



## **PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS POLICY**

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

Our founder, Venerable Catherine McAuley, constantly reminds us that *mercy is the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following him.*

This Professional Standards Policy (the Policy) expresses our commitment, as Sisters of Mercy, to live and work in accordance with the Gospel ideals and the values and principles as articulated in the *Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy Brisbane* together with the documents, *Integrity in Ministry (IM)*, and *Towards Healing (TH)*, *Integrity in the Service of the Church [ISC]*.

The Policy comprises three sections:

1. Underlying Principles
2. Purpose and Scope
3. Implementation.

### **UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF THE POLICY**

We appreciate the formative influence of the documents mentioned above as they guide us towards integrity in our private, public and professional lives. At the same time, we accept that the principles and procedures of *TH* provide the basis for responding with justice to persons who may have a complaint against us.

In context of this Policy, the justice we desire is restorative. That is to say, it is primarily about restoring right relationships between the Congregation and those whom its members, employees or volunteers may have harmed by conduct which has them caused pain and suffering.

Restorative justice asks that the experiences and needs of all concerned be voiced and heard, that lasting reconciliation be sought and that appropriate restitution be made. At its best, it gives expression to the ideal that “out of love we desire the deepest wellbeing of one another” and honours our pledge to “commit ourselves to relationships that embody respect, love and service”.

### **PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE POLICY**

This Policy complements the documents *TH*, *IM* and *ISC* and is intended

1. To direct the Congregation Leader and her Council in addressing issues of complaint which may relate to:-
  - members of the Congregation, living or dead;
  - former novices or member of the Congregation;
  - employees and volunteers of the Congregation;
  - employees and volunteers, living and dead, of the Congregation;



2. To assist each member of the Congregation in her personal responsibility to live and minister in harmony with its ideals and values.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

The Congregation Leader, with her Council, has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that all aspects of professional standards are effectively addressed within and on behalf of the Congregation. In that regard, there are three main areas:-

1. Our commitment to professional standards individually and as the Congregation.
2. Response to issues of complaint.
3. Development of guidelines for the professional conduct of employees and volunteers of the Congregation.

### **1. Our commitment to Professional Standards**

- 1.1. The Congregation Leader and Council will ensure that every sister has opportunities to become familiar with this Policy, together with the principles and standards of *IM* and to recognise their application to her and to the Congregation as a whole.
- 1.2 Every sister in active ministry is expected to conduct herself according to the ethics of her profession, for example, teaching, nursing, social work.
- 1.3 A sister who ministers within an institution, whether Church or secular, is obliged by its guidelines in relation to conduct.
- 1.4 A sister who is authorised by the Congregation Leader and Council to minister alone, such as in spiritual direction or natural therapies, is responsible for having regular supervision, taking opportunities for professional development and ensuring that her way of working, and the structural arrangements of her workplace, conform with the standards of *IM*.
- 1.5 Where a sister is authorised to minister alone, the Congregation Leader will ensure that:-
  - she is adequately resourced by the Congregation, particularly in relation to provision of a proper workplace and funds for her supervision and professional development;
  - she has an appropriate professional indemnity cover.
- 1.6 A sister who resides overseas for a time is obliged by this Policy as well as relevant policies of the diocese in which she lives and ministers.

### **2. Response to Issues of Complaint.**

#### ***Receiving Complaints***

- 2.1 Every complaint will be forwarded in the first instance to the Congregation Leader or her delegate.



- 2.2 To enable the complaint to be addressed effectively and in good time, the Congregation Leader may appoint a suitably experienced person to liaise with herself, the complainant, the person against whom the complaint is made, the relevant Office for Professional Standards and other bodies, including civil authorities, as necessary.
- 2.3 If any sister in the Congregation receives a complaint, for example, from a caller on the telephone or from someone she meets socially or in the course of her ministry, she will respond according to the guidelines for such instances.
- 2.4 Employees and volunteers of the Congregation should be instructed about how to respond if they receive a complaint or otherwise become aware of a violation of professional standards on the part of a sister, employee or volunteer of the Congregation.
- 2.5 Every sister who is involved in receiving or addressing a complaint is obliged by the demands of confidentiality in relation to the complainant, the alleged offender and any other person or institution named.

### ***Addressing Complaints***

- 2.6 The inherent dignity of every complainant and his or her rights to justice and compassion will be respected at all times. Likewise, there should be no assumption or judgment that the person who is the subject of a complaint is guilty of it until the investigation finds otherwise.
- 2.7 Where appropriate, complainants will be invited to engage with the process of *TH*.
- 2.8 If the established process is not an appropriate option for a complainant, the Congregation Leader, in consultation with the complainant, the liaison person and other relevant parties, will offer an alternative process based on principles of restorative justice, for example, mediation.
- 2.9 If it becomes apparent that there are a number of complaints related to the alleged practices at the one institution, it may be wise for the Congregation Leader and Council to design a particular, comprehensive programme of response.
- 2.10 The Congregation Leader will ensure that a sister, employee or volunteer who is the subject of a complaint is given sustained support – pastoral, psychological, spiritual and legal.
- 2.11 When other Church authorities are involved in a complaint, the Congregation will collaborate with them in seeking a resolution.
- 2.12 The Congregation Leader will seek to have adequate funds available for all contingencies associated with addressing complaints.

### ***Ongoing Pastoral Supports***

When an issue of complaint has been resolved, sisters are encouraged to continue pastoral care of the former complainant if the Congregation Leader, in consultation with all concerned, deems this to be appropriate. However, in such instances the sisters offering a pastoral relationship ought not to be those who were involved in the processes of resolution.



### ***Keeping Records***

- 2.13 All files relating to issues of complaint, active and closed, will hold only that information, which is prudent or legally necessary to retain. In determining the content of each file and the period for which it should be held, the Congregation Leader will seek advice from the Congregation's lawyers and the Professional Standards Office.
- 2.14 All active files concerned with sisters, employees or volunteers, are held by the Congregation Leader or her delegate.
- 2.15 Closed files are kept either by the Congregation Leader or her delegate, or are held by another suitable agency, for example, the Congregation's lawyers.
- 2.16 Wherever a file is held, it must be securely protected and access to it must be on a limited and specified basis.

### ***Communication Matters***

- 2.17 The Congregation Leader will ensure that:-
- guidelines for relating to the media on behalf of the Congregation are developed and kept current;
  - protocols are developed so that the sisters, employees and volunteers receive accurate and timely information, should an issue of complaint become public.
- 2.18 If it is likely that an issue of complaint will become public, the Congregation Leader will consult her Council, the relevant Church authority and Professional Standards Office, and seek legal advice before determining the nature of any public response from the Congregation and by whom it should be made.

### **3. Guidelines for Professional Conduct for Sisters, Employees and Volunteers of the congregation.**

The Congregation Leader will ensure that:-

- 3.1 Every work, incorporated or unincorporated, which is owned or sponsored by the Congregation, has particular guidelines for professional conduct which complement the relevant Church documents such as *Integrity in the Service of the Church*.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive Officer of Mercy Community Services, SEQ Ltd will provide regular opportunities for staff and volunteers to familiarise themselves with these guidelines and to understand how they relate to them personally and to the obligations and integrity of the Congregation.



## **Conclusion**

As Sisters of Mercy, we recognize that justice, tender love and humility before God must determine the response of our Congregation to any matter of complaint which may be brought against its members, its employees or its volunteers.

Our Constitutions inspire us in this regard.

*Whatever work we do, we join in the search for justice and love wherever we are.*  
[Constitutions 4.08]

<b>Authorised by:</b>	Congregation Leader
<b>Endorsed by:</b>	Congregation Leader & Council
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