



 **ACSL**  
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING LTD  
*A safe Church for everyone*

# 2022-2023 Annual Report

1 July 2022 – 31 December 2023

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING LTD



## **Acknowledgement to victims and survivors of abuse**

*Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd acknowledges the lifelong trauma of abuse victims, survivors and their families, the failure of the Catholic Church to protect, believe and respond justly to children and adults at risk, and the consequent breaches of community trust.*

*Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd is committed to fostering a culture of safety and care for children and adults at risk.*

## **Acknowledgement of country**

*Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd respectfully acknowledges all Traditional Owners of the land and waters of Australia. We pay respect to their Elders, past and present, and young leaders of today and the future.*

*ACSL commits itself to the ongoing work of reconciliation with our Aboriginal families and communities.*



*A safe Church for everyone*

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# About ACSL

Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL) has been created to promote and oversee a nationally consistent, comprehensive and sustainable framework for the protection of children and adults at risk within the Church in Australia. We have zero tolerance of abuse and we work to ensure a safe Church for everyone.

## OUR VISION

Nurturing and safe Catholic entities that are committed to reflective practice in safeguarding, open to external scrutiny, and accountable for how they protect children and adults at risk from abuse in their encounters with the Church.

## OUR MISSION

Supporting Church Leaders and Catholic entities in their work to foster a culture of safety and protection of children, young people, and adults within the Catholic Church across Australia.

## VALUES

### Leadership

*we are courageous in promoting the rights and safety of children and adults at risk as they engage with the ministries of the Catholic Church.*

### Respect

*we value and respect children, families, professionals, Church Authorities and each other, always.*

### Integrity

*our work is based on evidence and expertise. It is always ethical and transparent.*

### Compassion

*we honour the dignity of all and work with understanding, respect, and care.*

### Equity

*we promote and support empowerment and inclusiveness in how we work and what we do.*

We work to embed our values in everything we do.



# Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures

This contemporary Aboriginal artwork was commissioned by ACSL. It tells the story of ACSL's mission: to create a culture of safety, care, and respect within the Catholic Church in Australia, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It celebrates inclusion, restorative practice, and the concept of safe spaces while representing the transformative journey of healing and spirituality.

Created by nationally recognised Aboriginal Artist and Wiradjuri woman, Lani Balzan, it tells the story of ACSL and its commitment to creating safe spaces for all, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Through a blend of symbols and colours, this piece reflects the journey of healing, spirituality, and community.



*"The central element of the artwork is the Gathering Symbol, representing Australian Catholic Safeguarding as an organisation. This symbol is adorned with a cross, embodying spirituality, faith, and guidance, which ACSL provides to those in need.*

*Surrounding the central symbol are 12 smaller Gathering Symbols, symbolising safe spaces. These spaces are built upon strong foundations, denoted by their solidity and interconnectedness, emphasising the importance of community, and working together.*

*The footprints leading along winding pathways represent the journeys that individuals have undertaken to overcome trauma. These paths symbolise the support and care provided by ACSL, guiding them towards healing and restoration.*

*The background of the artwork is filled with an array of dots, which symbolise the overshadowing effects of the past on the lives of survivors of child sexual abuse. These dots acknowledge the challenges that individuals have faced but also represent the enduring commitment to ensuring people are protected from abuse in the future. The dots are a lighter colour than the foreground, symbolising the diminishing influence of the past as we move towards a brighter and safer future."*

**Lani Balzan**

[aboriginalartbylani.com.au](http://aboriginalartbylani.com.au)



# Message from the Chair

**Business as Usual (BAU) is an expression often used to distinguish the everyday operations of an organisation in contrast to a one-off event or a special project that the organisation might be undertaking. For ACSL in 2023 and the Catholic Church more generally the question has arisen what BAU means for safeguarding and the mission of the Church to be a safe and nurturing environment for all.**

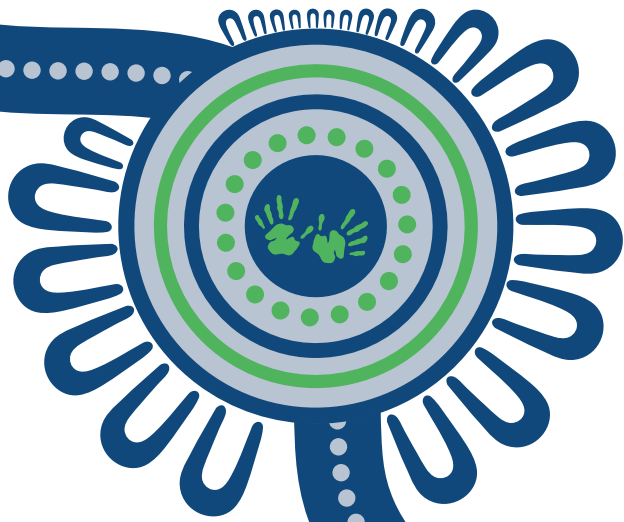
The Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse showed starkly and shockingly that for many decades BAU for the Church when it came to the nurturing and care of children and the vulnerable was far too often to place the interests of the Church as an organisation above the interests of those the Church should have protected. Confronting this reality required the Church at all levels to challenge and change its practices, structures, and cultures to move BAU to always placing children and vulnerable first and ensuring a robust safeguarding regime.

ACSL and its predecessor entity Catholic Professional Safeguarding Limited (CSPL) were established to assist the Church in its safeguarding work. Neither entity was BAU for the Church from a pre-Royal Commission perspective, as they represented a movement for the Church to act collectively to adopt best practice in safeguarding and through transparent monitoring, shine a light on performance which the entire community could examine.

As the Royal Commission began to recede into the rear-view mirror of history, the task was to make safeguarding and transparency at all levels of the Church, and for each Catholic entity, business as usual. While the goodwill and commitment to do this is widely and deeply held throughout the Church, the means of achieving safeguarding as BAU was never going to be a one size fits all model.

ACSL is to help the Church safeguard and provide services in reviewing complaints about Church personnel investigated and handled at the level of the responsible Church entity. In 2023 the Company implemented a subscriber model by which individual Church entities subscribed to ACSL either collectively through the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) for dioceses or individually for religious institutes or Public Juridic Persons (PJPs). As a Subscriber, a Church entity assumes three foundational responsibilities:

1. To adopt and implement the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS);
2. To have a complaint handling policy, and
3. To be reviewed against the NCSS and for the review report to be published.



ACSL's funding model is now tied to the take-up of subscriptions. This provides a strong discipline on the Company to be responsive to what Subscribers need to assist them in safeguarding and the model does impel the constraint of costs, but it also runs risks. The 'independence' of the Company to 'call it as it sees it' in safeguarding reviews can be in tension with the financial imperative to keep its Subscribers onside.

The uptake of subscriptions has been strong but it has not been universal. Some Catholic entities are small with mostly elderly members in religious orders. Some PJP's contend that the education or health services they offer are already highly regulated by government bodies. There are some larger bodies who have not subscribed, preferring to set their own course on safeguarding somewhat at odds with the notion of the Church acting in a nationally consistent manner. And for others, they simply say they can't afford the subscription fees.

Business as usual for ACSL is now a fully distributed workforce with no central office space. Despite this, the team continues to deliver on its commitment to professional learning and training of Catholic personnel on safeguarding practices. This program, combined with a detailed set of resources including learning portals help entities gather evidence of their safeguarding and complaint handling work which can be used for audits under the NCSS or compliance with safeguarding requirements of government regimes.

BAU is certainly a highly dedicated and deeply committed staff team led ably by CEO Dr Ursula Stephens. The staff have worked tirelessly to support those needing advice and support, whether complainants with serious concerns about their treatment within the Church or Church personnel striving to create the best Church in relation to safeguarding.

This will be my final report as ACSL Chair as I will be retiring from the Board at the 2024 Annual General Meeting. After six years, firstly on the Board of CPSL and for the last three years as Chair of ACSL it is timely for good governance to have an orderly succession of Company leadership. I have had the good fortune to serve with a fine group of Directors and to work with a wide range of leaders within the Church including the representatives of the three members of the Company. I thank them all for their insight, belief in a safe and nurturing Church and good humour.

**Professor The Honourable Michael Lavarch AO**  
*Chair of the Board*



## Message from the **CEO**

**A key strength of every organisation is in the relationship between the Board and Management. This year, ACSL has been blessed to have such an engaged group of Directors, led by The Hon Michael Lavarch AO, who leaves us after serving as ACSL Chair since its inception. I am immensely grateful for his support as we worked together to position ACSL as an independent enabler of safeguarding across the Church.**

I would also like to express the thanks and appreciation of the Board and ACSL staff to Fr Stephen Hackett MSC, who has served as the General Secretary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference during the life of CPSL and ACSL. His commitment to responding to the Royal Commission recommendations and implementing safeguarding measures and his support for ACSL has been unwavering.

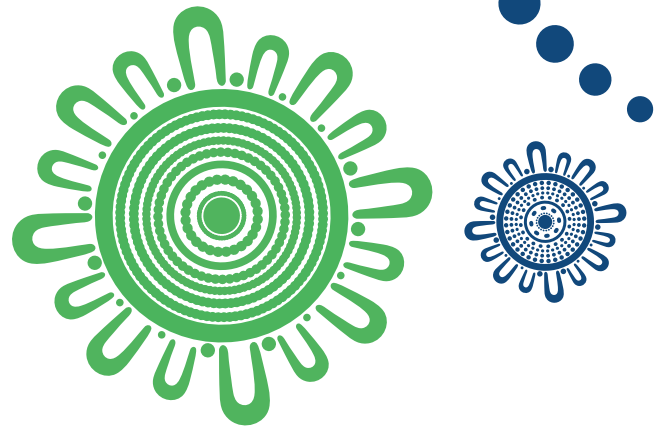
We can tell much of our impact through the numbers and stories in the following pages – meeting with as many organisations as possible, nurturing strong relationships with religious leaders and leadership teams, and connecting to the wider world of safeguarding beyond the boundaries of the Church.

Our greatest impact, however, can't be measured in numbers. Rather it is in the support we provide to those who reach out to ACSL, having experienced trauma or abuse. It is when their courage is applauded, and their abuse acknowledged, that their journey of healing can begin.

Our Chair has outlined the challenges involved in securing the new funding model to underpin the ongoing operation of ACSL beyond 2023. We are privileged and grateful to have had such strong support from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and individual Religious Orders to secure our future for another three years. The funding model has also allowed us to reach out to Catholic organisations beyond the three Company owners, and to grow the network of Catholic safeguarding even further.

Business as usual (BAU) for ACSL now has the full team working remotely and using technology to connect daily and check on each other's wellbeing. Our safeguarding and auditing programs have us all travelling constantly as the desire for face-to-face contact increases in our post-pandemic world. This has given us the opportunity to see first-hand the commitment to safeguarding that is evident in all areas of the Church. We have yet to find anyone who is not aware of their obligations to be child safe.





This year marked the 5-year anniversary of the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, but we know that abuse in many different forms continues, and we need to be ever vigilant. The Church has been reporting annually to the National Office for Child Safety on its efforts, and governments continue to introduce new legislation and regulations in response to the Royal Commission recommendations.

Emerging safeguarding risks, new research and the outcomes of the Royal Commissions into Aged Care, Disability and Domestic Violence have widened the intersection between safeguarding children and vulnerable people, and the impacts of intergenerational trauma are leading to a new body of interdisciplinary research in safeguarding.

Our mission is to support the Church Leaders and Catholic entities in their work to foster a culture of safety and protection of children, young people, and adults. We work every day to meet the responsibilities given us in our constitution. The Board and staff spend two days together each year in strategic planning, to prioritise our work and ensure we remain true to mission. We were all very proud that our former Director of Safeguarding, Daniele Donnini was appointed as a consultant to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, bringing his wealth of experience to the task of helping to shape Pope Francis' Universal Guidelines Framework for safeguarding around the world.

This year the number of Catholic organisations that have declared their commitment to the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards by featuring their NCSS commitment badge in publications and on their websites continues to grow. There is nothing more gratifying than seeing the Commitment Badge proudly on display in the schools, parishes, newsletter, bulletins, and facilities we visit. It reassures us that there is a safeguarding culture where shared values, beliefs, assumptions and behaviours are followed in practice.

We have worked hard to respond to the needs of our Catholic community to provide new learning opportunities and on-demand training, to help people meet the legislative requirements for safeguarding training and professional development. We are engaging with the wider Catholic network, including St Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Social Services, Caritas and Catholic Mission to support them in their safeguarding journeys.

There is always more work to be done and 2024 presents as another busy and fulfilling year as we work to embed the principle that *safeguarding is everyone's responsibility*.

**Dr Ursula Stephens**  
*Chief Executive Officer*



# Our Work

We provide integrated safeguarding services that are informed by Catholic social teaching, and support Church entities to meet their responsibilities to provide safe environments for children and adults at risk.



## Professional development

- Providing tailored education and professional development programs.

## Resources and support

- Producing training and support materials for Professional Standards and Safeguarding Officers.



## Standards and continuous improvement

- Monitoring the implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.
- Undertaking research and analysis of professional standards and safeguarding efforts.

## Complaints response and investigations

- Overseeing the management of complaints against Church Authorities.
- Managing databases related to Church safeguarding.



## Reviews, audits and assessments

- Providing an independent certification audit and review program of safeguarding practices.

## Research, data and projects

- Identifying and managing appropriate data collection by Church Authorities, and working with the members and state and territory regulators, to promote the safety of all who come in contact with Church entities.
- Working on whole-of-Church safeguarding initiatives, including drafting of national codes.







# Our Year in Numbers

While numbers can't tell the full story of our work - our relationships with our safeguarding partners are unique and safeguarding by its nature requires a holistic and considered approach - some of our key numbers from the reporting period are captured below:

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

**255** participants joined 11 online training sessions on topics helping to bring the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) to life



**77** leaders attended 4 NCSS Introductory Session for Leaders

**20** self-paced safeguarding learning modules launched on the ACSL Learning Platform

## AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT

**158** participants joined 7 information sessions on the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal

**25** representatives from audit firms joined 2 NCSS Auditor Induction Sessions

**75** entities used the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal



**13** audit providers joined the NCSS Auditor Register

**40** entities added their names to the NCSS Commitment Page website, signalling that safety is their priority

**12** audits or reviews of Church entities were completed

## PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND COMPLAINTS RESPONSE

**83** requests for complaints information received (including subpoenas and file requests)



**60** complaint enquiries reviewed and assessed for authority to manage or review

**4** complaints managed or reviewed by ACSL

**36** participants joined 3 consultation sessions on a potential Complaints Management System for the Church

## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MINISTRY REGISTER

**3,326**  
ACMR ID holders



**3,200**  
ACMR record updates

**352** new ACMR ID holders added

**83** Catholic entities using the ACMR

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**9.3K** visitors to ACSL's website



**71** CEO and Executive engagements (e.g. stakeholder meetings and presentations)

**5.3K** views of the NCSS Ed.2 page on ACSL's website



**31** participants joined a consultation session on the drafting of Our Common Mission

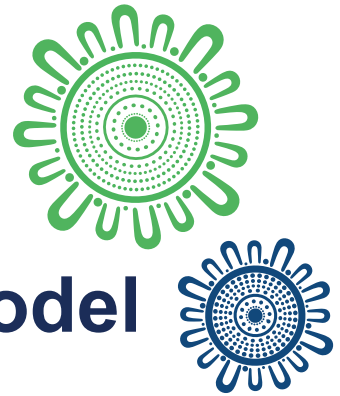
**2,958** subscribers to our monthly e-news

**16** editions of ACSL's e-newsletter

**17** media releases

# Key Achievement:

## Securing a future for ACSL through the **Subscriber Model**



From 2024 ACSL will provide a new model of safeguarding services to Catholic organisations, supporting a national approach to safeguarding within our Church to ensure a safe Church for everyone.

This decision has been reached by ACSL's member entities - The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons - who with the Board, have decided to open ACSL's services to organisations beyond the three owner bodies, to continue to promote a national and consistent culture of safeguarding and continuous improvement across the whole Church.

As of 2024, ACSL offers a direct subscription to organisations for its core services on behalf of the whole Church. Subscribers also have access to a range of additional professional services.

**ACSL has 113 Subscribers – these are organisations who have committed to funding ACSL through a subscription.**

### What do ACSL Subscribers receive?

Our Subscribers are partners in our journey to protect the vulnerable in our community and respond to safeguarding risks.

Subscribers also receive the following direct benefits:

- Discounted training fees
- Support using the Australian Catholic Ministry Register and Catholic Ministry Formation Register
- Safeguarding Advice
- Audit preparation and scope, including use of the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal








### Who are ACSL's Subscribers?

All Australian Catholic dioceses and eparchies have come onboard as Subscribers, as have 9 Ministerial Public Juridic Persons and 66 religious institutes. Other types of Catholic organisations have also joined, and the subscription is available as well to non-Catholic organisations and individuals who seek to use ACSL's safeguarding services.



## Why do organisations become ACSL Subscribers?

Organisations become Subscribers to support ACSL's safeguarding services. Subscribing to ACSL supports the Catholic Church to:

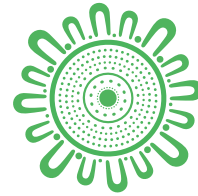
	Speak with authority, credibility, and authenticity on its commitment to the safety of children and adults at risk.
	Provide clear expectations around what practical actions are required to uphold a safeguarding culture in Church Authorities and entities.
	Provide a consistent and transparent mechanism for accountability in how we support survivors of abuse.
	Ensure operational independence from any Church Authority, when managing safeguarding complaints against Church Authorities and conducting reviews on behalf of Church Authorities.
	Provide expertise and resources that model evidence-based best practices and trauma-informed care.
	Support individual Church Authorities and entities to meet both moral and regulatory obligations.
	Improve the safeguarding skills of Church Authorities and entities in preparation for audits.
	Identify and raise awareness amongst members of emerging areas of risk within the life of the Church and work collaboratively to develop appropriate responses.

## How do organisations become ACSL Subscribers?

In 2023 the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), representing dioceses and eparchies in Australia, agreed to become ACSL Subscribers. All religious institutes and Ministerial PJPs were invited to become Subscribers to ACSL, a call which many responded to.

Subscription is also open to other organisations, peak bodies, Associations of Christs Faithful and to individuals.

# Key Achievement:



## Approval and formal publication of National Catholic Safeguarding Standards Edition 2

ACSL is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

In December 2022 ACSL released the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards Edition 2 (NCSS or the Standards), expanding safeguarding protections to include adults at risk as well as children.

The publication of the Standards marked the culmination of several years of development and consultation. The Standards were formally adopted by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia, with a number of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons also expressing their support for the Standards.

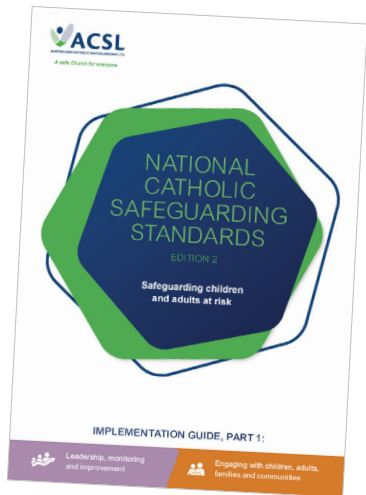
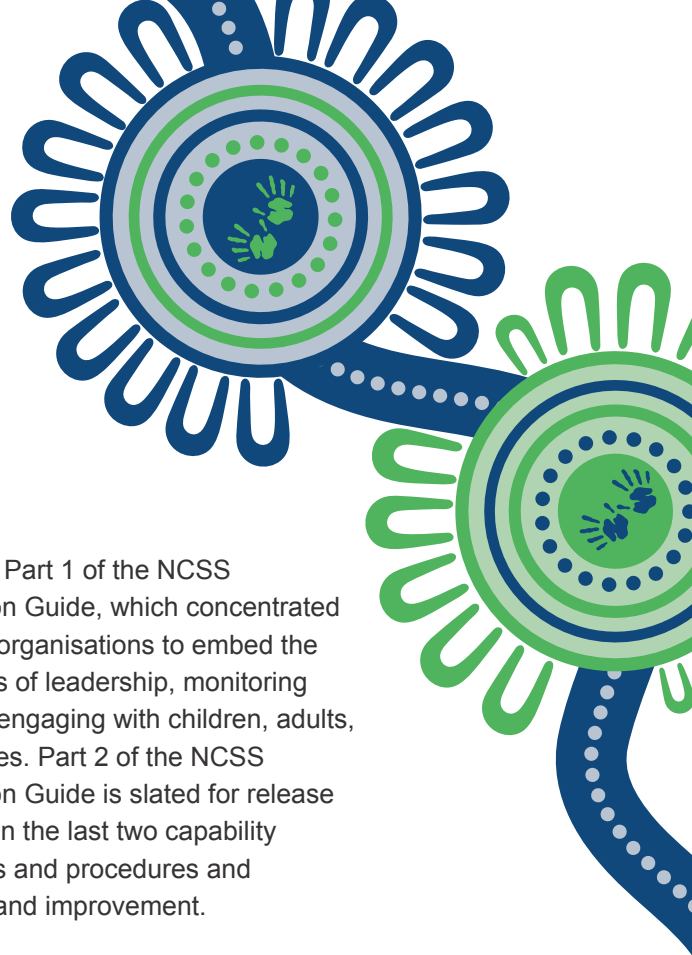


*'Including adults at risk within the safeguarding standards is a major milestone for the Church, as there are many groups running ministries with adults as well as children. The new Standards aim to address the power imbalances that can occur in a range of Church contexts, which can be a risk factor for abuse.'*

- ACSL Board Chair, Professor the Hon. Michael Lavarch AO

In the lead up to the release and continuing in 2023, ACSL provided learning opportunities for Catholic leaders and safeguarding professionals who will be responsible for leading the implementation of NCSS Edition 2 in their communities. Training focused on core concepts underpinning Edition 2, such as 'adults at risk'. A compendium document to the NCSS Edition 2, outlining the development work and rationale of the new edition was also released alongside the NCSS Edition 2, as well as a number of short guidance sheets on new aspects of NCSS Edition 2.





In 2023 ACSL released Part 1 of the NCSS Edition 2 Implementation Guide, which concentrated on supporting Catholic organisations to embed the first two capability areas of leadership, monitoring and improvement, and engaging with children, adults, families and communities. Part 2 of the NCSS Edition 2 Implementation Guide is slated for release in 2024 and will focus on the last two capability areas: systems, policies and procedures and leadership, monitoring and improvement.



*CEO Ursula Stephens celebrating the release of NCSS Edition 2 with Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay of the Maronite Diocese of Australia, Archbishop Charles Balvo, Apostolic Nuncio to Australia and Archbishop Christopher Prowse of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn*



# Safeguarding through **Learning, Development, Resources and Advice**

Providing safeguarding professional development opportunities and tailored advice for personnel in Catholic entities is one of the ways ACSL is working towards a safe Church for everyone.





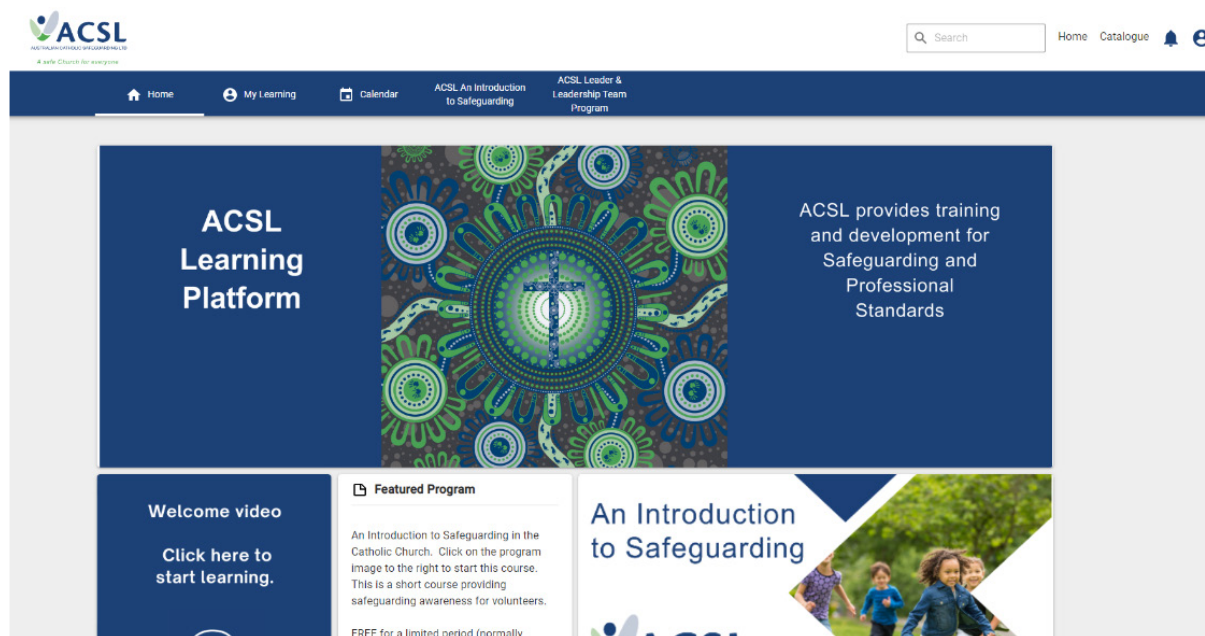
In 2022 and 2023, ACSL provided:

- 4 NCSS Introductory Session for Leaders, attended by 77 Catholic leaders
- 11 online training on topics helping to bring the NCSS to life, which 255 participants joined. These topics included:
  - Best practice supervision and reflective practice
  - Reflective practice: using experiences to improve action
  - Who is an adult at risk?
  - Making the Standards real in your organisation
  - Responding to the NCSS: operational challenges and needs

## ACSL LEARNING PLATFORM

In 2023 ACSL shifted its learning and development focus to creating an online learning platform.

With fewer face to face learning opportunities in the physical workplace now the reality for many Catholic organisations, the ACSL Learning Platform offers a mixture of free and Subscriber-only content that can be accessed by learners when it suits them.



## Self-paced training

In 2023 ACSL's team first mapped out a program of self-paced safeguarding training modules to address safeguarding fundamentals and requests for professional development. The Platform was launched with the following courses prepared by ACSL:

- ACSL Introduction to Safeguarding program, comprising of modules on:
  - Safeguarding in the Catholic Church
  - Understanding child abuse
  - Grooming behaviour
  - Responding to disclosures
  - Safeguarding adults at risk
  - Safeguarding Support & Resources
- ACSL National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and the NCSS
- ACSL Reporting Abuse Allegations

To broaden the content available on the ACSL Learning Platform, we partnered with three organisations to deliver their training content via our Platform.

We have been proud to make available:

- NATSICC's *Cross-Cultural Competency in a Catholic setting*
- The Australian Childhood Foundation's *Safeguarding Children* course
- The Australian Human Rights Commission's *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* course

## Schedule of live learning opportunities for 2024

A desire to hear from a range of safeguarding experts and practitioners inspired our schedule of Live Learnings for 2024. In late 2023 we released a full calendar of monthly interactive webinars, with expert presenters leading sessions on topics of safeguarding concern in each month of the year from February. Live learnings are recorded and then made available on the ACSL Learning Platform for anyone to watch.

## Revamped Leaders training for 2024

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse identified leadership culture as a key driver of a safe environment. Leaders need to understand the current safeguarding context and be vigilant about emerging safeguarding risks. That is why the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards requires the leader (Church Authority) of Catholic organisations – be that the bishop, the congregational leader or the trustee of an Ministerial PJP – to attend NCSS Leaders training, shortly after their commencement in the role.

The NCSS Session for Leaders, which first began as a two-day face-to-face training session in 2018, hosted in capital cities around Australia, has since COVID-19 transitioned into an online training program.

With the release of NCSS Edition 2, and the launch of the ACSL Learning Platform, our team has redesigned the training again to adapt to the shifting needs of today's leaders. In 2024 the training will be delivered in a hybrid format, consisting of two live interactive sessions for leaders to gather and meet, and a selection of self-paced online modules which cover other essential course content. This change means that leaders have more flexibility in when they complete the training while retaining the conversational and networking elements that have made the Leaders program rewarding for many years.

## Guidance materials

In addition to Part 1 of the NCSS Edition 2 Implementation Guide, ACSL has produced short guidance notes on aspects of the Standards that are new in Edition 2 or have been identified as areas needing support. During this period we released materials on:

- Best practice for arranging pilgrimages and retreats involving children, young people and adults at risk
- Guidance for Church Authorities in their engagement of an NCSS Auditor
- Guidance note: Managing monuments and memorials
- Legislation and policy update (August 2022)
- Child-friendly safeguarding awareness poster (NCSS)
- Our safeguarding commitments poster (NCSS)
- Parish checklist – NCSS Implementation
- Mandatory Reporting Fact Sheet
- Role guidance for working with children checks and criminal history screening
- Healthy relationships for adults at risk
- Adults at risk fact sheet
- Mandatory reporting fact sheets, each state and territory
- Training relating to adults at risk
- Diminished capacity and cognitive impairment

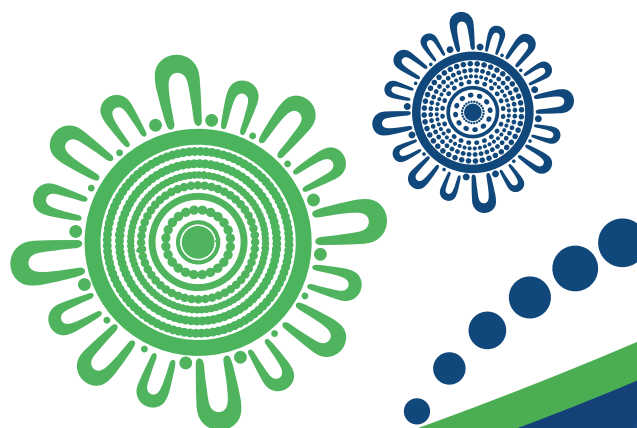
## Individualised safeguarding advice

In addition to our structured professional development activities, ACSL receives many requests for individual safeguarding support from leaders and safeguarding personnel. These requests can range from short queries about implementation of specific indicators of NCSS Edition 2, through to more complex safeguarding concerns.

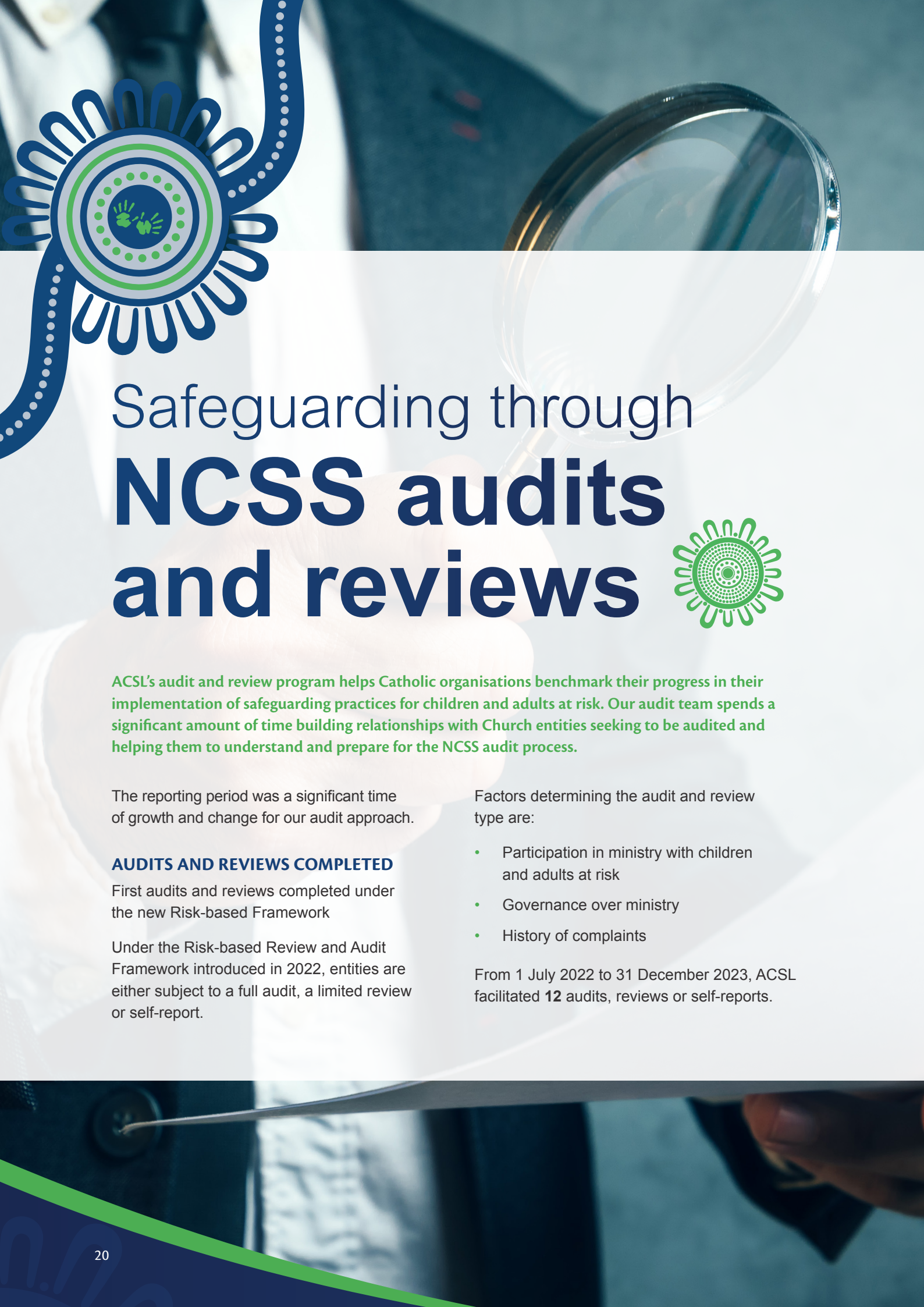
For example, advice on:

- Understanding and managing the risks in a physical ministry environment, for instance, installing glass doors and windows to improve visibility.
- Developing a risk matrix to understand which volunteer roles require specialist induction in safeguarding policies, procedures and practices.
- Developing a risk management plan to welcome a high-risk individual in activities within a Church community.

ACSL responds to each request individually, acknowledging that every Catholic organisation looks different. We provide the support that we can, and refer on to other help where we can not assist.







# Safeguarding through **NCSS audits and reviews**



ACSL's audit and review program helps Catholic organisations benchmark their progress in their implementation of safeguarding practices for children and adults at risk. Our audit team spends a significant amount of time building relationships with Church entities seeking to be audited and helping them to understand and prepare for the NCSS audit process.

The reporting period was a significant time of growth and change for our audit approach.

## **AUDITS AND REVIEWS COMPLETED**

First audits and reviews completed under the new Risk-based Framework

Under the Risk-based Review and Audit Framework introduced in 2022, entities are either subject to a full audit, a limited review or self-report.

Factors determining the audit and review type are:

- Participation in ministry with children and adults at risk
- Governance over ministry
- History of complaints

From 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2023, ACSL facilitated **12** audits, reviews or self-reports.

Entity	Date report published	Category
Order of the Servants of Mary Australian Delegation	September 2022	Limited audit
Servite College	September 2022	Full audit
Presentation Sisters of Wagga Wagga	December 2022	Review audit
St Columban Mission Society	December 2022	Limited audit
Sisters of Mercy Parramatta	April 2023	Full audit
Sisters of St John of God	April 2023	Limited audit
Congregation of Mary Queen of Peace	August 2023	Limited audit
Order of Discalced Carmelites, Goonellebah	September 2023	Self-report
Benedictine Community of New Norcia	November 2023	Review audit
Diocese of Darwin	November 2023	Review audit
Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart	December 2023	Limited audit
Maronite Eparchy of Australia	December 2023	Full audit

From 2024 we have an audit schedule that provides timeframes for Church entities to prepare for their audit or review so that they are completed by the end of 2025.

### FIRST REVIEW AUDITS OF PREVIOUSLY AUDITED ENTITIES

ACSL's audit and review cycle represents a three-year partnership with entities. After completing the initial audit, ACSL follows up periodically with entities to check in on the status of recommendations following from the audit, and at the end of the three-year cycle the entity is scheduled for a review audit.

Review audits provide an opportunity to showcase the progress that has been achieved since the last audit and identify emerging risk areas for the entity.

The Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga, the Diocese of Darwin and the Benedictine Community of New Norcia undertook review audits in this period.





# CASE STUDY

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT - BENEDICTINE COMMUNITY OF NEW NORCIA

The Benedictine Community of New Norcia (BCNN) operate in Australia's only monastic town, in outback Western Australia. A tourist town where visitors can stop by for a day, camp overnight or even join a retreat, the Community has a range of safeguarding considerations and challenges.

The Benedictine Community also has a history of abuse (from the 1950s – 1970s) committed by both religious and clergy inside and outside the Community, and other personnel, including other students and relatives. The Community has sought to improve safeguarding practice for all people while acknowledging the devastating harm that occurred.

With the introduction of the child safeguarding focused NCSS in 2019, the Benedictine Community of New Norcia was one of the first organisations to be audited. Undergoing an audit for the Community came after completing its own internal safeguarding self-assessment. The Community did well in the audit but found some areas that needed to improve. The report was published by ACSL, and a media release to document the findings of the report was shared so that accountability and transparency could be promoted. The Community committed to implementing the changes from the first audit.

During the period 2019 – 2023, Western Australia closed its borders to interstate travellers, and while the Community remained partially operational, the virtual lockdown provided a timely opportunity for the Community to consider its Safeguarding Risk Management Strategy and policies and make necessary changes to the Community's operations.



Regularly reviewing safeguarding practices became especially relevant with the inclusion of adults at risk in NCSS Edition 2. To measure how well the Community was making the community safe for both children and adults at risk, the Community underwent a second audit by ACSL in the second half of 2023. Between the two audits, key changes had been made in response to emerging risks and a review of safeguarding practices.

One such change was to move away from offering overnight excursions for school students (run by the schools) and to shift focus to day activities instead. This helped mitigate risks associated with overnight stays. The Community has developed an educational program for student groups visiting the Centre. As part of their safeguarding risk mitigation strategy there is a specified teacher-student ratio required and the expectation of full supervision of student groups. The Community no longer hosts overnight camps for people under 18 years



The Community continues to consult closely with the New Norcia Aboriginal Corporation. Several vibrant exhibitions have been designed and installed around the site. Aboriginal families with a connection to New Norcia are invited to record their connection in a dynamic display. Books on local Aboriginal language, history and culture have been published, and liturgical events and reunions have been celebrated, all in the spirit of preservation, reconciliation and restorative justice.

Through their second external audit by ACSL, further strategies to make the community a safer place were identified. Through the combined process of internal self-reviews and an external audit, the Community have committed to continuous improvement.



Safeguarding notices on a bulletin board in the Benedictine Community of New Norcia



ACSL CEO Ursula Stephens, BCNN Safeguarding Officer Tracey Sievwright, Abbot John Herbert OSB, ACSL Director Safeguarding & Compliance David Treanor and BCNN Safeguarding Officer Melissa Victoriano





*From left: ACSL CEO Ursula Stephens, Silvana Vicoli, Principal of Servite College, Hayley Priestley, Professional Standards and Redress Officer (Servite Order), ACSL Board Member Professor Maria Harries and Fr Peter Porteous, Provincial of the Order of the Servants of Mary*

### First formal school audit

In August 2022 ACSL was invited to carry out an audit of Servite College in Perth, alongside the audit of the Order of the Servants of Mary Inc.

Servite College is a co-educational Catholic secondary college with over 1000 students. It operates under the governance of the Order of the Servants of Mary.

The school safeguarding framework, policies and procedures were assessed against the NCSS. Our audit considered not only regulatory compliance, but also how students concerns are being heard in safeguarding, how the community is engaged within the school, and how diversity and equity are being upheld across safeguarding practices.

Through interviews with staff, students and parents, our audit found that there was a high degree of compliance with the NCSS (98%) and that children and families were well engaged in safeguarding processes.

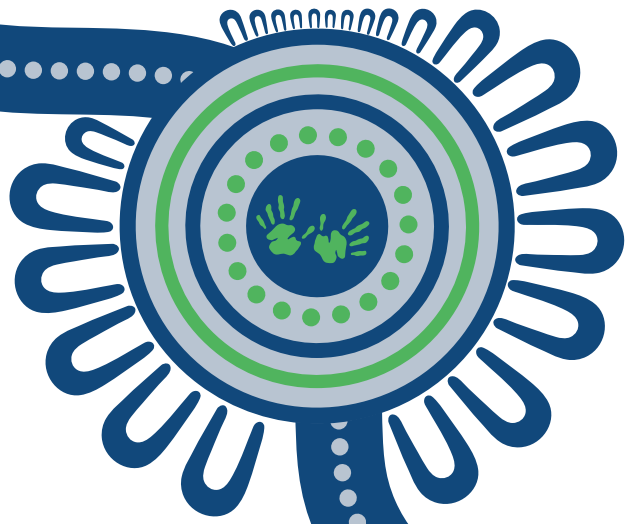
Twelve recommendations for improvement were provided to Servite College, which the Order of the Servants of Mary and Servite College agreed to implement over a 12 month period.



*Students at Servite College Perth. Image supplied by Servite College*

*'We were proud to be able to share our student experience and school community with ACSL. Our focus on the individualised care, support and learning outcomes of each Servite student drives our progress and we are delighted the audit report recognised our contribution to system-wide knowledge and practice in safeguarding within Catholic Education in Western Australia.'*

*- Servite College Principal Ms Silvana Vicoli (from ACSL media release: WA's Servite College – walking the talk on safeguarding its school community, 13 September 2022)*



### First co- audit with an external auditor

From July 2023 to November 2023 ACSL and Prolegis Lawyers jointly conducted an audit of the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

While the report was published in February 2024 and not in this reporting period, the audit marked the first co-audit between ACSL and another provider.

ACSL learnt much through this experience that will improve our own audit practice, and the co-audit furnished Prolegis Lawyers with on-the-ground experience in a Catholic diocese.

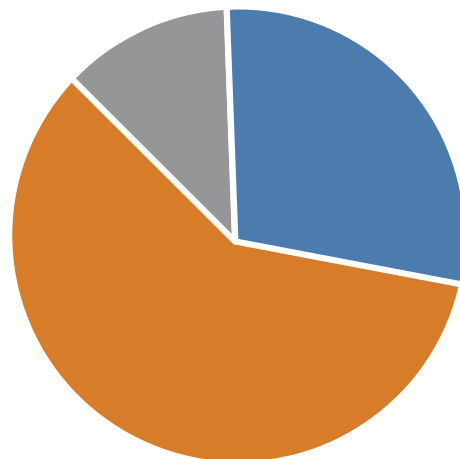


*A safe Church for everyone*

### INCREASED GROWTH ON THE NCSS SELF-ASSESSMENT PORTAL

Following the rollout of the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal in May 2022, the reporting period of July 2022 to December 2023 saw increasing numbers of Catholic entities using the portal to measure their implementation of the NCSS Edition 2 and to prepare for an audit or review.

As of December 2023, **75** Catholic entities are using the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal.



-  *Dioceses*
-  *Religious institutes*
-  *Other*



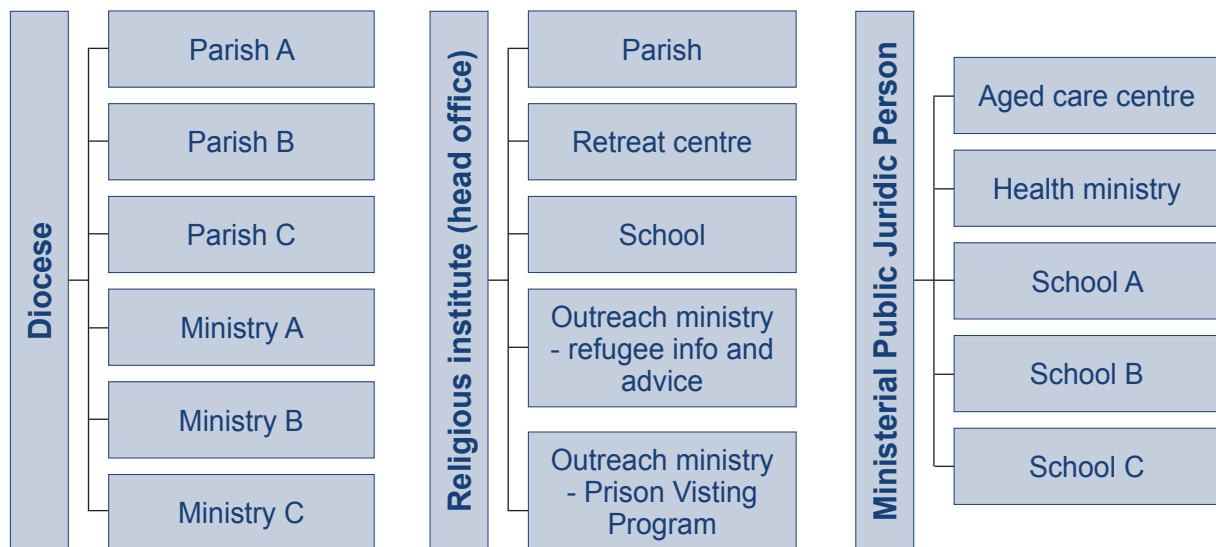
### Multi-Service Accounts on the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal

To help large entities focus attention on safeguarding implementation in their specific ministries, ACSL offers entities multi-service account options. This means that the administrative centre of the entity, for instance, a diocese, can have sub-accounts for each of their parishes (or parish clusters) as well as their other ministries, such as their CatholicCare or Centacare or other outreach ministries. This means that the organisation gets an overview of

how the NCSS are being met at the macro level (for instance, the diocese or religious institute level) and micro level (each parish's or ministry's ability to meet the NCSS).

As of December 2023, this feature has been used by 6 dioceses, 1 religious institute and 4 Ministerial PJPs.

ACSL has provided custom portal training session to 4 entities using Multi-Service Accounts.



*Example of the Multi-Service Account structure on the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal*

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NCSS AUDITOR REGISTER

In July 2022 we surveyed Catholic Church Authorities to determine their interest for the establishment of a panel of external auditors which would provide greater choice to Church Authorities in who could carry out NCSS Audits in addition to ACSL.

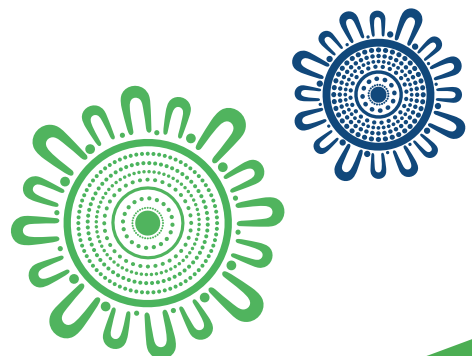
The responses indicated that there were Church Authorities that wanted this option. The ACSL Board and a small working group listened to this feedback and in response, initiated the NCSS Auditor Register in October 2022.

Auditors seeking to join the register are required to provide the necessary evidence of their accreditations, and insurance and undertake an Induction Session with ACSL prior to being admitted to the Register.

Following two intakes in February and December 2023, there are now **13 registered NCSS auditors**, independent of ACSL, available to any Catholic organisation seeking a formal NCSS Audit. Further recruitment will occur in 2024.



Registered NCSS Audit Providers



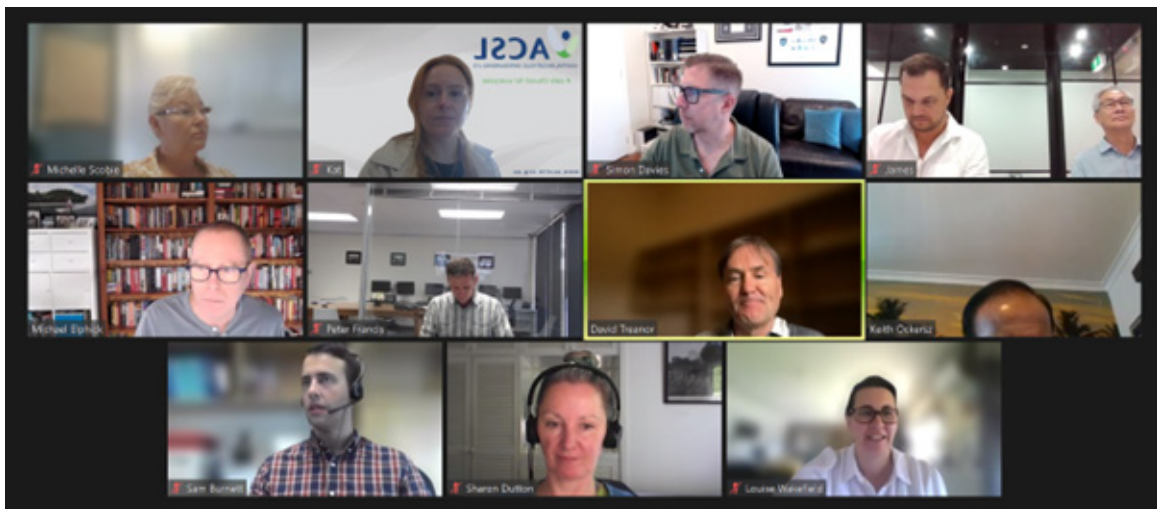




## Engaging a Safeguarding auditor

The process for Catholic organisations prior to audit is now:

- Complete a self-assessment on the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal. The evidence and information submitted here is used as the basis for the desktop review component of the audit, regardless of the chosen auditor.
- ACSL works with the Church entity to determine the size and scope of their audit.
- The Church entity selects an auditor.
- The cost of the audit will be negotiated directly between the Church entity and the auditor
- The audit is completed by the chosen provider.
- Once completed, the audit is subject to an independent quality assurance review.
- All audit reports will be published on ACSL's website.



NCSS Auditor Induction Session in February 2023



NCSS Auditor Induction Session in October 2023



## Audit certificate presentations

Undertaking a safeguarding audit can be daunting, stressful and without doubt, a lot of work. Once it happens, the feedback is invariably positive. The benefits of audit far surpass the initial stress. There are shared learnings as we identify both vulnerabilities and good practices. Often there are emerging risks and areas for improvement where changes will lead to a safer environment for everyone.

To celebrate and acknowledge the achievements of Church entities which have undergone audits in recent years, ASCL presents an NCSS Audit Certificate. The gallery below shows some of the entities receiving their certificates.



*From left: Professional Standards Officer Fr Peter Dorfield, Bishop of Toowoomba Robert McGuckin and ACSL's Director of Professional Standards and Complaints Karen Mosley*



*Sr Stancea Vichie MSS of the Missionary Sisters of Service*



*Members of the Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga Leadership team with ACSL's Director Safeguarding and Compliance David Treanor*



*Brother Tim Peter FSC of the De La Salle Brothers with Karen Mosley*





*Sr Maria Bailes OCD of the Order of Discalced Carmelite Nuns Goonellebah*



*Sr Gail Reneker of the Marist Sisters Australian Unit with ACSL's Karen Mosley*



*Sisters of Mercy Parramatta Leadership team with ACSL CEO Ursula Stephens*



*Sisters of St John of God leaders with ACSL's Ursula Stephens and David Treanor*



*Fr Peter O'Neill SSC of the St Columban Mission Society with David Treanor*





# Safeguarding through Professional Standards Support and Complaints Response

ACSL has a limited role in directly managing certain safeguarding complaints and reviews, and a wider role in supporting trauma-informed, best practice complaints response across the Church. We also offer victims and survivors a place where they can seek advice and referrals to support services.

## COMPLAINTS RESPONSE

ACSL is responsible for a limited range of complaints related functions.

- **Complaints under Vos Estis Lux Mundi** — If requested, ACSL can assist to facilitate complaints management under the Vatican procedural Vos Estis Lux Mundi;
- **Complaints against a Church Authority** — ACSL can provide an independent process for facilitating complaints against a Church Authority that are not captured by Vos Estis Lux Mundi; and
- **Review of the outcome of a complaint managed by a Church Authority** — ACSL can provide an independent review mechanism for complainants, respondents and Church Authorities for complaints managed under a Complaints Handling Policy.

ACSL's complaint functions are defined and specific in scope. The reason for this is that complaints and disclosure should always be made, in the first instance, to police and relevant authorities, directly to a Church entity and/or Church Authority, or to a State/Provincial Professional Standards Office (where relevant).

ACSL's role is to provide an additional level of independence for complaints relating to Church Authorities, where we are requested to do so, and provide a review mechanism for complaints already managed by Church Authorities.

Between 1 July 2022 and 31 December 2023 ACSL received over 60 complaint enquiries. ACSL reviewed and assessed each enquiry to determine whether it was within our scope.

During this period ACSL:

- assisted in **one** matter under Vos Estis Lux Mundi;
- assisted in **one** complaint against a Church Authority (where it was not captured by Vos Estis Lux Mundi);
- facilitated **two** reviews to completion.

While only four complaint enquiries were within scope, we provided guidance and assistance to several complainants, victims/survivors, Church personnel, safeguarding officers and Church Authorities on a wide range of disclosures and complaint enquiries.

## UPDATES TO THE ACSL CONSTITUTION: CLAUSE 5.1(F) – REVIEW MECHANISM

In October 2022 ACSL updated its constitution relating to its review functions. The changes now provides for ACSL to facilitate a review of a complaint that was managed under a Complaints Handling Policy such as the National Response Protocol, the National Response Framework or the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

This change is an ‘enabling function’, allowing ACSL to facilitate a review in circumstances where ACSL is permitted or requested to do so by a Church Authority. The permission can be expressed within a Complaints Handling Policy (for example the National Response Protocol), or in writing by a Church Authority where the Complaints Handling Policy does not reference ACSL.

## NATIONAL APPEALS AND REVIEW PANEL

The National Appeals and Review Panel (Panel) was established in April 2022 by ACSL to facilitate reviews of complaints managed by Church Authorities.

The Panel is chaired by The Hon. Duncan Kerr, supported by Deputy Chair, The Hon. Dr Patricia Kavanagh and seven other members based in Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales.

In December 2023 the ACSL executive team, board and the Panel met face to face for the first time to review the governance, policies and procedures of the National Appeals and Review Panel, and how these could be strengthened in the coming year. The agreed outcome was to work on implementing a therapeutic jurisprudence approach, which considers mental health and wellbeing in conjunction with legal process and practice. Policies and procedures are being updated to reflect these discussions and new direction.



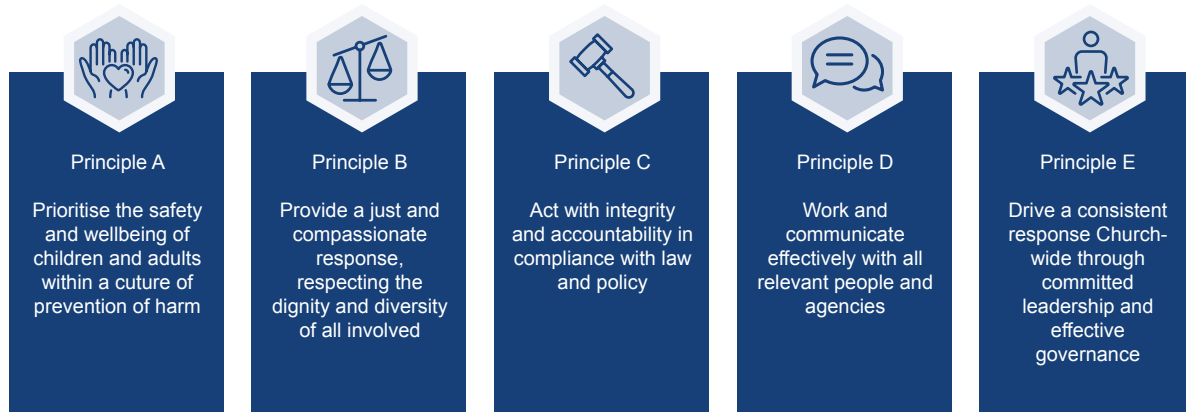
*The National Appeals and Review Panel meeting in Sydney in December 2022: Left to right: Dr The Honourable Tricia Kavanagh, The Honourable Duncan Kerr (Chairperson), Greg Barns SC, Karen Robinson-Iles, Jeffrey Hack, Andrew Kitchin, Ken Moroney, Matt Casey. Not pictured: Tim Unsworth*



## NATIONAL RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

In October 2022 ACSL launched the National Response Framework (NRF). The NRF provides a policy and procedure framework for the management of allegations or concerns about children and adults who have or may have been abused by church personnel.

The NRF provides five principles that underpin all aspects of the response:



The NRF also provides a seven-stage procedural framework for responding to allegations and concerns:



The NRF has been endorsed and adopted by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Religious Australia and the Association for Ministerial Public Juridic Persons.

As an overarching framework, Catholic entities are expected to develop and adopt policies and procedures that are aligned with the principles and procedural framework outlined in the NRF.





## REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL RESPONSE PROTOCOL

The National Response Protocol (NRP) provides principles, procedures and guidance on the response to children and adults who have been subject to abuse by Church personnel. The NRP expands of the principles and procedural framework outlined in the NRF and has been adopted by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and some religious institutes.

In November 2023 ACSL commenced a project to review the NRP. The first stage of this review was to open written feedback on the NRP. The review is expected to be completed in 2024.

## PROVINCIAL PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OFFICE MEETINGS

Prior to the commencement of ACSL the former national office was responsible for facilitating meetings of the various Provincial Professional Standards Offices (PPSO) around Australia. These meetings provide an opportunity for collaboration, discussion and support across geographically disperse offices.

Representatives of each PPSO (or equivalent) from the various Provincial Professional Standards Offices attend the meetings, including;

- NSW/ACT Communities of Practice
- Pathways Victoria
- Western Australia Professional Standards Office
- South Australia Professional Standards Office (and Northern Territory)
- Professional Standards Office, Queensland
- Professional Standards Office Tasmania

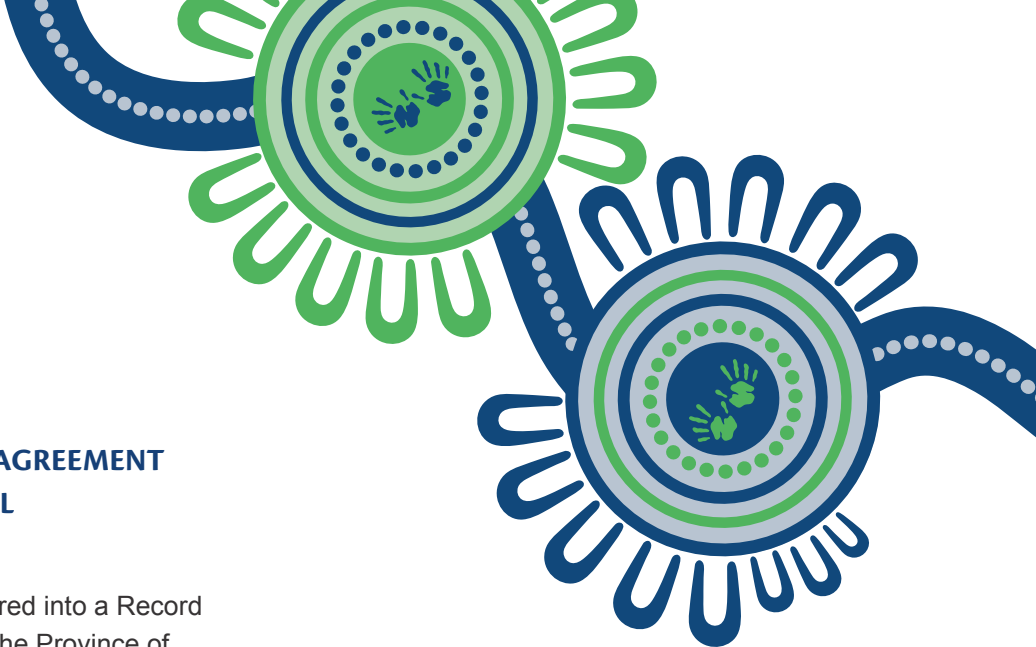
ACSL has facilitated **one face to face meeting and four virtual meetings** of the Provincial Professional Standards Offices. During one of the virtual meetings the group also participated in a workshop focused on writing procedurally fair allegations.



October 2022 meeting of ASCL and State Office Professional Standards Officers

*“The provincial professional standards meetings are helpful. What’s great about these meetings is the wealth of knowledge present. All attendees come from a variety of professional backgrounds and skillsets with a range of experience. It’s a great opportunity to come together to navigate emerging issues, seek feedback on best practice and identify developing trends. It’s also great to hear updates from the interstate offices. I frequently retire from these meetings with new ideas to implement in my own practice.”*

*– Stephanie Thirlwall, Response and Resolution Director, Pathways Victoria.*



**RECORDS MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT  
– NSW/ACT PROFESSIONAL  
STANDARDS OFFICE**

On 1 October 2021 ACSL entered into a Record Management Agreement with the Province of Sydney and Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn and Catholic Religious Australia to enable ACSL to hold and manage the Towards Healing and Intelligence Records of the former NSW/ACT Professional Standards Office (NSW/ACT PSO).

This Agreement provided important assistance to the Province in managing the increasing numbers of civil and National Redress Scheme claims, which increased by over 300% during 2021-2022, and the legal complexities of producing records. Given the challenges of discrepancies between digital and physical files, and the practice of issuing multiple subpoenas for the same claims, the Agreement was terminated and ACSL ceased the management of access to records on 1 November 2023.

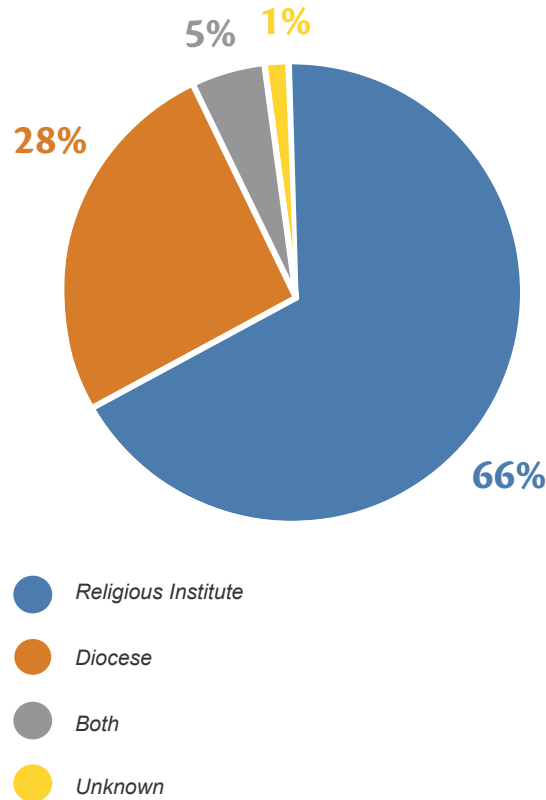
Between 1 July 2022 and 1 November 2023 ACSL received and **managed 83 requests for information** as follows:

Request Type	No. Requests
Subpoena	59
File Request	23
Notice to Produce	1

The requests for information relate to a person associated with a diocese, religious institute or both. Here is the breakdown of information requests by entity type:

Entity Type	No. Requests
Religious Institute	55
Diocese	23
Both	4
Unknown	1

Requests for information by entity type





# Safeguarding through systems – the Australian Catholic Ministry Register and the Catholic Ministry Formation Register

## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MINISTRY REGISTER

The Australian Catholic Ministry Register assists clerics, religious and their Church Authorities in the safe management of movement for ministry. It offers a means to help entities fulfil indicator 5.7.1 of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

When clergy or religious perform ministry in another diocese or a different community, for instance, to minister at a wedding, it is important that the incoming Church Authority is aware that the individual is safe to perform ministry.

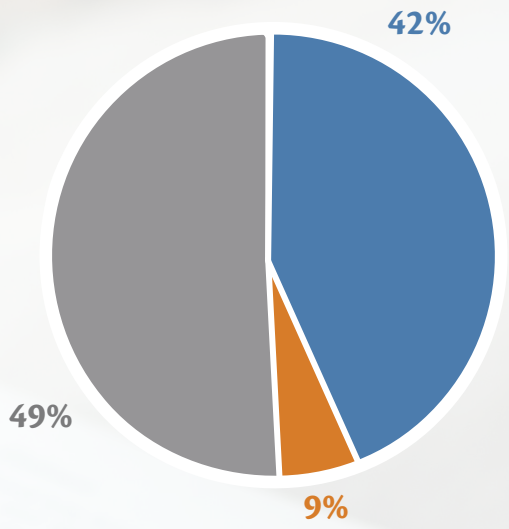
Having an ACMR ID allows holders to demonstrate their identity and good standing without the need for one-time paperwork for each trip. Along with benefits in standardisation, this allows all parties to comply with the requirements easily, and significantly reduces administrative burdens for safeguarding personnel and other staff.

ACSL is responsible for managing the ACMR.

## WHO USED THE ACMR IN THE REPORTING PERIOD?

83 Catholic entities used the ACMR from 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2023 to help manage the safe movement of their people.

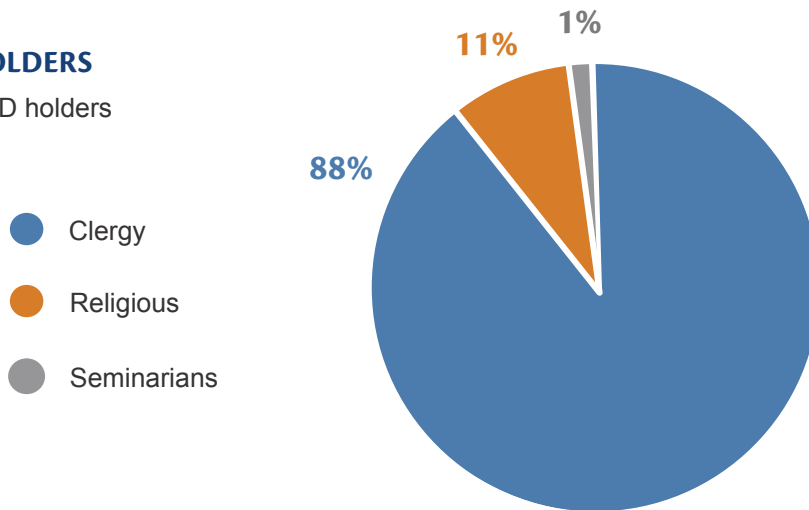
- Dioceses & Eparchies
- Women Religious
- Male Religious





## ACMR ID HOLDERS

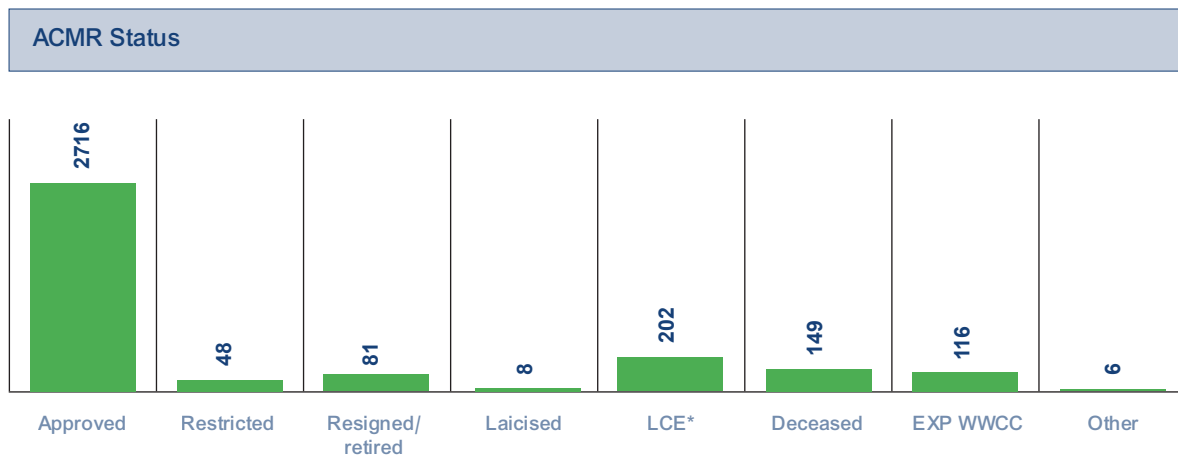
3,326 ACMR ID holders



## ID HOLDER STATUSES

Every ACMR ID holder is accorded a status, which when searched by a receiving Church Authority (e.g. the new diocese that the ID holder is seeking to perform ministry in) helps to indicate if a person should be allowed to perform that ministry.

As of the end of the reporting period, of the 3,326 total ACMR ID holders, the status breakdown was:



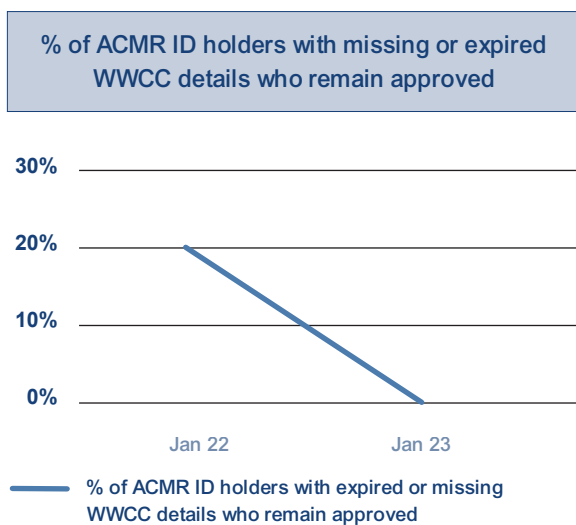
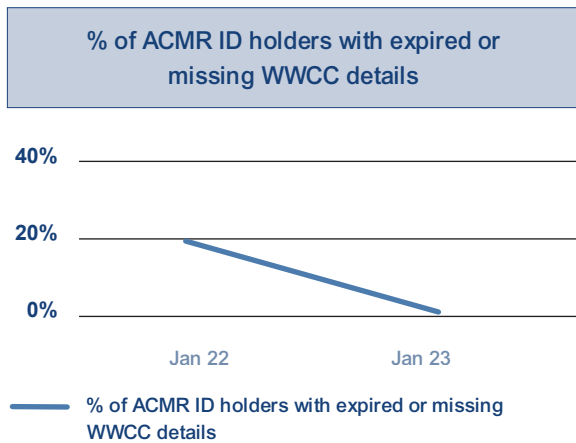
\*LCE = No longer part of the Church entity

## SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS IN EXPIRED OR MISSING WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECKS (WWCC) AS A RESULT OF ACMR WWCC ENFORCEMENT POLICY

In 2022 ACSL strengthened its processes to ensure that the data held for the ACMR is up to date. This system now detects and disables ACMR IDs where ACSL does not have details of a current and valid Working with Children Check (WWCC) as required under our policy.

In preparation for the rollout of this system we contacted entities to give them as much warning as possible to avoid disruption for ID holders. Following the enforcement rollout, of the ACMR ID holders who had their IDs temporarily disabled, almost all had their status restored within a day of ACSL receiving an update. These efforts have allowed us to substantially improve the quality of our data, while minimising the impact on ACMR ID holders.

ACSL will continue to monitor this system and work with Church entities to continue meeting requirements.



Since the implementation of WWCC enforcement, 700 ACMR IDs have been deactivated due to expired WWCCs. In most instances, ACSL receives the updated WWCC details within 24 hours of the deactivation notice. This indicates that while WWCC's are being updated in accordance with regulatory requirements, this is not always being passed on to ACSL.

As a result of entities providing updated WWCCs, we were able to reactive 550 of these.

## UPDATES BETWEEN 1 JULY 2022 AND 31 DECEMBER 2023

Every day ACSL receives several applications for new ACMR IDs or WWCC updates.

In this period our team processed:

- 3200 record updates (e.g. change to status, update or change WWCC details)
- Applications for 290 new male ACMR ID holders
- Applications for 62 new women religious ACMR ID holders
- 25 restrictions ((where a Church Authority can no longer declare every aspect of the Safeguarding Statements)
- 12 removals of restrictions

## WORKFLOW IMPROVEMENTS

To continue to provide quality service to entities using the ACMR, we did the following:

- In June 2023 we amended our policy so that more than one ACMR delegate per entity can be nominated. The ACMR delegate often acts on behalf of the Church Authority of an entity to complete safeguarding statements and declarations. The change to allow more than one delegate per entity reduces the burden on one person to be responsible for all ACMR declarations.
- In July 2023 we reissued a number of ACMR forms to make them clearer and easier to use for ACMR contact people
- In September 2023 we again updated a number of ACMR forms as well as our Procedures Guide to resolve some common issues occurring in ACMR applications.
- In 2023 we provided internal ACMR training to additional ACMR staff to ensure that we are better able to provide timely responses to ACMR enquiries during busy periods.



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MINISTRY REGISTER

In November 2022 ACSL launched the Catholic Ministry Formation Register (CMFR). The CMFR is intended to keep a record of those in formation for Clerical or Religious Ministry.

The CMFR can assist Church entities in identifying whether a person who is discerning or applying for formation towards clerical or religious life, has previously sought formation elsewhere. This is especially important where previous applications or time spent in formation may not have been disclosed. Awareness of this background will aid entities in allocating their time and resources and protect against potentially deliberate evasion.

The creation of this Register is partially intended to assist the Church in Australia in responding to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

ACSL believes that the Register will be of value in fulfilling recommendations 16.20 and 16.21 which address screening of candidates for formation.

**Recommendation 16.20** *In order to promote healthy lives for those who choose to be celibate, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and all Catholic religious institutes in Australia should further develop, regularly evaluate and continually improve, their processes for selecting, screening and training of candidates for the clergy and religious life, and their processes of ongoing formation, support and supervision of clergy and religious.*



**Recommendation 16.21** *The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia should establish a national protocol for screening candidates before and during seminary or religious formation, as well as before ordination or the profession of religious vows.*

The CMFR will aid in the screening of applicants and serve as a historical record of formation. Deidentified aggregate data from this system relating to safeguarding will help inform ACSL in coming years.

To accompany the launch of the CMFR we published a range of forms to aid Catholic entities to begin opting in and registering new applicants. Explainers and a policy document were also included.

The CMFR will help participating Church entities to fulfil a range of responsibilities under Canon Law, as well as in responding to recommendations of the Royal Commission into Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

In 2024 and beyond ACSL will seek to fully rollout the CMFR by refining these materials, advertising and explaining the Register to Church entities and supporting them in registration.

# Safeguarding through Communications and Engagement



Woven into our direct safeguarding services of learning and development, advice, audit, complaints response and management of safeguarding databases is a commitment to advocate for the safety of children and adults at risk, communicate our work transparently and engage with partners across and beyond the Catholic sector.

## ENGAGING WITH OUR MEMBERS AND NETWORKS WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In 2022 and 2023 ACSL engaged deeply with our Member entities the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) and the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (AMPJP) in relation to the ACSL Subscriber Model and safeguarding needs within the Church.

We also engaged directly with individual Catholic organisations. Some of our highlights during this period were:

- Meeting with the Bishops Commission for Professional Standards and Safeguarding (October – December 2023) and attending the ACBC General Forum.
- Attending the NSW/ACT Province Community of Practice in August 2023.
- Joining the Archdiocese of Sydney Clergy Safeguarding Conference in June 2023.
- Presenting to the Bishops Plenary in May 2023, providing information on the Audit Framework, Annual Safeguarding Statement and progress on the future funding of ACSL.
- Presenting to the Catholic Women's Network presentation in October 2023.

- Participating in a panel at the NSW Catholic Schools Law and Governance Symposium in a panel with the NSW Children's Guardian in October 2022.
- Presenting at the CRA National Assembly in September 2022.
- Meeting with the NSW/ACT Province Professional Standards Community of Practice to provide up to date information on a range of issues including the external audit panel in August 2022.
- Presenting a session at the Catholic Social Services Australia conference in August 2022 to discuss ACSL's capacity building safeguarding and audit approach.



*2CEO Ursula Stephens and former General Secretary of the ACBC Fr Stephen Hackett MSC in August 2023*





ACSL's Director, Safeguarding and Improvement Daniele Donnini leading a session at the Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) conference in August 2022



CEO Ursula Stephens and Director Safeguarding and Compliance David Treanor staffing the ACSL booth at the CSSA 2022 National Conference

## CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFTING OF OUR COMMON MISSION

*Our Common Mission* affirms that the Catholic Church of Australia puts safety and integrity at the centre of culture, relationships, stewardship and formation for mission. Our commitment extends to every child and adult with whom we interact. It particularly extends to those most at risk and those who have most reason to doubt they will be safe.

In 2021 ACSL established a working group, chaired by Sr Veronica Hoey SGS and engaged Dr Julie Thorpe to assist in meeting the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Recommendation 16.49 for a new, combined Code of Conduct for the Catholic Church, to replace *Integrity in Mission*, and *Integrity in the Service of the Church*. This work culminated in the draft *Our Common Mission*, and In September 2022 we facilitated a consultation led by Fr Jake Mudge on the draft text, attended by 31 people.

*Our Common Mission* was revised for feedback following consultation and published by ACSL in October 2022. *Integrity in Our Common Mission*, published by the ACBC in November 2023, builds on the framework of *Our Common Mission* and develops its approach to the daily pastoral, administrative and personal interactions which occur across the breadth of ministries.

In November 2022, the ACBC, CRA and AMPJP adopted *Our Common Mission* as a national framework for ministry and service in the Church in Australia. This prefaces *Integrity in Our Common Mission*, the *National Code of Conduct*, which updates and integrates the earlier work of *Integrity in Ministry* and *Integrity in the Service of the Church*.



## ECUMENICAL OUTREACH

Beyond the Catholic Church, we were able to engage with other denominations about safeguarding, sharing our experiences and gaining insight into other church efforts to embed safeguarding.

In November 2022 ACSL was invited by the Anglican Diocese of Sydney to speak at their safeguarding network meeting. The Diocese was particularly interested in exploring how the NCSS Audit framework could be applied to their organisations and to understand the work of the Catholic Church and ACSL in promoting cultural change.

In May and December 2023 ACSL also participated in the NSW Interdenominational Professional Standards and Safeguarding Group, convened by the Anglican Church to review their 2019 Statute on Child Safety in light of government regulation. In November 2023 ACSL also joined the Anglican Church of Australia National Safeguarding Committee.

## ENGAGING WITH COMMONWEALTH, STATE AND TERRITORY REGULATORS

ACSL advocates for and represents the Church's commitment to safeguarding with state, territory and Commonwealth regulatory bodies.

During the reporting period we were pleased to meet with the NSW Children's Guardian and the Victorian Commissioner for Children and Young People to advance mutual recognition of the NCSS Audit framework and to promote alignment between the development of school-based assessment tools and the NCSS. This dialogue is ongoing.

### National Office for Child Safety

In 2022 and 2023 ACSL continued its role on the National Office for Child Safety Sector Leaders Group, which gives advice and shares information about what governments and organisations can do to keep children and young people safe and well.

As the Catholic representative in a group of 50 peak bodies, engagement in the group helps to represent the Catholic Church's proactive stance on child safety within the broader Australian services context.

In March 2023 our Manager of Communications and Community Engagement participated in consultations on guidance for media who are reporting on child sexual abuse. The National Office for Child Safety partnered with the University of Canberra News and Media Research Centre to develop the guidelines, and the consultations heard from a range of voices in media and advocacy organisations.





## SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL REDRESS SCHEME

The Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the Operation of the National Redress Scheme was a collaborative effort and submitted jointly by ACBC, Australian Catholic Redress Limited (ACRL), ACSL and Catholic Social Services Australia. The Inquiry focused on the participation of First Nations people and those living with disability. Our shared perspectives focused on how the Scheme can be improved, following the Kruk Review.

ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens gave evidence at a public hearing of the National Redress Scheme Committee in October 2023 where she was able to affirm the Church's support for a Scheme that offers a pathway to redress for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse which is trauma-informed, provides independent decision-making and consistency of outcomes.

## WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS TO STRENGTHEN SAFEGUARDING APPROACHES ABROAD

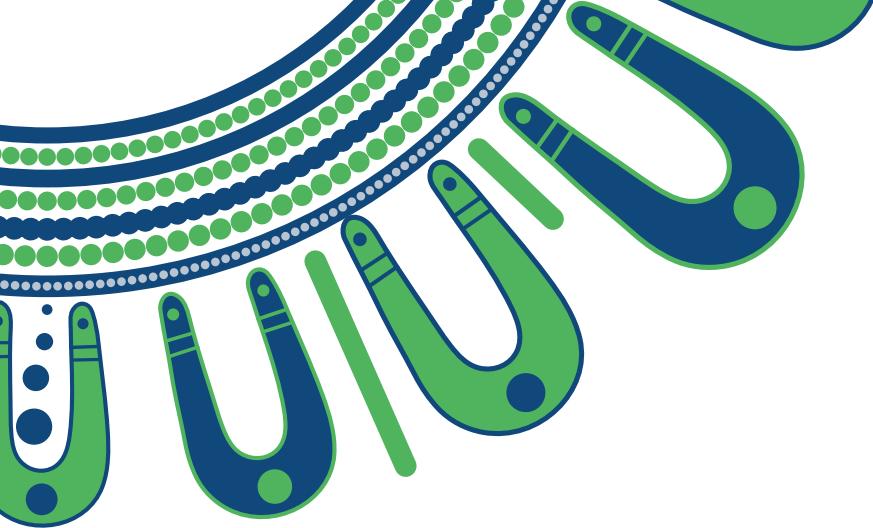
The safeguarding initiatives of the Australian Catholic Church, including the development and adoption of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, are world-recognised.

During the reporting period ACSL engaged with international partners through:

- Speaking with the Church of England (United Kingdom) about the establishment of their national safeguarding office, in November 2023.
  - Liaising with ACSL's counterparts in New Zealand throughout 2023 as they transition through new phases of their operations.
  - ACSL's CEO met with Theresa Devlin, CEO of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland and Dr Mary McAleese Chancellor, Trinity College and former President of Ireland to discuss changes to safeguarding issues in Ireland and the global Church.
  - Meeting with Safeguarding Ireland representatives to discuss options for a proposal to the Australian Law Reform Commission on an overarching safeguarding framework to encompass vulnerable adults (July 2023).
- Attending and participating in the International Safeguarding Conference in Rome in June 2023. ACSL's Director of Safeguarding and Improvement Daniele Donnini acted as a facilitator for the conference by bringing together a group of safeguarding practitioners in the Church in the Pacific region.



*Ursula Stephens meeting with former President of Ireland Dr Mary McAleese to discuss safeguarding efforts across the global Church*



## PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

### E-news

ACSL's monthly e-newsletter is one way we communicate regularly with Church leaders, safeguarding personnel and those interested in ACSL's work. We share program updates on our key safeguarding services areas of audit and review and complaints response and share upcoming learning opportunities from ACSL and other safeguarding specialists. Our monthly e-news is where we can also relay legislative updates that impact our Catholic organisations and share safeguarding best practices and research from non-Catholic networks.

We published **16 editions** of ACSL's e-news during this period, reaching **2,958 newsletter subscribers**.

### Media releases

We published **17 media releases** highlighting key updates to ACSL's work and celebrating the safeguarding achievements of Catholic organisations.

Distributed to Catholic and mainstream news outlets, our media releases were regularly featured in CathNews' daily newsletter, reaching 13,000 people per day, and were regularly carried in diocesan and other local Catholic news.

### Website

ACSL's website is often the first interaction with ACSL from the general public. We keep it updated with information about our safeguarding services and our publications, including Church audit reports. It is also a place where victims and survivors can find information about processes for making a complaint and find links to trauma-informed and local support services.

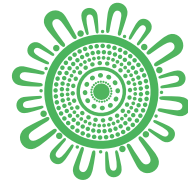
During the reporting period, our website received **9.3k visitors**.

Our most viewed pages were:

1. Homepage
2. NCSS landing page
3. Publications and Reports
4. ACSL Tools and Guides
5. ACMR

# The people who made it possible

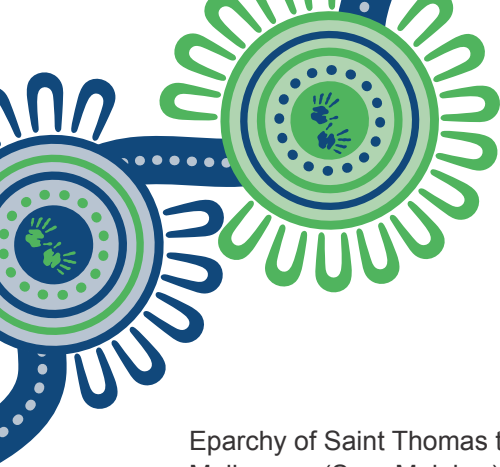
# Our Subscribers



ACSL is working for everyone in the Church, providing leadership, professional development and support to Catholic organisations across Australia. Together our commitment is to ensure that protecting and supporting vulnerable people is at the forefront of all our work.

**Thank you for partnering with us in this important work.**

African Missions Fathers (SMA)	Diocese of Broken Bay
Antonine Sisters (AS)	Diocese of Broome
Archdiocese of Adelaide	Diocese of Bunbury
Archdiocese of Brisbane	Diocese of Cairns
Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn	Diocese of Darwin
Archdiocese of Hobart	Diocese of Geraldton
Archdiocese of Melbourne	Diocese of Lismore
Archdiocese of Perth	Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
Archdiocese of Sydney	Diocese of Parramatta
Augustinian Fathers (OSA)	Diocese of Port Pirie
Australian Ursulines (OSU)	Diocese of Rockhampton
Benedictine Monks New Norcia (OSB)	Diocese of Sale
Blessed Sacrament Fathers (SSS)	Diocese of Sandhurst
Brigidine Sisters (CSB)	Diocese of Toowoomba
Calvary Ministries	Diocese of Townsville
Canossian Daughters of Charity (FdCC)	Diocese of Wagga Wagga
Carmelite Friars (OCD)	Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes
Catholic Mission	Diocese of Wollongong
Catholic Social Services Australia	Disalced Carmelite Nuns, Goonellebah (OCD)
Christian Brothers - Oceania Province (CFC)	Disalced Carmelite Nuns, Launceston (OCD)
Company of St Ursula - Secular Institute of St Angela Merici is an Institute of Pontifical right but is not registered as no civil legal status in Australia	Disalced Carmelite Nuns, Ormiston (OCD)
Congregation of Mary Queen of Peace	Divine Word Missionaries (SVD)
Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (FDNSC)	Dominican Education Australia
De La Salle Brothers (FSC)	Dominican Fathers (OP)
Diocese of Armidale	Dominican Sisters of Eastern Aust and the Solomon Is (OP)
Diocese of Ballarat	Dominican Sisters of North Adelaide (OP)
Diocese of Bathurst	Dominican Sisters of Western Australia (OP)
	Eparchy of Saint Maroun of Sydney (Maronite)
	Eparchy of Saint Michael of Sydney (Melkite)



Eparchy of Saint Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne (Syro-Malabar)

Eparchy of Saint Thomas the Apostle of Sydney (Chaldean)

Eparchy of Saints Peter and Paul of Melbourne (Ukrainian)

Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM)

Good Samaritan Education

Good Samaritan Sisters (SGS)

Good Shepherd Sisters (RGS)

Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS)

Institute of the Sisters of Reparation (SR)

Kildare Ministries

Loreto Ministries Ltd

Loreto Sisters (IBVM)

Marist Brothers - Province of Australia (FMS)

Marist Fathers (SM)

Marist Sisters (SM)

Mary Aikenhead Ministries

Mercy Partners

MercyCare

Michaelite Fathers (CSMA)

Military Ordinariate of Australia

Missionaries of Charity (MC)

Missionaries of God's Love Fathers and Brothers

Missionaries of God's Love Sisters

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC)

Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (MFIC)

Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)

Missionary Sisters of Service (MSS)

Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart (MSC)

Missionary Society of St Columban (SSC)

Missionary Society of St Paul (MSSP)

Passionist Fathers (CP)

Passionist Sisters of St Paul of the Cross

Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross

Presentation Sisters, WA (PBVM)

Presentation Sisters, Wagga Wagga (PBVM)

Priestly Fraternity of St Peter (FSSP)

Salesian Sisters - Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

Scalabrinian Fathers (CS)

Sisters of Charity (RSC)

Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane (RSM)

Sisters of Mercy - Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (RSM)

Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta (RSM)

Sisters of Perpetual Adoration

Sisters of St John of God (SSJG)

Sisters of St Joseph Lochinvar (RSJ)

Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition (SJA)

Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart (RSJ)

Sisters of the Resurrection (CR)

Society of St Paul (SSP)

Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ)

St John of God Australia

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Inc

The Carmelites (OCarm)

The Sisters of Nazareth (CSN)

The Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth (CSFN)

Verbum Dei Missionary Fraternity (VDM)

Vincentians (CM)



# The people who made it possible

# Our Members

Our mandate is to support Catholic entities to create a safe Church for everyone. The establishment of ACSL is part of the Church leadership's commitment to doing all in its power to ensure that abuse, in any form, should never again occur in the Catholic Church in Australia.

Our Board of Directors are responsible for the strategic directions of ACSL.

Sitting alongside our Board of Directors, ACSL's three member organisations support and advise the Board. They are the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (AMPJP), the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and Catholic Religious Australia (CRA).

Our governance arrangements are outlined in our company's constitution, available on our website.

## ACSL MEMBER REPRESENTATIVES

ACSL Member Representatives met with ACSL's Board of Directors on six occasions in the reporting period (1 July 2022 – 31 December 2023).

The Member Representatives for ACSL are:

### Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

- Most Rev Michael McCarthy, Bishop Rockhampton Diocese
- Most Rev Gregory Bennet, Bishop Sale Diocese
- Mr Henry Pruyn

### Catholic Religious Australia

- Fr Tom McDonough CP, Provincial, Passionist Fathers (Chair)
- Sr Eveline Crotty RSM, Institute Leader, Sisters of Mercy - Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea  
– **RETIRED 30/03/2023**
- Sr. Catherine Reuter RSM, Congregational Leader, Sisters of Mercy Brisbane  
– **APPOINTED 20/02/2023**

### Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons

- Ms Eva Skira AM, Trustee Chair, St John of God Health Care  
– **RETIRED 25/11/2022**
- Mr. Neville Owen, Trustee, St John of God Health  
– **APPOINTED 13/09/2022**





# The people who made it possible

# **Our Board of Directors**

Our Board of Directors have experience and credentials in child and adult safeguarding, professional standards, law, governance, Church administration, and finance and management. The ACSL Board met 12 times in the reporting period



**PROF THE HON MICHAEL  
LAVARCH AO LLB**  
*Chair of the Board*



**MS AUDREY BROWN**  
*(Appointed November 2022)*



**DR MARIA HARRIES**  
*(Appointed November 2022)*



**DR ROBYN MILLER**



**MR DAVID PENNY**



**SR KATH TIERNEY**



**MR JULIAN WIDDUP**

# The people who made it possible

# Our Staff



**URSULA STEPHENS**  
*Chief Executive Officer*



**KAREN MOSLEY**  
*Director, Professional Standards and Complaints*



**DAVID TREANOR**  
*Director, Safeguarding and Compliance*



**KAT BEAVIS**  
*Manager, Community Engagement and Communications*



**LLYWELLYN O'BRIEN**  
*Manager, Information and Systems*



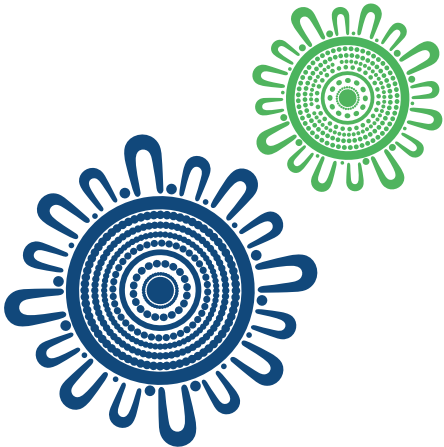
**KENDRA BOSWORTH**  
*Project Officer*



**TANIA WALKER**  
*Executive Assistant*



**MAREE CHARNLEY**  
*Senior Finance Officer*



And with deepest thanks to staff who left our team in 2022-2023:

- Daniele Donnini**, *Director, Safeguarding and Improvement*
- Susan Whitehead**, *Complaints Response Officer*
- Nicole Young**, *Executive Assistant*

# Concise Financials

## Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2023

In the previous financial period, the company amended its financial reporting date from 30 June to 31 December. The comparative period therefore reflects only a six-month period.

	Full year Dec 2023	Six months Dec 2022
	\$	\$
<b>Income</b>		
Members Contribution/Levy	1,750,000	865,000
Service Income	256,341	88,298
Interest Received	11,136	1,740
	<b>2,017,477</b>	<b>955,038</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Cost of rendering services	(209,328)	(86,920)
Administration expense	(295,444)	(121,028)
Employee benefits expense	(1,075,947)	(659,012)
Director fees & related costs	(222,233)	(87,104)
Depreciation and amortisation	(27,021)	(24,741)
Finance costs	(697)	(445)
	<b>(1,830,670)</b>	<b>(979,250)</b>
<b>Surplus/(Deficit) for the year</b>	<b>186,807</b>	<b>(24,212)</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>		
Other comprehensive income for the year (net of tax)	-	-
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>186,807</b>	<b>(24,212)</b>





## Statement of financial position as at 31 Decemeber 2023

	31 Dec 2023	31 Dec 2022
	\$	\$
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,043,224	1,071,345
Trade and other receivables	141,054	84,315
Other Assets	37,753	23,312
Right-of-use assets	-	22,716
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>1,222,031</b>	<b>1,201,688</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Property, plant and equipment	-	-
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>1,222,031</b>	<b>1,201,688</b>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	395,669	553,008
Provisions	53,792	44,781
Lease liabilities	-	22,777
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>449,461</b>	<b>620,566</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Provisions	20,934	16,293
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>20,934</b>	<b>16,293</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>470,395</b>	<b>636,859</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>751,636</b>	<b>564,829</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Accumulated funds	751,636	564,829
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>751,636</b>	<b>564,829</b>



*A safe Church for everyone*

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