

LIVING TOGETHER WITH RESPECT & DIGNITY

Congregation of
Our Lady of Charity
of the Good Shepherd





CONTENTS

Short note from Leadership	2
Glossary/Definition	2
Introduction	3
Code of Conduct	5
The Mediation Procedure	7
Appendix 1	11
Appendix 2	12

Version Control

Version	Date	Action
0.1	2 nd May 2023	Living Together with Respect & Dignity. Approved by The Leadership Team

Welcome to our Respect and Dignity Policy

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd Irish Province, strives to create a safe environment in which all sisters and those we encounter daily, feel respected and treated with dignity at all stages of their lives.

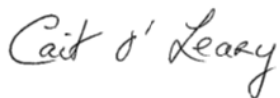
As outlined in our 31st Congregational Chapter under Universal Culture of Justice; *“There is a yearning to be heard, to be included, to be visible, and to be treated with respect and dignity.”*

Our Constitutions, Article 5, say: *“Our relationship with those we meet should be for them a means of encounter with Jesus the Good Shepherd.”*

This Policy covers the underlying values and principles out of which we strive to live our lives. The Code of Conduct aims to help our Congregation to provide a positive, nurturing and supportive environment for everyone, offers guidance if we feel our dignity has been lessened, and the supports that are available to us.

May the Spirit be our guide as we journey on this road together and thank you to each one of you for your commitment.

Thank you to all who have enabled this Policy to come to fruition.



Sr. Cait O'Leary
Province Leader

Glossary/Definition

Respect and Dignity; “St. Mary Euphrasia recognised the image of God in each person, instilling in her sisters respect for the dignity of all persons” (Constitutions – Prologue). Our Constitutions and the Scriptures guide us in our understanding of respect and dignity. We learn from Jesus’ example how to “witness to the sacredness of relationships in a world increasingly insensitive to the dignity and value of each person” (Const. 17). We approach each person we meet with courtesy and respect.

INTRODUCTION

Policy Statement

We uphold the right of each sister of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd to have her dignity honoured and to be treated with courtesy and respect. Likewise, we affirm the right of each person encountered by our sisters to be treated with the same courtesy and respect. Violations of these rights are unacceptable. We are committed to eliminating any form of inappropriate behaviour, real or imaginary, in our interactions with each other in the Congregation and with all whom we encounter in daily life.

Scope of Policy

This Policy applies to all sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and is to be adhered to in all contexts: with each other and with staff in the community and with colleagues in other workplaces. Compliance with the Values and Code of Conduct in this document will ensure best practice in all our relationships.

The Underlying Values and Code of Conduct in this document provide guidelines for best practice in how we relate to others and can support us in living our commitment to form communities “characterised by sisterly love, warmth and concern” (Const. 18).

Underlying Values

1. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” ([John 13:34–35](#))
2. “Our relationship with those we meet should be for them a means of encounter with Jesus the Good Shepherd... Our love should awaken in them a sense of their worth and dignity as children of God” (Const. 5).
3. “One person is of more value than a whole world” (St. M. Euphrasia)

Province Leadership will ensure that our communities are safe environments where each person feels respected.

Leadership will ensure that all persons in positions of responsibility are given guidance and training on the importance of identifying mannerisms that may lead to bullying. When incidents of inappropriate behaviour are brought to the attention of Province Leadership they will act appropriately and swiftly.

Underlying Principles

- All sisters whatever their circumstances have an equal right to be respected and to be treated justly.
- Communication and reconciliation are central to the religious way of life.
- Called as we are to be responsible and accountable in all aspects of our lives and in this to uphold and promote the common good.
- Peace and community cannot co-exist with injustice or serious conflict.
- Where two or three are gathered together Christian values must be evident.

Context, guiding principles and policies.

Our approach to this work is also guided by a number of key national and international principles and standards as set out in Appendix (2).

CODE OF CONDUCT

This Code of Conduct is part of a wider framework of our Policies. Legislation, regulatory requirement, professional standards, congregational and organisational policies, procedures, protocols, and guidelines that support and require the compliance of Sisters. Appendix (1).

What to do if you are concerned about yourself?

If a sister feels that her dignity is being lessened by any actions/verbal exchange/attitude that is unacceptable or inappropriate, the sister ought to make this known, at an appropriate time and manner, in the first instance in the community in which she is residing, hopeful of securing an informal resolution.

Distinction has to be made between the actual exchange and the later interpretation the individual makes of it.

In a situation where the person feels that she continues to be undermined or at risk, the following more formal approach may be taken.

The sister who wishes to make a formal complaint to a member of the PLT should, with help, if necessary, record relevant details and instances with dates, times and locations and put these in writing.

The PLT member takes the matter very seriously and she (with guidance from a professional psychologist) will meet first with the complainant and then with the person against whom the complaint is made.

The PLT member, approaching the matter from the stance of the Underlying Values (listed above), will inform the sister of the allegation made against her, listen to her response and her version of the exchange between them.

It is indicated to the person against whom the complaint is made that within a specified time there will be a meeting with her and the sister who made the allegation.

Having reflected and considered all that was heard from both parties they will reflect and make an assessment of the situation.

The PLT member (with assistance from a relevant professional) meets again with each party and if they deem the situation to be serious, they formally state that any behaviour that lessens the dignity of another is totally unacceptable and contrary to the spirit of the congregation. Efforts will be made to ensure that the unacceptable behaviour will cease. Both parties are encouraged to avail of professional help.

A date is set to review the situation within one month. The sisters involved will form part of this meeting.

If the unacceptable behaviour continues the PLT member will propose a solution/resolution which may involve changes in residence/ministry. A commitment from both parties to respond differently to exchanges will be requested. Consideration will be given to the implementation of the Mediation Procedure, if informal, and more formal approaches are not successful.

Province Leadership have a responsibility to:

1. Ensure that all members are familiar with Safeguarding Policies and related documents.
2. Local Leaders should look out for trends in the behaviour of vulnerable sister that may indicate hidden bullying, e.g., reluctance ever to express an opinion on community living, reluctance to take part in conversation when certain others are present, difficulty in making statements with respect to what she feels, seeming to be afraid of another member of the group, or afraid of annoying/disturbing that person.
3. The Leader will take whatever practical steps are necessary to foster better relations between the sisters in question.

A sister who considers others as victims of bullying or observes manipulation in relationships, has a serious obligation to take one or more of the steps as outlined above.

Sisters should be able to recognise the different types of behaviour that do not uphold the dignity and respect of each person and comply with the code of conduct.

Disrespectful behaviours are often referred to as bullying or harassment and have no place in our emerging consciousness of wellbeing.

THE MEDIATION PROCEDURE

Our shared Christian responsibility to promote and demonstrate Gospel relationships calls us to act justly and to a willingness to forgive. It calls us to find ways to respond constructively when relationships are damaged. Injustices, real or perceived, are less likely to lead to intractable conflict or relationship breakdown when addressed from a values perspective which honours and respects the dignity of each person involved.

There are times when we fall short of our ideals and can have serious and seemingly irreconcilable differences. If the usual methods of conflict resolution fail in these situations, mediation may be a useful avenue for reconciliation and is available to Sisters as detailed in this Mediation Procedure.

PROCEDURE STATEMENT

In recognition of our responsibility to foster reconciliation, a Mediation Procedure is available to all members for the resolution of serious conflict. It is designed to be non-judgemental, confidential, culturally sensitive, easily accessible, and reflective of our commitment to right relationships, justice and reconciliation. Mediation can be defined as a voluntary conflict resolution process in which an impartial third party helps the parties in conflict to agree a solution that is acceptable to both, and which fosters the common good.

Underlying Principles

1. All Sisters, whatever their circumstances, have an equal right to be respected and treated justly.
2. Unity and reconciliation are central to our Congregational way of life.
3. We are called to be responsible and accountable in all aspects of our lives and to promote the common good.

Procedure Objectives

1. To promote the resolution of conflict:
 - ◇ Informally, by honest and open communication.
 - ◇ Through our Local/Provincial structures of governance.
2. To facilitate an amicable resolution of unresolved grievances and injustice through a mediation process.
3. To ensure the process is fair, and seen to be fair, to all the parties.

Who is it for?

The Mediation Procedure applies to the Congregation's membership (Sisters) and may involve:

- ◇ Two Sisters.
- ◇ A Sister and a group of Sisters.
- ◇ Two groups of Sisters.
- ◇ A Sister or group of Sisters in relation to Local, Provincial, or Congregational Leadership.

Under what circumstances?

Mediation may be necessary when:

- ◇ There is a real or perceived violation of a Sister's rights.
- ◇ There are situations of serious conflict among Sisters when a resolution has not been found by due process, either informally¹, or through our structures of governance².
- ◇ There are situations where a complaint which arises out of an act, decision, or omission which the affected person(s) consider to be unjust, wrongful, or discriminatory and which arises with the Congregation's membership.

¹ Informal efforts to resolve conflicts, such as Sisters not speaking to each other, include informing the Local Leader, seeking spiritual direction/counselling, or initiating a discernment.

² This refers to Local Leadership and Provincial Leadership Team (PLT) link person.

MATTERS WHICH ARE NOT REFERRED FOR MEDIATION

- ◇ Conflicts between Sisters which can be resolved by due process within the structures of the Province and/or Congregation.
 - ◇ Conflicts involving Sisters in ministry situations, outside of the Congregation e.g., Parishes, Diocese or within Organisations. In these situations, Sisters are recommended to present their grievances through the appropriate channels in their places of ministry.
 - ◇ Decisions relating to the process of Initial Formation.
 - ◇ Matters which are currently the subject of civil or criminal proceedings.
-

PROCEDURE

1. A list of Mediators is offered by Provincial Leadership. From this. The parties are invited to choose a mediator.
2. An *initial meeting* with both parties is the first stage in the process. This meeting is convened by the mediator in order to agree ground rules, including confidentiality about the process, a timeframe, and working guidelines.
3. In *the next stage*, the mediator arranges separate meetings with each of the parties. These meetings are designed to ensure that those involved:
 - ◇ Understand, and have confidence in, the mediation process and the mediator and have a shared understanding of the issues.
 - ◇ Begin to look at the values they hold in common.
 - ◇ Are asked to think about key issues identified by the mediator at the initial meeting so that they are better prepared for the joint meeting(s).
4. The parties will then be invited to a joint face-to-face meeting(s) where they will be facilitated in working towards a satisfactory outcome. There may be a need for an acknowledgement of all the issues that have led to the current situation, including varying perceptions of what those issues are before moving on to:
 - ◇ Mediated discussions.
 - ◇ Agreement about a way forward.

- ◇ Drafting of a formal agreement, if/when agreement is achieved.
- ◇ Agreement on what information, if any, should be furnished to the relevant, or competent leader.
- ◇ Informing the relevant leader should the mediation process be unsuccessful.

FAILURE OF THE MEDIATION PROCESS

If the mediator believes that the process is not achieving a desirable outcome, he/she informs the Provincial Leader or the Congregational Leader. The Congregational Leader receives the report when the Provincial or a Sister from her Team is a party to the conflict.

Code of Conduct; It sets out the standards of behaviour which are expected and gives a clear understanding of roles in ensuring quality and person-centeredness in everybody's approach. It will also support people to engage in a constructive and positive way.

Guidance on Code of Conduct

The Congregation has a responsibility to create and maintain a safe environment for all persons and will take seriously any suspicion or concerns or inappropriate behaviors and respond appropriately.

The Code of Conduct aims to help the Congregation to provide a positive nurturing and supportive environment for all persons. The intention is to:

- Provide guidance for all sisters and associated people on good practice in working with children, persons in vulnerable situations and in community where we live.
- Reduce the risk of harm to anyone.
- Reduce the risk of complaints or concerns being made against any members of Congregation.

The Code of Conduct relates to all persons who participate in or are affected by the Congregation's activities including:

- All Program participants
- Staff or volunteers

The Congregation expects all sisters to treat every person with the professional standards of respect, care and dignity. However, in contact with children and persons in vulnerable situations, we must also take into account:

- **The developmental needs** of children and persons in vulnerable situations when planning activities.
- **additional legal requirements or responsibilities** due to the vulnerable person's age. This might include considerations such as the age of consent; drinking alcohol; gaining the consent of a parent or guardian to activities.
- Use positive and appropriate language.
- Use physical contact carefully.
- Avoid being alone with a child or person in vulnerable situation (in tutoring or mentoring situations, meet in open places or leave the office door open if possible).
- Keep healthy boundary in building relationship.
- Practice media ethics when in use of internet and any social media.
- Contact without delay to Safeguarding Focal Person/s when a person discloses about abuse concern.

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

- Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse Interim Guidance 2022.

Click here for link: <https://goodshepherdsisters.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Safeguarding-Adults-at-Risk-of-Abuse-Interim-Guidance-2022.pdf>.

International law, policy and guidance:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) Article 1, 18 & 19.

Republic of Ireland law, policy and guidance

- Draft HSE Adult Safeguarding Policy (2019)
 - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018)
 - National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons Act), 2012-2016
 - Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act, 2010
 - Criminal Justice Act, 2006
 - The Constitution of Ireland
-



Province Administration Office
63 Lower Sean McDermott Street, Dublin 1, D01 NX93
Tel: +3531 871 1109, **Email:** province.office@rgs.ie, **Website:** www.goodshepherdsisters.ie