

# CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

## OCEANIA PROVINCE

### CHILD PROTECTION POLICY (2015)

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The Vincentian Fathers and Brothers (Congregation of the Mission – Oceania Province) are committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children. We support the rights of children and will act without hesitation to maintain a child-safe environment across all of our ministries.

The Vincentian Fathers and Brothers are committed to the protection of children from harm, abuse, exploitation and discrimination. Children have a right to survival, development, protection and participation as stated in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The Vincentian Fathers and Brothers works with all our employees and ministry partners to ensure that they have an effective Child Protection Policy, based on the recommendations from the Royal Commission into the sexual abuse of children within institutions and the Church documents "Integrity in Ministry" and "Towards Healing," with relevant staff training, implementation and auditing procedures in place.

1. **Title of policy** Vincentian Fathers and Brothers Child Protection Policy (VCPD)
2. **Definition of child abuse** Child abuse can be defined as the neglect or discrimination of, or the physical, sexual or emotional mistreatment of, a child, regardless of whether the action is wilful or deliberate or not. This includes the potential or threat to harm or mistreat, as well as actual harm inflicted.
3. **Definition of a child** The VCPD defines a child as anyone less than 18 years of age, unless a specific nation's laws recognise adulthood or the age of majority as being obtained earlier.

#### 4. Statement on commitment to child protection

The Vincentians are committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children. We support the rights of children and will act without hesitation to maintain a child-safe environment across all of our ministries.

The Vincentians are committed to the protection of children from harm, abuse, exploitation and discrimination. Children have a right to survival, development, protection and participation as stated in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The VCPD will uphold these rights.

The Vincentians takes its duty of care seriously and will at all times provide the safest possible programs and environments for children and the staff who look after them. This will be achieved by identifying and managing risks that may lead to the harm of children in any way.

The Vincentians will ensure that appropriate relationships are maintained at all times between pastoral ministers involved in a Vincentian ministry and the children being served by this same ministry.

The Vincentians will ensure there are procedures in place to monitor the implementation of the Child Protection Policy.

The Leadership of the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers will evaluate all ministries on an annual basis to determine the effectiveness of the VCPP. We will immediately seek to address any issues that may arise in relation to child protection and children's rights within all the Vincentian ministries.

## 5. Purpose of the policy

This VCPP has been developed to provide a practical guide to prevent child abuse in all Vincentian ministries. It outlines a range of risk management strategies that will be implemented which will reduce the risk of children being harmed.

The VCPP demonstrates the Vincentian's commitment to protect children from harm, abuse, exploitation and discrimination and create and maintain appropriate relationships between all staff and children participating in Vincentian ministries

- The VCPP aims to educate staff and others about child abuse and promote a child-safe and child-friendly culture where every individual is committed to keeping children free from any form of abuse.
- The VCPP aims to create an open and aware environment where concerns for the safety and wellbeing of a child can be raised and managed in a fair and just manner, thus protecting the rights of all concerned.
- The VCPP gives guidance on how to respond to concerns and allegations of child abuse. It provides direction to staff and others on how to work respectfully and effectively with children, and offers all stakeholders a safe working environment.

## 6. Guiding principles

1. The Vincentian Fathers and Brothers believe that any form of child abuse and exploitation is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
2. The UNCRC is the universal foundation for child protection. The fundamental principle of the Convention is that children have their own inalienable rights and that these must be upheld by individuals and organisations working with children.
3. The Vincentian Fathers and Brothers recognises their duty of care to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe from harm at all times and will take proactive steps to create child-safe and child-friendly ministries.

4. Adherence to the VCPP is a mandatory requirement for all Vincentian Fathers and Brothers, their staff, as well as all others working on any Vincentian-supported ministries.
5. The Vincentian Fathers and Brothers will ensure that all staff and relevant stakeholders are made aware of the VCPP and their responsibilities in relation to it.
6. All decisions regarding the welfare and protection of children will be made based on the Best Interests of the Child principle. This principle refers to decisions made on the consideration that a child receives the maximum benefit possible from services provided, and that the positive impacts of any course of action must outweigh any negative impacts.

## 7. Definitions

### Oceania

Refers to the countries where the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers assist and support Church ministries within the framework of the global Congregation of the Mission, specifically in: Australia, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.

### Bullying

The inappropriate use of physical or psychological power by an individual or group done with the intent to injure another either physically or emotionally. Physical bullying includes pushing, hitting, punching, kicking or any other action causing hurt or injury. Verbal bullying includes insults, taunts, threats and ridicules, whilst psychological bullying includes physical intimidation and ostracism.

### Child

A child or young person is regarded as any person under the age of 18 years unless a nation's laws recognise adulthood earlier.

### Child Abuse

Any mistreatment of a child by another individual whether deliberate or not. Child abuse happens to boys and girls of all ages, ethnicity and social backgrounds, abilities, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and political persuasions. It includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, bullying, child labour and domestic violence. Abuse can be inflicted on a child by both men and women, as well as by young people themselves.

### Child Protection

Used to describe the responsibilities and activities undertaken to prevent or stop children from being abused or maltreated.

### Duty of Care

A common law concept that refers to the responsibility of an organisation to provide children with an adequate level of protection against harm. It is the duty of the organisation to protect children from all reasonably foreseeable risk of injury.

### Emotional Abuse

This occurs when a child is repeatedly subjected or exposed to behaviour from another individual that leads to psychological trauma. This may involve name-calling, being verbally put down, bullying, intimidation, continual coldness from a parent or caregiver, degradation, criticism or excessive personal demands, all which may affect a child's physical, psychological or emotional growth.

### Neglect

The deliberate denial of or persistent failure to provide clean water, food, shelter, sanitation or supervision or care to a child to the extent that their health and development is placed at risk.

### Physical Abuse

Occurs when a person purposefully injures, or threatens to injure, a child. It may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing.

### Provincial

The name used for the Vincentian who has responsibility for the conduct of Vincentian ministries in the Oceania Province.

### Sexual Abuse

This occurs when a child or young person is used by another individual for his or her own sexual stimulation or gratification, regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. These can be either contact or non-contact acts, including threats and exposure to pornography.

## **7. Child protection risk management**

- The Vincentian Fathers and Brothers recognise that there are a number of potential risks to children in the delivery of ministry within the Oceania Province. The Vincentian Fathers and Brothers proactively assess and manage these risks in our ministries and in the communities in which we work to reduce the risk of harm. As children are part of every ministry in which we work, we are mindful of potential risks that may create issues in relation to child protection.
- Risk management is an ongoing part of every activity undertaken by the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers. We will conduct a child protection risk assessment on every new ministry, which will be included in the ministry management cycle.
- All Vincentian Fathers and Brothers, as well as those who minister in our works, should be continually aware of risks associated with children and should be actively attempting to reduce opportunities where abuse can occur.

- Reporting procedures have been developed and are to be utilised whenever an incidence of child abuse is reported by an individual in relation to the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers.

### **What should be reported?**

It should be noted that, for any allegation of the sexual abuse of children, it is compulsory to report such allegations to the appropriate authorities – Police, Provincial and Church.

Further reporting is required of

1. Any disclosure or allegation from an individual or staff member regarding abuse or mistreatment of a child.
2. Any observation or concerning behaviour exhibited by a Vincentian Father or Brother or staff member, volunteer or other relevant person that breaches the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers policy code of conduct.
3. Inappropriate use of the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers photographic equipment or computers, including evidence of child pornography or exploitation or sexualisation of a child, as well as any inappropriate use of personal equipment for the same activities.
4. Any Vincentian Father, Brother, Staff or ministry partner engaging in suspicious behaviour that could be associated with sexual exploitation.

### **Code of conduct for working with children**

Vincentian Fathers, Brothers, Staff members and ministry partners are responsible for maintaining a professional role in relation to child protection. This means working in a respectful and approachable manner and maintaining professional boundaries that serve to protect everyone from misunderstandings by promoting transparency and accountability when working with children. This includes staff being conscious of their own behaviour, as well as how these behaviours are perceived by others.

All Vincentian Fathers, Brothers, staff and ministry partners should conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their role as a Vincentian representative. The Congregation of the Mission has developed this VCPP to provide clear guidelines for staff in order for them to work transparently and accountably within their role, as well as the expectations relating to its staff and child protection.

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**The Vincentian Fathers and Brothers  
Child Safe Code of Conduct includes:**

**I WILL:**

1. Abide by the mandatory reporting laws of the particular State or Territory in which I am ministering
2. Treat all children and young people in Vincentian ministries with respect and equality regardless of gender, personal situation or age.
3. Conduct myself in a manner that is consistent with the values of the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers.
4. Provide a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for all children.
5. Encourage open communication between all children, parents, staff and ministry partners and seek to have children participate in the decisions that affect them.
6. Report immediately any concerns of child abuse.
7. At all times, be transparent in my actions and whereabouts.
8. Take responsibility for ensuring that I am accountable and do not place myself in situations where there is a risk of allegations of child abuse being made.
9. Self-assess my behaviours, actions, language and relationships with children.
10. Speak up when I observe concerning behaviours of colleagues regarding children.
11. Proactively seek to encourage children within all projects in which they partake.

**I WILL NOT:**

- .1. Engage in behaviour intended to humiliate, belittle or degrade children.
- .2. Use inappropriate, offensive or discriminatory language when speaking with a child or young person.
- .3. Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for him or herself, such as assistance with toileting or changing of clothes.
- .4. Take children to their own residence or sleep in the same room or bed as a child.
- .5. Smack, hit or physically assault any child.
- .6. Develop sexual relationships with children or relationships with children that may be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- .7. Dress or behave provocatively or inappropriately when working with children.
- .8. Condone or participate in behaviour with a child that is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- .9. Act in a way that shows unfair, differential or discriminatory treatment of a child.
- .10. Photograph or film a child without their consent and that of a parent or guardian.
- .11. Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch a child in an inappropriate, unnecessary or culturally insensitive way.
- .12. Seek to make contact or spend time with any child outside ministry or the working hours specified in my contract.
- .13. Use a Vincentian Community or personal computer, mobile phone, video or digital camera in an inappropriate manner or use them for the purpose of exploiting, abusing or harassing a child.

**10. Conclusion**

All members of the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers, their employees and ministry partners commit themselves to providing a child safe environment. It must be noted that this policy statement will be revised annually, especially in light of the Royal Commission and Church recommendations.

## 11. References

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