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Professional Standards Policy  
for  
Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea

*ACT JUSTLY, LOVE TENDERLY, WALK HUMBLY*

## INTRODUCTION

God's Word, living and active, compels us

*to act justly  
to love tenderly and  
to walk humbly with your God.  
(Micah 6:8)*

and 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 members, employees, long term contractors and volunteers of ISMAPNG to live and work in accordance with the Gospel ideals and the values and principles as articulated in the *Constitutions of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea* (the Institute), together with the documents, *Integrity in Ministry*<sup>1</sup>, *Towards Healing*<sup>2</sup> *Integrity in the Service of the Church*<sup>3</sup> and *Protocol for Right Relationships in Ministry*<sup>4</sup>.

The Policy comprises three sections:

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

<sup>1</sup> *Integrity in Ministry* – A Document of Principles and Standards for Catholic Clergy and Religious in Australia, National Committee for Professional Standards, 2004 (reprinted 2010.)

<sup>2</sup> *Towards Healing* – Principles and Procedures in Responding to Complaints of Abuse Against Personnel of the Catholic Church in Australia, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia, 2010 and associated documents.

<sup>3</sup> *Integrity in the Service of the Church* – A resource document of Principles and Standards for Lay Workers in the Catholic Church in Australia, National Committee for Professional Standards, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> *Protocol for Right Relationships in Ministry* – Dealing with Cases of Sexual Abuse Involving Clergy, Religious and Church Personnel in Papua New Guinea (amended 2006).



## 1. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF THE POLICY

The Institute appreciates 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 the Institute accepts that the principles and procedures of *Towards Healing, Integrity in Ministry, Integrity in the Service of the Church and Protocol for Right Relationships in Ministry* (all subsequently incorporated in the term "Church Professional Standards") provide the basis for responding with justice to persons who may have a complaint against us<sup>5</sup>.

In context of this Policy, the justice we desire is restorative. That is to say, it is primarily about restoring right relationships between the Institute and those whom its members, employees, contractors or volunteers may have harmed by conduct which has caused them 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 well-being of one another" and honours our pledge to "commit ourselves to relationships that embody respect, love and service"<sup>6</sup>.

For all associated with the Institute, restorative justice reflects the truth that justice is constitutive of Mercy. As Pope John Paul II teaches:

*True Mercy  
is the  
most profound source of justice.  
It is  
an indispensable element  
for shaping  
mutual relationships,  
in a spirit of deepest respect  
for what is human.  
It has the power  
to confer on justice  
a new content,  
which is expressed  
most simply and fully in  
forgiveness.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> In some situations, the Institute may need to collaborate with persons governed by the *Melbourne Response*.

<sup>6</sup> *Integrity in Ministry* p. ix.

<sup>7</sup> Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Dives in Misericordia*, 1980.



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

This Policy complements the Church Professional Standards documentation and is intended

- i. to assist the Institute Leader and her Council in addressing issues of complaint which may relate to
  - members of the Institute, living or dead<sup>8</sup>;
  - former novices or members of congregations<sup>9</sup> which united to become the Institute;
  - employees, contractors and volunteers of the Institute;
  - employees, contractors and volunteers, living and dead, of congregations which united in December 2011 to become the Institute;
  - employees and volunteers of the former Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia (ISMA)<sup>10</sup>;
- ii. to assist all associated with the Institute in their personal responsibility to live and minister in harmony with its ideals and values.

## **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

The Institute Leader, with her Council, has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that all aspects of professional standards are effectively addressed within and on behalf of the Institute, by ensuring that

- ISMAPNG operates within an environment which is safe, respectful, professional and legally compliant;
- Complaints are handled promptly, in a manner characterized by mercy, justice, truth, humility and respect and fairness for the inherent dignity of all involved.
- In the absence of exceptional circumstances, all employees, contractors, volunteers and sisters in active ministry are expected to complete a minimum of 2 hours training once a year with face to face training at least each second year.

### ***Pastoral Care***

ISMAPNG is committed to providing pastoral care to those who have been mistreated and abused. This Pastoral Care is characterized by mercy, justice and compassion, respect for their self-determined needs and a focus on empowerment.

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<sup>8</sup> For purposes of this Policy, members of the Institute include all sisters, living and dead, who belonged to congregations that dissolved in order to form the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea on December 12, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Reference to “congregations” includes the former Autonomous Region of Papua New Guinea.

<sup>10</sup> ISMA was dissolved on December 12, 2011.





## ***Keeping Records***

- i. 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 Institute Leader or her delegate will seek advice from the Institute's lawyers and the Professional Standards Office.
- ii. All active files concerned with sisters, employees, contractors or volunteers, are held by the Institute leader or her delegate.
- iii. Closed files<sup>11</sup> are to be kept either by the Institute Leader's relevant delegate, or to be held by another suitable agency, for example, the Institute's lawyer.
- iv. When judged appropriate, certain files may be sent to the Institute archives.
- v. Wherever a file is held, it must be securely protected and access to it must be on a limited and specified basis.

## ***Communication Matters***

In relation to Professional Standards matters, the Institute Leader will ensure that:

- i. guidelines for relating to the media on behalf of the Institute are developed and kept current;
- ii. appropriate protocols are developed so that the sisters, employees and volunteers clearly understand the required processes. If it is likely that an issue of complaint will become public, the Institute 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 Institute and by whom it should be made;
- iii. no person is to make any statement to the media without the authorization of the Institute Leader.

### **a. Guidelines for Professional Conduct for Members, Employees, Contractors and Volunteers of the Institute.**

The Institute Leader will ensure that:

- i. every workplace, incorporated or unincorporated, which is owned or sponsored by the Institute, has particular guidelines for professional conduct which complement the relevant Church Professional Standards documentation;
- ii. the directors<sup>12</sup> of each ministry 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 Institute.

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<sup>11</sup> A closed file is one which contains information about the investigation of an allegation whether substantiated or not, and whether the subject of the allegation is living or deceased.

<sup>12</sup> This is the person immediately responsible for the operation of the work, for example, a school principal or an executive officer.



## **Confidentiality**

All associated with ISMAPNG will respect the confidentiality of all matters related to Professional Standards to which they have access in the course of or arising from their association with the Institute.

As Mercy women and men we recognize that justice, tender love and humility before God must determine the response of the Institute to any matter of complaint which may be brought against its members, its employees, contractors or its volunteers. Our Constitutions inspire us in this regard.

*Whatever work we do,  
our song is of mercy and fidelity  
justice and peace  
Because of our God,  
to whom we sing our song,  
we join in the search  
for justice and love wherever we are .....  
Working together to create the new earth  
which God's love demands.*

(Constitutions 4.09)