

Our Common Mission

Conversation Guide

This conversation guide is a companion to *Our Common Mission*. The guide seeks to provide:

- the background and timeline of *Our Common Mission*;
- a map and FAQs to support implementation of *Our Common Mission*; and
- questions for personal and communal feedback on *Our Common Mission*.

Background and timeline

In August 2018, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia accepted Recommendation 16.49 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that ‘codes of conduct in religious institutions should explicitly and equally apply to people in religious ministry and to lay people’ and undertook to review *Integrity in Ministry* for clergy and religious and *Integrity in the Service of the Church* for laity.

In October 2021, Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL) established an advisory group to guide the writing of a national code for all Catholic ministries and services. Advisory group members (Sr Veronica Hoey SGS – Chair, Dr Jane Comensoli, Dr David Leary OFM, Sr Ailsa MacKinnon RSM, Rev Dr Jake Mudge, and Dr Ursula Stephens – CEO ACSL) provided input on the draft, which reflects current ecclesiology and safeguarding within an Australian and global context and recognises the imperative of each entity to develop their own codes of conduct.

The working draft, *Our Common Mission*, draws on Second Vatican Council and contemporary Vatican documents as well as human rights documents to distil the synodal themes of mission, communion and participation for contemporary readers. The text’s brevity is intentional: it should speak directly and inclusively to diverse groups and prompt deeper reflection for personal and communal use. Its purpose is synodal in both form and content. Marginal quotes are also intended to promote dialogue with the main text.

Our Common Mission proposes three interdependent principles – culture, relationships, and formation – as a national framework for ministry and service in the Church. These are drawn from US, UK and Australian sources, including the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) and National Response Protocol (NRP), and provide high level guidance for ministry and service in conjunction with other codes of conduct.

At its May meeting, the Bishops Plenary endorsed *Our Common Mission* for an initial 12-month implementation period. The advisory group is now seeking feedback from the wider Catholic community to inform a final version for approval in November 2022 and dissemination across all entities. As a living document, *Our Common Mission* will be subject to continuous review and improvement so that it remains future-focused in ensuring ‘a safer Church for everyone, now and in the years ahead’ (NCSS, Ed 2, p. 1).

Mapping Our Common Mission

Our Common Mission outlines the commitment of the whole Catholic Church in Australia to put safety at the centre of mission. The diagram visualises something that is at the foundation, still living and requiring continuous adaptation but not subject to as many legislative and professional requirements as the outer levels.



FAQs

Can I/we still use *Integrity in Ministry* and *Integrity in the Service of the Church*?

Yes. *Integrity in Ministry* and *Integrity in the Service of the Church* detail over 250 specific behavioural standards. These may provide a resource for entities in developing their codes of conduct. Some of these standards have been condensed and updated in *Our Common Mission*. Codes of conduct should be developed in adherence to *Our Common Mission*, the NCSS, NRP and other legislation applicable to the entity's circumstances.

Does *Our Common Mission* provide guidance for any breaches of responsibility?

Not specifically. The NCSS includes specific guidance on processes for raising concerns and complaints (Standard 6). The NRP and any other complaints procedure in the Church must meet this standard. *Our Common Mission* includes responsibilities (e.g., mandatory reporting, supervision, reporting boundary violations, acting within expertise) that, if breached, may result in criminal or professional proceedings. The relevant legislation and standards apply.

Does everyone in my entity need to read *Our Common Mission*?

Yes. It is intended to be used for ongoing formation in ministry and service, in conjunction with each entity's code of conduct. *Our Common Mission* also refers to key Church and human rights documents that may prompt further engagement for personal or communal reflection and discernment.

Feedback questions

Our Common Mission provides a national framework for ministry and service. It forms a suite of documents including the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, National Response Protocol, National Response Framework, and organisational codes of conduct, which entrust the whole Catholic Church in Australia with a shared commitment to safety. Please provide your feedback on *Our Common Mission* after reading and discussing it in your organisation.

- How would you embed *Our Common Mission* in your role or organisation?
- How does *Our Common Mission* inform your organisation's code/s of conduct?
- What does *Our Common Mission* offer to the Catholic Church in Australia?
- How do you see yourself and/or your role reflected in *Our Common Mission*?
- Is there anything missing from *Our Common Mission*? If so, what?
- How would you envisage *Our Common Mission* as a formation document for your organisation?
- Any other comments?