is consistent with the Church's teachings and the FABC's mission.

In Asia, where the challenges of poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and religious intolerance are ever-present, the role of the FABC and its staff is more critical than ever. The Church in Asia must be a voice for the voiceless, a defender of the vulnerable, and a source of unity in diversity. The staff of the FABC are called to embody these ideals, serving with a spirit of humility, respect, and a deep commitment to the common good.

This Code of Conduct is not merely a set of rules but a reflection of the values and principles that define the FABC's work. It is intended to foster a culture of accountability, transparency, and mutual respect, where every staff member feels empowered to contribute to the Church's mission. It is FABC's commitment to integrity, excellence, service, and to upholding the highest standards of conduct among its staff, grounded in the teachings of the Gospel and the rich traditions of the Church.

This Code serves as a guide and inspiration for all who work within the FABC, helping staff members to navigate the challenges of the time with faith, courage, and a steadfast commitment to the values that the Church in Asia hold dear.

1. Respect for Human Dignity

1.1 Upholding Dignity and Respect in the Workplace

All staff members are expected to treat one another, as well as all visitors, partners, and stakeholders, with dignity and respect. This includes respecting the rights, cultural differences, and personal beliefs of others, fostering an inclusive and welcoming work environment.

1.2 Prohibition of Discrimination and Harassment

Discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, disability, religion, or any other characteristic is strictly prohibited. Harassment, including sexual

harassment, bullying, and any form of abusive behavior, will not be tolerated. Staff members must contribute to a workplace free from such negative conduct and report any incidents immediately.

1.3 Promotion of Inclusivity and Equity

The FABC is committed to promoting inclusivity and equity within its offices. Staff members are encouraged to support and participate in initiatives that promote diversity, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all, ensuring that everyone feels valued and respected in the workplace.

2. Commitment to the Mission and Values of the Church

2.1 Alignment with the Church's Teachings

Staff members are expected to align their professional conduct with the teachings and values of the Catholic Church. This includes upholding the principles of faith, justice, charity, and social responsibility in all aspects of their work.

2.2 Professional and Personal Integrity

Staff members must demonstrate integrity, honesty, fairness, and consistency in all their professional dealings, avoiding any actions that could compromise the mission or reputation of the FABC.

2.3 Participation in Ongoing Formation

Staff members are encouraged to engage in ongoing personal and professional formation, including spiritual and ethical education, to enhance their understanding of the Church's teachings and to better serve the mission of the FABC.

3. Professionalism and Excellence in Service

3.1 High Standards of Work Performance

Staff members are expected to perform their duties with diligence, accuracy, and excellence. This includes being punctual, meeting deadlines, and producing high-quality work that reflects the professionalism of the FABC.

3.2 Accountability and Responsibility

Each staff member is responsible for their actions and decisions. They must be accountable for their work, taking responsibility for any errors or shortcomings and making efforts to correct them. Staff should also be proactive in seeking guidance or clarification when needed.

3.3 Collaboration and Teamwork

Staff members should work cooperatively with colleagues, sharing information, resources, and support to achieve common goals. Respectful communication and constructive feedback are vital components of a healthy team environment.

4. Transparency and Ethical Conduct

4.1 Honesty and Integrity in Financial Matters

Staff members must handle all financial matters with the utmost honesty and integrity. This includes accurate record-keeping, transparent reporting, and the ethical use of funds.

and resources. Any form of financial misconduct, such as fraud or embezzlement, will result in disciplinary action.

4.2 Conflict of Interest Avoidance

Staff members must avoid situations where their personal interests could conflict with their professional responsibilities. Any potential conflicts of interest should be disclosed immediately to supervisors, and steps should be taken to mitigate such conflicts.

4.3 Ethical Use of Resources

The resources of the FABC, including time, materials, and information, must be used responsibly and for their intended purposes. Staff members should avoid waste and ensure that resources are utilized in a manner that supports the mission and values of the FABC.

5. Confidentiality and Information Security

5.1 Protection of Confidential Information

Staff members are entrusted with sensitive information that must be handled with the highest level of confidentiality. This includes personal data, financial information, and any other proprietary or sensitive information related to the FABC's operations. Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information is strictly prohibited.

5.2 Responsible Communication

All forms of communication, whether written, oral, or digital, should be conducted with professionalism and respect for confidentiality. Staff members should ensure that any information shared externally reflects the values and mission of the FABC and does not compromise its reputation or security.

5.3 Adherence to Data Protection Policies

Staff members must comply with all applicable data protection and privacy laws, as well as FABC policies, regarding the collection, storage, and processing of personal data. This includes taking appropriate measures to safeguard data against unauthorized access, loss, or misuse.

6. Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults

6.1 Commitment to Safeguarding

The FABC is committed to the protection of minors and vulnerable adults. Staff members must adhere to all safeguarding policies and procedures, ensuring that the FABC activities and events are safe environments for everyone. This includes participating in safeguarding training and being vigilant in identifying and reporting any concerns.

6.2 Reporting and Addressing Concerns

Any suspicion or knowledge of abuse, exploitation, or neglect must be reported immediately to the appropriate authorities, following the FABC's safeguarding procedures. Staff members have a duty to take all allegations seriously and to support the affected individuals while ensuring that the proper investigative processes are followed.

6.3 Creating Safe Environments

Staff members should actively contribute to creating safe environments in all FABC activities and events. This includes adhering to safeguarding measures, promoting

awareness, and fostering a culture of respect and protection for all individuals, particularly minors and vulnerable adults.

7. Commitment to Social Justice and the Common Good

7.1 Advocacy for Justice and Peace

Staff members should support initiatives that promote social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability, both within their work and in their broader engagement with society.

7.2 Supporting Marginalized Communities

The FABC is committed to serving marginalized and vulnerable communities across Asia. Staff members are encouraged to support outreach programs and initiatives that address the needs of these communities, promoting equity, inclusion, and empowerment.

7.3 Environmental Stewardship

Staff members should support and implement environmentally sustainable practices within the FABC offices, such as reducing waste, conserving resources, and advocating for eco-friendly policies.

8. Professional Development and Continuous Learning

8.1 Commitment to Learning and Growth

The FABC encourages all staff members to pursue ongoing professional development and continuous learning. This includes attending workshops, seminars, and training programs that enhance their skills and knowledge, particularly in areas related to their roles within the FABC.

8.2 Supporting Others' Development

Staff members should also contribute to the development of their colleagues by sharing knowledge, offering mentorship, and fostering an environment of mutual learning and support. This helps to build a more capable and cohesive team.

8.3 Spiritual Formation

In addition to professional development, staff members are encouraged to engage in spiritual formation activities that deepen their faith and enhance their ability to integrate their spiritual and professional lives.

9. Conflict Resolution and Constructive Dialogue

9.1 Addressing Conflicts Constructively

Conflicts should be addressed constructively and with a focus on resolution. Staff members are encouraged to engage in open and respectful dialogue when conflicts arise, seeking to understand different perspectives and finding mutually agreeable solutions.

9.2 Mediation and Support

When conflicts cannot be resolved directly, staff members should seek the assistance of a mediator or supervisor to facilitate a resolution. The FABC is committed to providing the necessary support and resources to help resolve conflicts in a way that upholds the dignity and respect of all parties involved.

10. Compliance and Enforcement

10.1 Adherence to the Code of Conduct

All staff members are required to familiarize themselves with this Code of Conduct and adhere to its principles and guidelines in their daily work. The FABC will provide training and resources to support staff in understanding and applying the Code.

10.2 Reporting Violations

Staff members have a duty to immediately report any violations of this Code of Conduct. Reports can be made confidentially to designated authorities within the FABC, and all reports will be taken seriously and investigated promptly and fairly.

10.3 Disciplinary Actions

Violations of this Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary actions, which could include reprimand, suspension, or termination of one's role in the FABC, depending on the severity of the breach. The FABC is committed to enforcing this Code consistently and justly, ensuring that all staff members are held accountable for their actions.

This Code of Conduct serves as a guide for the ethical and professional behavior expected of all staff members working in the FABC Central Secretariat in Bangkok and all FABC offices across Asia. Each staff member's dedication to upholding this Code ensures that the work of the FABC is carried out with integrity, respect, and a deep sense of responsibility to the peoples of Asia and beyond.

This document is formally approved by the FABC's highest governing bodies, ensuring that it carries the full weight of the organization's authority and commitment.

Approved by:



His Eminence Felipe Neri Cardinal Ferrao
President

Date: 04 March 2026
Place: Bangkok, Thailand



His Eminence Isao Cardinal Kikuchi, SVD

Secretary General
Date: 04 March 2026
Place: Bangkok, Thailand



Fr. William LaRousse

Assistant Secretary General
Date: 04 March 2026
Place: Bangkok, Thailand

Appendix 1A - The FABC Standards of Behavior towards Children

The FABC staff and beneficiaries must remain aware of perceptions and appearances in their language, actions, and relationships to children and safeguard them from harm. Staff and beneficiaries should be aware at all times to uphold the dignity of each child, and treat children with respect.

The following outline provides behavioral expectations of all staff and beneficiaries when interacting with children (any person under 18 years of age).

The FABC staff and beneficiaries:

MUST	MUST NOT
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct themselves in a manner consistent with values of the FABC, including complying with the FABC Code of Conduct 2. Treat all children and their families with respect, regardless of race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, sexual orientation national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status 3. Listen to children 4. Provide welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for children that prevents all forms of abuse and exploitation. 5. Be sensitive when they are around children (i.e. language, conversations, touch, gestures) 6. Respect cultural differences which do not harm children 7. Be transparent in actions and whereabouts 8. Have at least one other adult present when they are with a child. Care and discretion must be used on all one-on-one situations 9. Ensure that an adult caretaker is present when transporting a child; and if not possible, obtain appropriate permission 10. Report any concerns of abuse or exploitation against a child 11. Disclose all charges or convictions if they relate to child 12. Comply with relevant country legislation 13. Ensure contact with children is supervised, accompanied or at least in sight of other adults. 14. Respect all the rights of the child as enshrined in the Convention for the Rights of Child (1989). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hit and physically abuse children (even if culturally acceptable) 2. Emotionally, verbally abuse or bully a child, or vulnerable adult 3. Be harsh toward a child or vulnerable adult. If a child expresses discomfort, stop the behavior 4. Have sex or engage in any sexual activity with a child including inappropriate touch 5. Send degrading or harmful written or verbal messages to a child, such as sextexting, showing pornographic material like images, videos etc 6. Use any computers, mobiles, video cameras or social media to exploit or harass children, or access, download or share child exploitation material 7. Hire a child 8. Encourage a child to meet with them outside of work-related activities 9. Take a child to their homes 10. Find themselves alone with a child (there may be exceptions) 11. Do things for a child of a personal nature that they are able to do for themselves 12. Show favoritism 13. Use alcohol, drugs or tobacco in the company of children.

Appendix 1B - The FABC Standards of Behavior towards Vulnerable Adults

The FABC staff and beneficiaries must understand their ethical and legal responsibilities towards caring for vulnerable individuals and follow at all times clear protocols in accordance with the Holy See’s directives outlined in the **Motu Proprio “Vos Estis Lux Mundi”**.

The following outline provides behavioral expectations of all staff and beneficiaries when interacting with vulnerable adults.

The FABC staff and beneficiaries:

MUST	MUST NOT
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Treat vulnerable adults with respect, recognizing their inherent dignity. 2. Actively create and maintain a safe environment for vulnerable adults. 3. Ensure informed consent is given for any care or service provided. 4. Report any suspicions, allegations, or evidence of abuse to the appropriate authorities immediately. 5. Offer appropriate pastoral care and emotional support to vulnerable adults. 6. Protect the confidentiality of a vulnerable adult’s personal information unless required by law to disclose. 7. Adhere to established safeguarding policies and procedures within the Church and local legal framework. 8. Ensure appropriate supervision during interactions with vulnerable adults, particularly in private or one-on-one situations 9. Respect the decisions of vulnerable adults, where they can make informed choices. 10. Ensure clear and professional boundaries in interactions with vulnerable adults, maintaining appropriate physical and emotional distance. 11. If physical contact is necessary (e.g., assisting with mobility), always seek explicit permission and explain actions beforehand. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage in any form of physical, emotional, sexual, or financial abuse against vulnerable adults. 2. Coerce or manipulate vulnerable adults into actions or decisions against their will. 3. Ignore or cover up any allegations, suspicions, or evidence of abuse. 4. Share personal information about vulnerable adults without consent, except when legally required. 5. Isolating vulnerable adults from others, especially in private spaces. 6. Exploit the vulnerability of adults for personal gain, financial benefit, or other forms of manipulation. 7. Discriminate against vulnerable adults based on race, gender, disability, age, or any other characteristic. 8. Engage in unprofessional relationships with vulnerable adults, including overly familiar behavior or favoritism. 9. Engage in behaviors that could be construed as “grooming” vulnerable adults for future exploitation or abuse. 10. Delay in reporting concerns or incidents of abuse; immediate action is critical.

Annex 2: Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures on Safeguarding Concerns

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is committed to creating a safe environment for all individuals, especially vulnerable groups, by ensuring that any concerns or incidents of harm are reported and handled appropriately. The following step-by-step reporting procedures are designed to protect the data and dignity of those involved, provide a clear sequence of actions, define the roles and responsibilities of those involved in case processing, ensure compliance with Church law, and outline guidelines for communication with the public and media.

These procedures are designed to:

- Ensure that all concerns are received and responded to in a timely and professional manner;
- Protect the dignity, rights, and privacy of all individuals involved;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities in the case handling process;
- Maintain consistency with the **Case Management Procedures** outlined in this policy;
- Ensure compliance with applicable canonical norms and ecclesiastical directives;
- Guide internal and external communications responsibly.

1. Reporting Channels

1.1 Initial Reporting

All FABC staff, beneficiaries, member conference personnel, and any individuals who interact with or are served by the FABC are **encouraged and obliged** to report any safeguarding concerns or suspicions of abuse. Reports should be made to the **designated Safeguarding Officer**, who serves as the primary point of contact and is responsible for receiving and initiating action on safeguarding complaints.

Anyone who has reasonable grounds to believe that a breach of the **FABC Code of Conduct** or the **Safeguarding Policy** has occurred may raise a concern through the following steps:

- Identify the concern and confirm that it falls within the scope of safeguarding (i.e., involving children, vulnerable adults, or breaches of ethical conduct);
- Fill out the **Safeguarding Concern Report Form** (see **Appendix A**);
- Submit the completed form directly to the **Safeguarding Officer**, either in person, via secure email, or through other confidential reporting channels established by the FABC.

Anonymous reports are permitted but must include sufficient detail to allow proper assessment and response.

1.2 Immediate Action by the Safeguarding Officer

Upon receipt of a report, the **Safeguarding Officer** shall promptly:

- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint, if the reporter is identifiable, and assure the individual that the matter will be handled with confidentiality and urgency.

- Conduct an initial review to assess the nature and seriousness of the concern, and to determine whether:
 - The concern falls under the scope of the FABC Safeguarding Policy;
 - Immediate protective or precautionary measures are needed;
 - The concern requires mandatory reporting to civil or Church authorities.
- Initiate a preliminary assessment (in accordance with Section 1.9: Case Management Procedures) to evaluate the credibility of the concern and determine appropriate next steps. This may include:
 - Gathering initial facts or clarifying information;
 - Consulting with relevant safeguarding experts or Church legal advisors;
 - Recommending interim safeguarding measures to the competent ecclesiastical authority.
- Document the report and actions taken, ensuring accurate and secure record-keeping in line with FABC safeguarding standards.
- Refer the case to the appropriate internal or external authority, including the competent diocesan bishop, religious superior, or civil authorities, if the concern involves a cleric or constitutes a civil offense.
- Maintain communication with the reporter (if known), and other relevant parties as appropriate, ensuring pastoral care is made available to those affected.

1.3 Role of the Safeguarding Team

The Safeguarding Team, led by the Safeguarding Officer and composed of designated safeguarding point persons from across the FABC member Episcopal Conferences and regional desks, plays a vital supporting role in the case management process. Their responsibilities in handling complaints include:

- Providing insight and support during the initial assessment, especially when contextual understanding is required based on legal, cultural, or ecclesial frameworks in the territory concerned;
- Assisting in coordination and follow-up with local safeguarding bodies or Church authorities, ensuring alignment between all levels;
- Serving as resource persons for pastoral support, documentation gathering, and referral to civil or ecclesiastical authorities, as appropriate;
- Participating in case discussions, as invited by the Safeguarding Officer, particularly in complex or cross-jurisdictional matters;
- Ensuring confidentiality and professionalism in all communications and interventions related to the case;
- Contributing to the post-case review process, helping the Safeguarding Officer assess outcomes and recommend improvements to the safeguarding framework.

1.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The confidentiality of the reporter and all parties involved is of utmost importance. When a report is made, the Safeguarding Officer will ensure that the information is handled with the highest level of confidentiality. The identity of the reporter will be protected where possible; however, the reporter's choice of anonymity may affect the ability to conduct a thorough investigation. If anonymity is requested, the Safeguarding Officer will discuss the potential limitations with the reporter to ensure they fully understand the implications.

1.3 Mandatory Reporting

In line with Church law and local legal requirements, certain cases must be reported to higher Church authorities or external authorities, such as the police. This includes instances of sexual abuse, physical abuse, or other serious safeguarding concerns. The Safeguarding Officer will be responsible for determining when a report needs to be escalated and will ensure that all mandatory reporting obligations are met.

1.4 Documentation and Data Protection

All reports must be carefully documented by the Safeguarding Officer. This documentation should include the details of the concern, the steps taken in response, and any outcomes of the investigation. The Safeguarding Officer must ensure that all personal data collected during the reporting process is handled in accordance with the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) and other relevant data protection laws. This includes securing records to prevent unauthorized access and ensuring that data is only used for the purposes of investigating and addressing the concern.

2. Investigation and Response

2.1 Preliminary Assessment

Upon receiving a report, the Safeguarding Officer will conduct a preliminary assessment to determine the severity of the concern and the appropriate next steps. This assessment involves gathering initial information, evaluating the credibility of the report, and determining whether the concern requires immediate action. The Safeguarding Officer may consult with other experts within the FABC or external safeguarding professionals to ensure that the assessment is thorough and accurate.

The preliminary investigation will be conducted in accordance with the **norms regarding delicts reserved to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF)**, which is the body of the Holy See responsible for investigating and handling cases of clerical misconduct (**11 October 2021**), as outlined by the Holy See. This will ensure that all procedures align with the established standards for addressing serious offenses and safeguarding within the Church.

Commented [MM1]: When the Bishop finds semblance of truth in the pre-liminary investigation he referred the case to DDF. See CIC 1717. I understood the Bishop plays the initial role here. Please double check.

2.2 Escalation and Reporting to Authorities

If the preliminary assessment indicates that the concern is serious, the Safeguarding Officer will escalate the matter to the appropriate higher authorities within the FABC, such as the Secretary General, the Assistant Secretary General, or relevant office heads. When the alleged offender is a cleric, the process falls under the jurisdiction of the DDF, particularly in cases of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable persons. The investigation and judicial process for such cases are typically managed by ecclesiastical authorities, including the local bishop or religious superior, in coordination with the DDF.

In cases of severe harm or where there is a risk to the safety of individuals, the Safeguarding Officer will also notify the relevant civil authorities, including the police, in compliance with local laws.

Reporting to Church authorities, such as the Nuncio, the bishops, or the heads of religious congregations, is mandatory in cases of sexual misconduct, abuse, or other grave offenses that fall under their jurisdiction. The Safeguarding Officer will follow the procedural requirements outlined in ecclesiastical documents such as the Holy See's *Motu Proprio Vos Estis Lux Mundi* and/or the *Vademecum on Certain Points of Procedure in Treating Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Committed by Clerics* (Version 2.0, 5 June 2022), to ensure that the Church's protocols are followed correctly.

2.3 Consultation with Experts

During the investigation process, the Safeguarding Officer may need to consult with external experts, such as legal professionals, child protection specialists, or psychologists. These consultations are essential for ensuring that the investigation is conducted with the necessary expertise and that the rights and well-being of all parties involved are protected. The Safeguarding Officer must maintain confidentiality during these consultations and ensure that any advice received is documented and used appropriately.

2.4 Investigation Process

The investigation process should be conducted in a manner that is thorough, impartial, and respectful of all parties involved. The Safeguarding Officer will assist in the initial stages of the investigation, including gathering preliminary information, conducting initial assessments, and taking the necessary actions to ensure the case is properly referred to the relevant and responsible authorities within the Church. The Safeguarding Officer will collaborate with other relevant parties as needed, noting that the lead responsibility for the investigation of abuse committed by a cleric will lie with the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities, as mandated by the Holy See.

If the investigation finds that safeguarding policies have been breached, appropriate actions will be taken by FABC in accordance with FABC policies and local legal requirements to address the violation and ensure accountability.

2.5 Communication with Parties Involved

Throughout the investigation, the Safeguarding Officer should maintain regular communication with the individual who made the report (if they are not anonymous) and any other parties directly involved. These communications should provide updates on the status of the investigation and inform the parties of any actions that will be taken as a result of the findings. Care should be taken to ensure that communication is clear, compassionate, and respectful.

3. Support for Affected Individuals

3.1 Providing Support

The FABC is committed to offering support to all individuals affected by harm or abuse. This support may include counseling, legal assistance, and spiritual guidance. The Safeguarding Officer will work with other FABC offices or external agencies to provide these services to those in need. The support offered should be tailored to the specific needs of the affected individual, with a focus on their well-being and recovery.

3.2 Ongoing Care

In addition to immediate support, the FABC recognizes the need for ongoing care for those affected by safeguarding issues. The Safeguarding Officer, in collaboration with other FABC departments, will arrange for long-term support services, such as ongoing counseling or pastoral care, to help individuals heal and regain their sense of security.

3.3 Respecting Privacy and Dignity

All support services will be provided in a manner that respects the privacy and dignity of the affected individuals. This includes ensuring confidentiality in all communications and interactions and obtaining consent before sharing any personal information with external service providers.

4. Guidelines for Dealing with the Public and Media

4.1 Media Relations

In cases where safeguarding concerns become public, the FABC must manage its communication with the media carefully to protect the privacy of those involved and to maintain the integrity of the investigation. The Central Secretariat will designate a spokesperson responsible for handling all media inquiries related to safeguarding cases. This spokesperson will work closely with the Safeguarding Officer and other relevant authorities to ensure that all public statements are accurate, consistent with legal requirements, and respectful of the ongoing investigative process.

4.2 Public Statements

Public statements should be prepared in advance, whenever possible, and reviewed by legal counsel to ensure they do not compromise the investigation or the rights of the individuals involved. The FABC's public communications should emphasize its commitment to safeguarding, the steps being taken to address the concern, and the resources available to those affected. Care should be taken to avoid making statements that could be perceived as dismissive or defensive, as this could damage the FABC's reputation and undermine public trust.

4.3 Social Media Guidelines

Social media presents unique challenges in managing public perceptions and maintaining confidentiality during a safeguarding investigation. The FABC prohibits the sharing of any confidential information related to safeguarding cases, discourages speculative or inflammatory comments, and emphasizes the importance of protecting the dignity and privacy of all individuals involved.

The use of photos and videos related to safeguarding cases should be strictly controlled to protect the privacy of those involved. Any images or videos that could identify individuals involved in a safeguarding concern should not be shared publicly without explicit consent. If it is necessary to use photos or videos in public communications, the FABC should ensure that they are carefully selected and edited to avoid revealing identifying information.

The designated spokesperson should also monitor social media channels for any discussions or disclosures related to the safeguarding concern and take appropriate action to address misinformation or unauthorized disclosures. This may include issuing corrective statements or requesting the removal of inappropriate content.

4.5 Internal Communications

Internal communications about safeguarding cases should be managed with the same level of care as public communications. The Safeguarding Officer should ensure that all personnel are informed about the appropriate procedures for reporting concerns and the importance of maintaining confidentiality. Internal communications should also provide guidance on how to respond to inquiries from the public or media, emphasizing the need to refer all such inquiries to the designated spokesperson.

The FABC's reporting procedures are designed to ensure a thorough, respectful, and legally compliant response to any safeguarding concerns. By following these steps, the FABC seeks to protect vulnerable individuals, uphold the principles of justice and transparency, and maintain the trust of the communities it serves.

Appendix A: Report Form

Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures on Safeguarding Concerns

Instructions

Any suspicion or concern of abuse or exploitation of a child or an adult involving the FABC staff¹ and beneficiaries² must be reported as required in the FABC Complaint Handling Policy and Procedure and Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy. If you are unable to complete all of the sections, fill in what you do know. If there is more than one victim, please complete a separate report for each victim. The reporter's identity will not be disclosed except on a "need-to-know" basis. If the reporter believes danger is imminent to themselves or anyone involved, you should alert the FABC *Safeguarding Office/Consultant* at once, safeguarding@fabc.org. The FABC is committed to addressing and responding to all reports.

If an immediate threat to life exists or if emergency assistance is needed, please contact your local authorities and alert local senior management at once. The purpose of this Report Form is to report any suspicious activity of abuse or exploitation for the FABC to assess and determine next course.

REPORTED BY:

Does the **Reporter** wish to be identified?

Yes No

If yes, Reporter name and contact information

First Name _____

M. Initial _____

Last Name _____

Phone Number *Include the area code or country code*

Preferred _____

Alternative _____

Email: _____

Name of Organization _____

Job Title _____

¹ Staff refers to the Central Secretariat in Bangkok, all Office bishops, secretaries, and other volunteers who would be involved during a workshop, seminar or conference including the consultants or speakers.

² Beneficiaries refer to all who attend FABC events, including the bishops, clergy, religious and lay faithful.

VICTIM:

Is the victim a child or an adult?

Child Adult

Victim Identity:

First Name _____

M. Initial _____

Last Name _____

Nick Name _____

Unknown (If you are unable to provide the victim's identity, check Unknown.)
Approximate age _____ Gender _____

Child refers to all persons under the age of 18
Provide any additional information

Caregiver/Guardian/Relative:

First Name _____

M. Initial _____

Last Name _____

Unknown
(If you are unable to provide the caregiver/Guardian/Relative's identity, check Unknown.)

Phone Number *Include the area code or country code*

Preferred _____

Alternative _____

Physical Address _____
(Include: name of village, street name, city, house, building)

Approximate age _____ Gender _____

INCIDENT DETAILS Type of Incident:

(Check all that apply)

- Sexual Abuse (e.g., fondling, kissing, non-contact sexual activity, rape)
- Exploitation (e.g. sex trafficking, forced prostitution, survival sex, child labor)
- Emotional Abuse (e.g. intimidation, threats, humiliation, bullying)
- Physical Abuse (e.g. hitting, kicking, shaking)

Other (Define other)

Location:

Country _____

Physical Address _____
(Include: name of village, street name, city, house, building)

Dates:

Approximate Date of Incident: Month _____ Date _____ Year _____

Date Reported: Month _____ Date _____ Year _____

Physical and Emotional State:

Physical and Emotional state of victim *(Check all that apply)*

- Cuts, bruises, welts, scratches
- Behavioral changes (e.g., angry, crying, acting out, withdrawn, sudden illness)
- Other

Please further describe the physical and emotional state of the victim.

Impairment or Disability:

Does the victim have a physical impairment or disability?

Yes No Do Not Know

If yes, describe the impairment or disability.

Become Aware:

How did the reporter become aware of this incident?

Witnessed it Other (Define other)

Safety of Victim:

Was the victim in immediate danger prior to completing this form? Yes No

Were the proper authorities and senior management contacted (as appropriate)? Yes

No

Please provide any additional information.

SUSPECT:

First Name _____

M. Initial _____

Last Name _____

Unknown (If you are unable to provide the respondent's identity, check Unknown.)

Phone Number Include the area code or country code Unknown Phone Number

Preferred _____

Email _____

Physical Address _____
(Include: name of village, street name, city, house, building)

Unknown Email Unknown Address

Approximate age _____ Gender _____

Name of Organization _____

Job Title _____

Physical Description of Respondent:

MORE INFORMATION:

Are there any other persons with more information? Yes No

If yes, provide details: