

# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

1 JANUARY –  
31 DECEMBER 2024

Australian Catholic  
Safeguarding Ltd





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Safeguarding Ltd 2025

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we live, work, and gather. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations people. We recognise the deep, enduring spiritual and cultural connections Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to these lands, waters, and skies — connections that continue to guide and nurture communities today.

### **Art** by *Lani Balzan*

Created by nationally recognised Aboriginal Artist and Wiradjuri woman, Lani Balzan, 'The Path of Spirituality and Protection' 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.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

We recognise the immense pain and suffering caused by the Church's failures to protect, believe, and respond justly to those who courageously came forward — and to those who could not. We honour the strength and resilience of victims, survivors, their families, and their communities, who continue to live with the lasting impacts of these failures.

We are committed to listening with humility, learning with open hearts, and acting with integrity to ensure the mistakes of the past are never repeated. Our ongoing work in safeguarding is grounded in a steadfast resolve to build a Church that is safe, accountable, compassionate, and worthy of trust. We walk alongside those who have lived experience of abuse, committed to promoting healing and justice as we continue this journey together.



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# ABOUT ACSL

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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 promote a zero tolerance of abuse and we work to ensure a safe Church for everyone.

## Our vision

A Church that is nurturing and safe for everyone who encounters the ministries and services we provide.

## Our mission

To support 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.

## Our impact

Catholic entities that are transparent and accountable in how they protect children and adults at risk from abuse and are committed to reflective practices in safeguarding.

## Our values

### LEADERSHIP

We are courageous in promoting the rights and safety of children and adults at risk within our communities.

### 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 strive to  
embed our  
values with  
professionalism  
and care in  
everything we do.

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



2024 was the first full year of operation of a full Subscriber model to ACSL.

## Subscriber Model

The concept of a Subscriber was a key recommendation of the 2020 review of the operations of Catholic Professional Standards Ltd (CPSL), the predecessor company of ACSL. During this review many Church Authorities requested a move away from compulsory membership of CPSL. Rather, it was seen as important to allow each individual Church Authority to make an active decision to subscribe to the new safeguarding company ACSL.

ACSL defines a Church Authority as a Diocese, Religious institute or a Ministerial Public Juridic Person (PJP).

In electing to subscribe the Church Authority makes a commitment to:

- to implement the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards,
- to engage in a three-year assessment cycle,
- to support the work of ACSL,
- to adopt a Complaints Handling Policy such as the National Response Protocol or Framework, and
- to adopt other ACSL Safeguarding and Professional Standards as they are developed.

They also contribute financially to the operations of ACSL.

118 Church Authorities have agreed to be Subscribers for the 3-year period until December 2026. These 118 Subscribers represent the majority of clergy and religious women and men in Australia.

Those Church Authorities that decided not to subscribe have done so for a number of reasons: including their assessment that they have low risks within the safeguarding area, have very small numbers of active members, are elderly and no longer in ministry, or the cost is too high.

While they are not Subscribers to ACSL it does not mean that they are not serious about safeguarding within their entity. They will likely have strong safeguarding policies and sound complaint frameworks – but have just decided not to subscribe to ACSL. While this is disappointing, it is their right to make this decision.

Regardless, ACSL remains available to support all Church Authorities.

## Change to Directors

During the year we farewelled two directors who had served our safeguarding company since the establishment of CPSL in 2017.



The Hon. Michael Lavarch AO was appointed as an inaugural Director of CPSL and agreed to continue when ACSL was established. As Chair since 2020 Michael led the discussions with Church entities to establish the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards and the National Response Protocol. We owe Michael a tremendous debt of gratitude for his contribution.

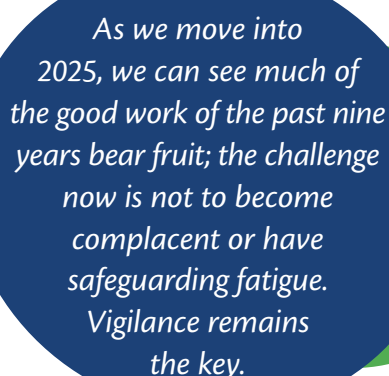
Dr Robyn Miller AM was also an inaugural director of CPSL. Robyn brought her significant experience in child protection to the Board and assisted in ensuring critical current thinking and research was applied to all aspects of the work of ACSL.

We thank these two individuals for their dedication and commitment, and welcome Mr Michael Moore as a new director.

## Organisational Review

Within the ACSL constitution there is a requirement that the Board undertake a review of the company's activities at the end of the fifth year of operation.

The Board will be implementing this review during 2025 with a report to be provided to the Members of the company in November 2025.



*As we move into 2025, we can see much of the good work of the past nine years bear fruit; the challenge now is not to become complacent or have safeguarding fatigue. Vigilance remains the key.*

There are many demands on ministry within a wounded Church still feeling the effects of the Royal Commission and COVID-19. This means that choices are needed in a world with finite resources. We remain hopeful that the right choices will continue to be made.

In the years since the Royal Commission much has changed and there has been real engagement in the development of safeguarding policy and its implementation. But to really make the change that is necessary we need to embed this policy and practice into the culture of our Church. If we can do this, we may be able take a leadership role in changing society's understanding of safeguarding and assist in reducing the incidence of abuse of children and vulnerable within our society which continues at high rate.

In concluding this annual report, I wish to thank the Company Members for their support, my fellow Board Directors, our Subscribers and all those who assist with this endeavour. It is truly an honor to have been asked to chair this important Church body.

I also wish to particularly thank Ursula Stephens our CEO and the staff of ACSL for their amazing tenacity and dedication to the work of ACSL.

Much of their work goes unnoticed but it all goes to assist in the efforts to make our Church safe for all.

**Mr David Penny**  
*ACSL Board Chair*

# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



*"When you establish prevention policies, even in the remotest communities, you are writing a promise: that every child, every vulnerable person, will find a safe environment in the ecclesial community."*

- Pope Francis

2024 was another busy year and it has been gratifying to witness the combined efforts of our Catholic organisations to embed a safeguarding culture within their ministries. We have witnessed these efforts during audits and reviews, as well as in the opportunities that the ACSL team has had to engage directly with the work of ministries within the community.

Our mandate as outlined in the ACSL Constitution represents a huge challenge as we attempt to meet these responsibilities effectively and on behalf of the whole Church. The change in 2024 to a Subscriber model of funding created many opportunities for reflection by the Board and the staff about what we are doing well, and where we need to make further progress. The Organisational Review in 2025 will provide an independent report card of that work.

Bringing on board a panel of external auditors is helping us to deliver baseline audits for every Diocese and Religious Institute that is engaged with children, and providing new opportunities for assessing not only compliance, but safeguarding culture across the Church. The NCSS Self-assessment Portal is a powerful tool being used now by almost 100 Catholic entities, and generating continuous improvement plans for them in real time.

While this annual report captures some of our impact through the bite sized graphics and highlighted cases, we are mindful of where the real impact of ACSL's work should be – helping Church Authorities to embed a safeguarding within their ministries, so that it is never an 'add on' or additional compliance burden' but is rather the way we operate as 'open communities' and families in God.

As we are encouraged to be a synodal church, inviting people to belong and to befriend and care for each another, we also recognise that our Church communities are vulnerable to those who seek to harm others. This is why in 2024 we have had a strong focus in our work around Codes of Conduct and Professional Standards, and on the responsibilities of leadership in safeguarding. We have shared examples and case studies with Parish Councils, Boards and Ministry Leadership teams of how to mitigate against creating opportunities for grooming not only children, but their families, their priests and leaders, and potentially the whole church community.

Whenever we detect signs of 'safeguarding fatigue' we encourage perseverance in the face of emerging safeguarding risks. None are more significant than in the areas of online safety, and digital safety to protect from scams, new forms of coercive control and online exploitation. Society takes digital technologies for granted and it is in that complacency that inherent risks lie.

2024 saw us relocate our physical presence to Canberra, allowing us to collaborate with both Catholic and other organisations and support their safeguarding efforts. We were pleased to be consulted by the ACU Institute for Child Protection Studies on establishing micro-credentials in safeguarding; our partnership with the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council has taken us directly into contact with parishes and the Society's work with vulnerable people; and we have direct insights into projects being coordinated through the various Commissions of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. It is by creating these relationships, bringing together leaders, champions and allies from across the Church, that we highlight the power of unity. They allow us to share knowledge, align on priorities, and strengthen our collective voice for safeguarding.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the Hon Michael Lavarch and Dr Robyn Miller who both served on the original CPSL Board and then carried on with ACSL. We at ACSL also thank the Hon Trish Kavanagh, who retired from our National Appeals and Review Panel, having served the Church faithfully for many years in that role.

On behalf of the ACSL staff, thank you for your ongoing support and encouragement. We are privileged and grateful to have continuing strong support from our Board of Directors, chaired so ably by David Penny. We continue to strive for a more integrated, responsive and pastoral approach to safeguarding in 2025 and beyond.

**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 where children and adults at risk can flourish.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Providing education and professional development programs that boost Catholic organisations' capacity to effectively safeguard children and adults at risk.



## REVIEWS, AUDITS AND ASSESSMENTS

- Providing an independent certification audit and review program so that Catholic organisations can accurately gauge where they need to improve safeguarding practices to provide safer environments.



## PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS, COMPLAINTS RESPONSE AND REVIEWS

- Assisting in the management of complaints associated with Vos Estis Lux Mundi, when requested; overseeing the management of complaints against Church Authorities; managing reviews of previous complaints and coordinating complaints response best practice at a national level.



## MANAGING ESSENTIAL CHURCH DATABASES, SUCH AS THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MINISTRY REGISTER AND CATHOLIC MINISTRY FORMATION REGISTER

- Supporting Catholic organisations to fulfil their requirements to safely manage the movement of ministry and capturing data on those entering formation.



## CHAMPIONING SAFEGUARDING IN THE CHURCH THROUGH COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Engaging with our Subscribers and Catholic organisations, maintaining dialogue and presence with government and sector partners at the national level to support safeguarding and share a Catholic perspective, and informing Catholic organisations about important legislative developments and new resources.

# 2024 SNAPSHOT IN NUMBERS

1141

people reached through a Professional Development Activity such as a webinar, interactive training program or self-paced module

12 NCSS

AUDITS  
COMPLETED  
BY ACSL



1

NCSS audit completed  
by an external  
NCSS Auditor



28

PROGRAMS  
OR MODULES  
OFFERED



3,528 individuals  
held an ACMR ID

92

entities  
completing the NCSS  
Self-Assessment Portal

2,037

ACMR UPDATES  
WERE ACTIONED  
BY ACSL

84

Catholic entities used the  
ACMR to help manage their  
movement for ministry

137

COMPLAINT  
ENQUIRIES WERE  
RECEIVED BY  
ACSL

3

complaints and reviews  
within ACSL's scope were  
managed by ACSL



3,056

SUBSCRIBERS  
READ ACSL'S  
E-NEWSLETTER



18

media releases shared  
ACSL's work with the  
wider community



16,000

people visited ACSL's website





# DIRECT SAFEGUARDING SUPPORT – RESOURCES AND ADVICE

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All ACSL's services aim to strengthen and empower Catholic organisations as they develop their capacity to safeguard vulnerable people.

## Direct safeguarding advice and support

ACSL provides a range of safeguarding advice for leaders and safeguarding personnel and responds to a wide variety of requests and enquiries.

ACSL responds to each request individually, acknowledging that every Catholic organisation looks different and undertakes their ministry through the lens of a particular charism or mission. We draw on the expertise of our safeguarding network where we are unable to assist, such as in relation to canonical matters.

Some examples of areas where we provided advice in 2024:

- How to design effective risk assessments that include the essential components of safeguarding;
- Assessing safeguarding policies, procedures and processes as Church entities updated their own safeguarding systems;
- How to build awareness of changes to the NCSS to include adults at risk;
- Sourcing appropriate safeguarding resources for entities working in community services and aged care;
- The safeguarding requirements of the ACNC for Catholic registered charities;
- How to use Catholic Social Teaching to strengthen safeguarding training; and
- How to make safeguarding processes more inclusive of diverse needs.

## Developing safeguarding resources – NCSS Implementation Guide

In September 2024 we released the much-anticipated Part 2 of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) Implementation Guide. This important resource provides guidance on risk management, complaint management, appropriate human resources and training.

To bring each standard to life, practical and detailed scenarios are featured, alongside a breakdown of key concepts and examples of documents and processes that animate the standard. The now completed Guide was reviewed by an Implementation Advisory Group from outside of ACSL. We deeply thank the Group for their input and support in the development of the Guide.

## Looking ahead to 2025

2025 will be an opportunity for innovation and future planning. As well as continuing to develop new resources and guidance, ACSL is focusing on strategic projects that will help to position the Church in the lead up to the closure of the National Redress Scheme and a new, pastoral response to those who experience abuse. The National Safeguarding Notifications Data Project (see more on page 41) will help to inform the story of growth and healing that is occurring within the Church and the role it is playing through its agencies.

We acknowledge the call to play a greater role in supporting the safeguarding efforts of episcopal conferences within our region, and the responsibilities we have to support our missionary services overseas to strengthen their safeguarding through the implementation of the Universal Guidelines Framework.

# NATIONAL CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS

EDITION 2

**Safeguarding children  
and adults at risk**

## IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE, PART 2:



Right people, right role,  
right knowledge



Systems, policies  
and procedures





# SERVICES

## – PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

ACSL provides many professional learning opportunities to Catholic entities, helping to build a positive safeguarding culture, safeguarding capacity, and ultimately provide safer environments for everyone who comes in contact with the Catholic Church.

Our learning outreach and engagement increased significantly in 2024, offering safeguarding professional development opportunities to 1,141 learners.

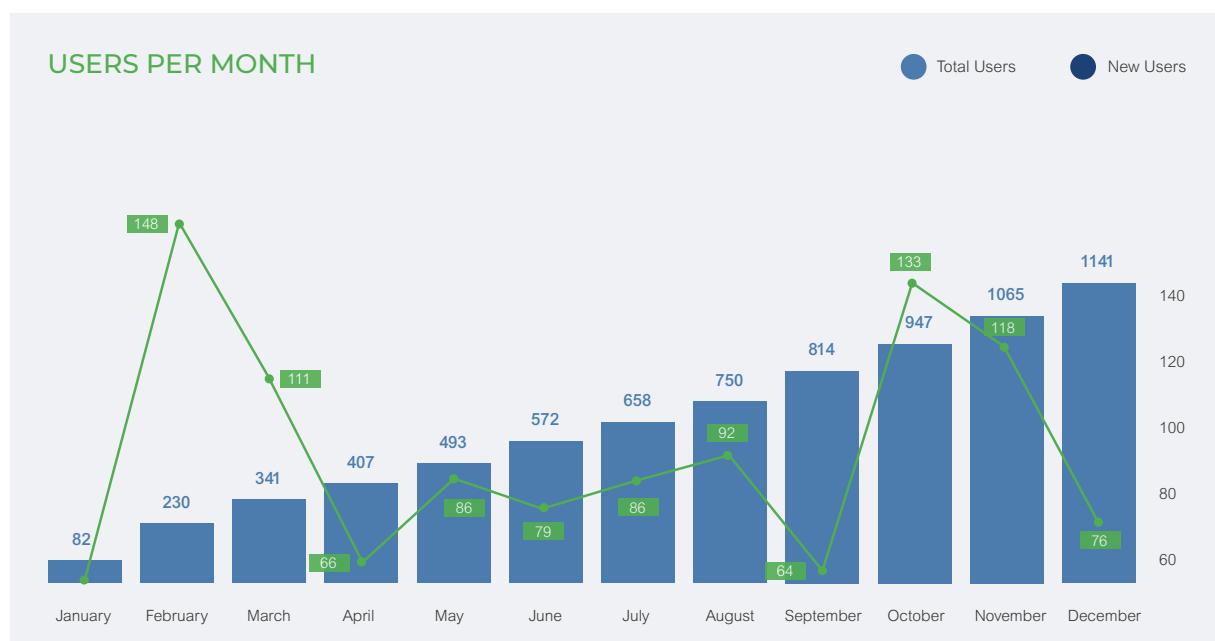
From the launch of our online learning platform in January 2024, we have offered self-paced modules, webinars, workshops and leaders and leadership teams programs.

We drew on our 2023 Training Needs Survey to develop the range of courses and webinars that responded to and continue to address our community's professional development needs.

All programs are developed by experts in education and safeguarding concepts. Consultation with our learning community is also a key part of the development, and all courses are frequently reviewed in line with learner feedback and legislative changes.

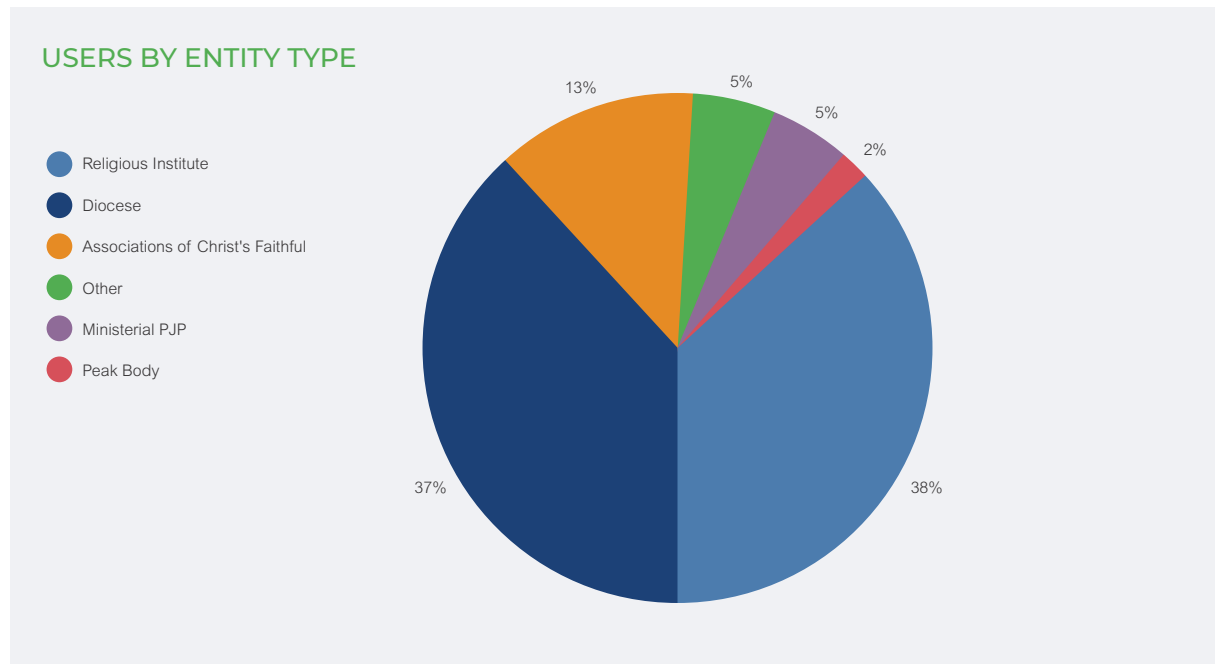
We saw an immensely positive response to the launch of the ACSL Learning Platform.

Starting with 61 user registrations on the ACSL Learning Platform at launch in January 2024, we ended the year with 1,141 users on the Platform.



## Who are our learners?

- **91%** are from Catholic entities.
- **75%** of our users are from religious institutes and dioceses.
- **140** Catholic entities were represented by learners on the ACSL Learning Platform.



## Types of learning available in 2024

- 12 self-paced modules  
– 409 learners enrolled in a module.
- 12 live learning webinars  
– 477 learners attended a webinar in 2024.
- 9 safeguarding programs  
– 564 learners enrolled in a safeguarding program, including the Introduction to Safeguarding program and Leaders and Leadership Teams program.
- 3 modules from affiliated partners  
– 152 learners enrolled in at least one module.
- 2 safeguarding workshops  
– 51 learners enrolled in a workshop.

## Partnering with external experts

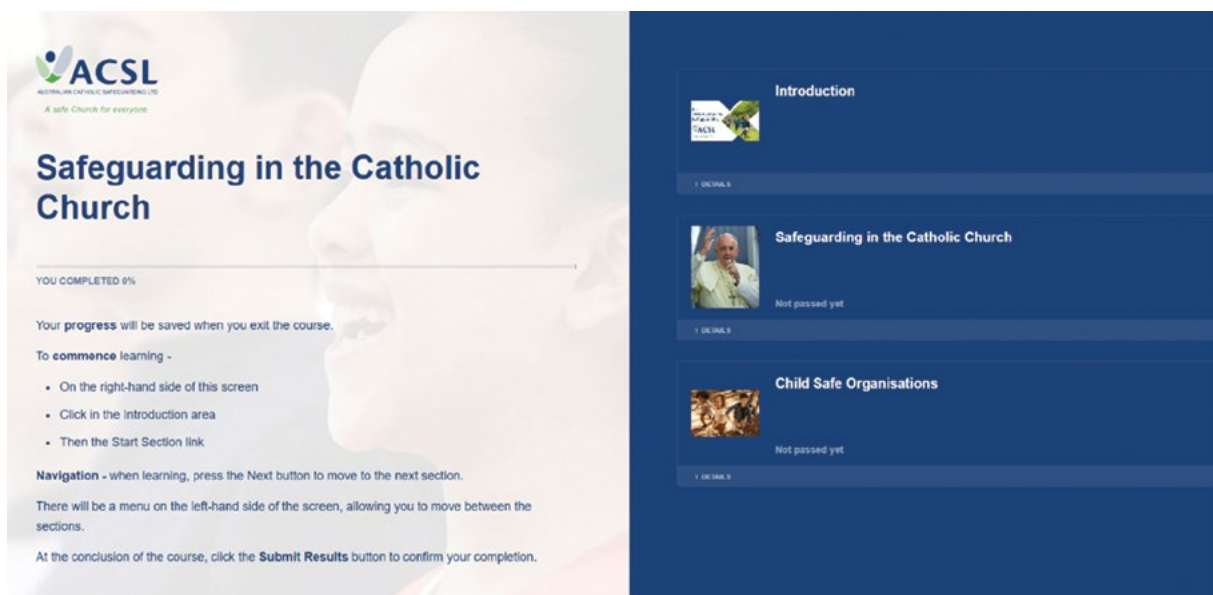
As a foundation to our learning management system, ASCL has partnered with Australian Childhood Foundation, the Australian Commission for Human Rights and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Catholic Commission to offer their courses to our learners.

## Flagship self-paced program: Introduction to Safeguarding

Our Introduction to Safeguarding program, with over 400 learners in 2024, provides the fundamentals of theology and practices of safeguarding within the Catholic Church, including identifying and responding to the

abuse of children and adults at risk.

This self-paced program has proved popular because learners can progress in their own time and is free of charge to encourage volunteers to contribute to a safeguarding culture within their ministries.



ACSL's Introduction to Safeguarding program, available on the ACSL Learning Platform.

### Some feedback on our self-paced modules:

*"Well presented and clear course on a difficult subject"*

*"I had thought that I knew what grooming was, but have learnt a lot and am now thankfully much more aware, particularly as I am in charge of Children's liturgy in our Parish"*

*"Compared with previous similar courses I have completed, this is the most up to date and relevant one I have done and much more impactful"*

*"Ease of use, easy to view videos and clear concise questions"*



## Flagship interactive program: Leaders and Leadership Teams

In 2024 the Leaders and Leadership Program was redesigned to better suit our leaders' needs and has been offered either face to face within religious entities, or in a hybrid mode across 6 weeks (some online interactive sessions and self-paced modules, with weekly directed reflection discussion for the program duration).

More than 150 leaders completed this program in 2024 – learners included bishops and provincials of religious institutes and their safeguarding leadership teams. This program addresses NCSS Standard 5.3.2 and builds leaders' safeguarding capacity rather than only focusing on compliance issues. Modules include Safeguarding Responsibilities for Church Authorities and Religious Institute Leaders, Managing and Mitigating Safeguarding Risk, Managing Safeguarding in Digital World and Managing Complaints Effectively at a Leadership Level.

### CASE STUDY – IN-PERSON LEADERS TRAINING IN THE DIOCESE OF CAIRNS



*From left to right: ACSL's Director Professional Standards and Complaints Ms Karen Mosley, Bishop Joe Caddy AM of the Diocese of Cairns, and Dr Ursula Stephens.*

ACSL was invited by Bishop Joe Caddy AM to provide the Safeguarding Program for Leaders and their Leadership Teams for more than 40 participants across the Cairns Diocese. The session was followed by access to the ACSL E-Learning Platform to complete learning modules not covered in the one-day session.

*"The opportunity for the highest level of leadership from each parish, ministry, service, together with members of the Diocese Safeguarding Committee to come together in person, has enabled unified learning in relation to such an important issue and supports the Catholic Diocese of Cairns continued commitment to the safeguarding of children and adults at risk, and embedding effective safeguarding across our Diocese."*

*- Sarah Davison,  
Diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator  
for the Diocese of Cairns*

## Feedback on our Leaders and Leadership Teams program in 2024



### Safeguarding for Boards and Trustees workshop

Stakeholder consultation identified a need for professional development focused on the safeguarding responsibilities of Board Members and Trustees. In response, we developed an interactive and collaborative learning workshop to address this need. Offered twice in 2024, to over 50 learners, this has become a flagship program for 2025.

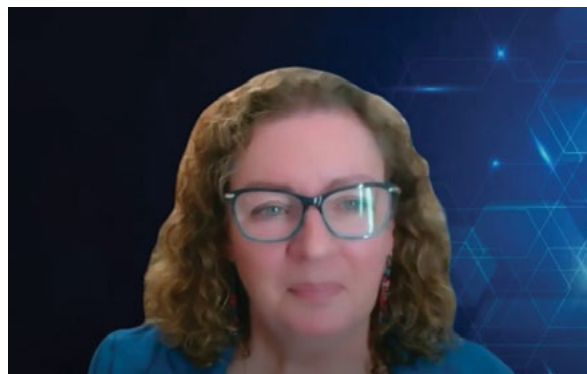
### Bespoke and custom training

ACSL also offers bespoke training to organisations within our Catholic network. In 2024 we were engaged by the St Vincent De Paul National Council to develop leadership and safeguarding training for their federated organisation. This professional development program has been tailored for their leadership contingent, to ensure their extensive Australia-wide operations work to embed a safeguarding culture, while also complying with the state and territory regulations. This program commenced in late 2024, for over 200 participants.

Twelve safeguarding workshops were also presented online and in person to several dioceses, parishes, eparchies, religious congregations and Associations of Christ's Faithful during the year.



*Robert Fitzgerald AM presenting a webinar on Safeguarding Adults at Risk in March 2024*



*Dr Judith Howard presenting a webinar on a Trauma Aware Approach to Education in August 2024*

## Webinars with external safeguarding experts

Across 2024 ACSL offered 11 webinars, or live learning opportunities, on a series of safeguarding related topics. These topics included elder abuse, esafety, international safeguarding, research from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, trauma approaches to education, the Sanctuary Model and a discussion about the Burden of Proof.

With over 477 participants—ranging from 20 to 120 attendees per webinar—feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and has helped shape our choice of experts and topics for 2025.

These webinars have increased ACSL's reputation for expertise and professional development opportunities within the safeguarding space, with a significant number of participants joining from outside of the Catholic Church, including government authorities.

Thank you to our 2024 webinar presenters:

- February – *The prevalence and characteristics of male child sex offenders in the Australian community*, Professor Michael Salter, University of New South Wales
- March - *Dignity in Safeguarding*, Dr Simon Longstaff AO, The Ethics Centre
- March - *Safeguarding Adults at Risk*, NSW Disability Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald AM
- April - *Understanding Mental Health in the Workplace*, Kellie Lewis, The Mental Health Project
- May - *The Australian Child Maltreatment Study*, Prof Daryl Higgins, Australian Catholic University
- June – *Safety online* by Kaylene Kerr, eSafeKids
- July - *Safeguarding in international contexts*, Fr Brian Lucas, Catholic Mission
- August - *Restorative Justice - Principles and Practice*, Matt Casey, National Appeals and Response Panel
- August – *Trauma Aware Approaches to Education*, Dr Judith Howard, Queensland University of Technology
- September - *Trauma-informed care – the Sanctuary model*, Cameron Burgess Mackillop Family Services
- October - *Burden of Proof* – The Hon. Duncan Kerr, Former Federal Judge and Dr Pat Mullins, Partner, Mullins Lawyers
- November - *Capturing the Voices of Children and Vulnerable Adults*, Associate Professor Tim Moore, Australian Catholic University

## Being responsive to training needs


We aim to be very responsive to requests for training to address specific needs. In 2024 we developed self-paced training modules such as the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, Trauma-Informed Safeguarding, Using the ACMR, Introduction to Safeguarding Online, Managing Difficult Conversations, The National Response Framework and Protocol, Safeguarding for Parish Teams and Safeguarding Refresher.

We have developed a tailored online Safeguarding Adults at Risk workshop for a religious community, while building a more substantial professional learning program to support safeguarding adults at risk as part of the NCSS Ed 2. This program will be further evaluated through interactive workshops in 2025 on Safeguarding Adults at Risk and Safeguarding Risk Management.

ACSL also created a hub for any training resources related to Integrity in Our Common Mission. This includes an online module created by ACSL in consultation with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, illustrating the living document through examples and case studies.

## Looking ahead to 2025

Our Church is on a journey of continuous improvement in safeguarding, which includes being vigilant about emerging safeguarding risks. ACSL will continue to work with our Catholic entities and partners to ensure we maintain currency in our Professional Learning Program. Our safeguarding competency framework will provide new opportunities for articulation and Recognition of Prior Learning for accredited courses in safeguarding.



*We offer our thanks to all within our community who have contributed to the success of these programs and the continuing spread of safeguarding skills, knowledge and tools.*

The need for safeguarding professional development continues to grow, with plans to expand both the range and number of offerings in 2025, always focused on supporting the development and embedding of safeguarding culture within the Australian Catholic Church community.





# SERVICES

## – AUDITS AND REVIEWS

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ACSL's Audit and Review program provides Church entities with independent external feedback on their implementation of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards and compliance with the National Child Safe Standards. The program enables the Catholic Church to demonstrate greater transparency and accountability to the Australian community.

The NCSS align directly with the National Child Safe Standards. With the inclusion of consideration of adults at risk in NCSS Edition 2, the audit process now also addresses canonical requirements, and provides more comprehensive benchmarking of Church entities' progress in creating safer environments for everyone.

We have focused this year on improving and refining our audit framework, practices and reporting. By expanding our Auditor Register we are providing greater choice and more timely audits as we work to ensure every Diocese and Religious Institute that engages with children has undertaken a baseline audit. With a three-year review cycle, and a risk-based assessment framework, we are now also working with entities undertaking review audits, which are providing important insights into the impacts of safeguarding measures being embedded in everyday church life.

### Audits completed by ACSL

- 12 audits were undertaken by ACSL in 2024.
  - Six were religious institutes and six were dioceses.
  - Of these, three were entities previously audited and now completing their review audits.
  - Two entities were audited jointly with members of the NCSS Auditor Register.
  - Nine were full audits against all 10 NCSS, for entities working with children and/or adults at risk.
  - Three were limited audits, for entities with limited engagement or governance over ministries with children and adults at risk, and a lower risk profile.
  - Nine were against NCSS Edition 2, examining safeguarding practices for both children and adults at risk.
  - Three were against Edition 1, assessing safeguarding practices for children only. 2024 marked the last year entities could be assessed against Edition 1.
- The Diocese of Broken Bay engaged an auditor on the NCSS Auditor Register.

THE ENTITIES AUDITED IN THIS PERIOD WERE:



Archdiocese of  
Perth



Archdiocese of  
Sydney



Christian Brothers Oceania  
Province



Diocese of Broken  
Bay



Diocese of  
Cairns



Diocese of  
Maitland-Newcastle



Diocese of  
Sale



Diocese  
of Townsville



Discalced Carmelite Nuns  
Launceston



Dominican Sisters of  
Eastern Australia and  
Solomon Islands



Missionary Oblates of  
Mary Immaculate



Missionaries of  
St Charles Scalabrinians



Sisters of the Good Samaritan  
of the Order of St Benedict

## First joint audits completed

In February we published the NCSS audit report of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, which was completed in partnership with Prolegis Lawyers.

The joint audit was a very positive experience for ACSL's own audit team and we appreciated the independent voices throughout our audit fieldwork. Prolegis also provided helpful insight on how to further enhance our reporting template.

In August, ACSL released the report for the Archdiocese of Sydney. We were supported in this audit by Michael Elphick & Associates and Woods Consulting. Again, the experience of the joint audit was positive, with both auditors bringing their significant experience in safeguarding consultancies within schools, social services and religious institutes to this audit.

The Archdiocese of Sydney and the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle were both able to benefit from the varied experiences and perspectives of the combined audit teams.



*ACSL's Audit Team meeting with personnel at the Vineyard Parish in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. Pictured from left: Karen Mosley, David Treanor, Monique Mesina and Father James Lunn.*



*From left: Mr Sean Tynan, Director of Safeguarding at the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle; Most Rev Michael Kennedy, Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle; and David Treanor, ACSL Director Safeguarding and Compliance.*



*From left: ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens, Archbishop Anthony Fisher of Sydney, and ACSL Board Chair Mr David Penny.*





*Bishop Anthony Randazzo of the Diocese of Broken Bay being presented with the NCSS audit certificate. He is pictured with senior members of his safeguarding and leadership team and joined by Dr Ursula Stephens and auditor Julianna Demetrius (far right). Image supplied by the Diocese of Broken Bay.*

## First audit completed by an external auditor

In October the Diocese of Broken Bay became the first Catholic entity to have an NCSS audit completed by a provider other than ACSL. The Diocese enlisted Demetrius Consulting, an auditor approved on ACSL's NCSS Auditor Register to review its child safeguarding practices.

This marked an important milestone for the NCSS audit program, fulfilling the wish of some Church entities to be audited by a provider of their own choosing.

## Auditors Community of Practice

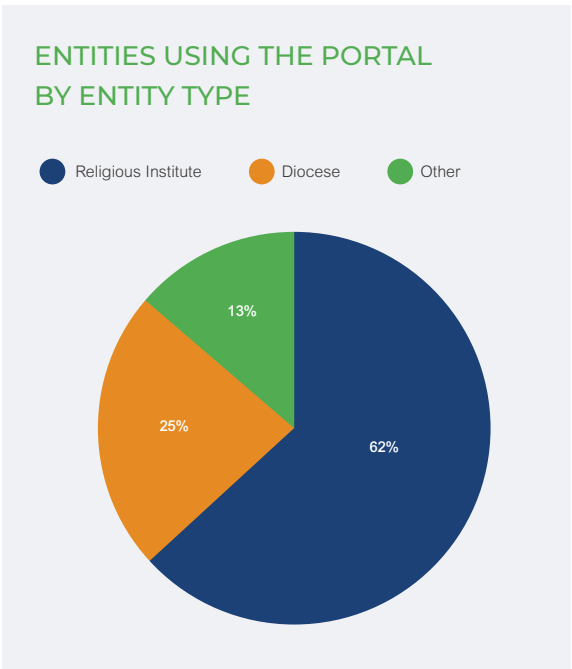
To share insights and information between auditors, ACSL established the NCSS Auditors Community of Practice in December 2024. The purpose of this Community of Practice is to form a professional support network for auditors to share their learning, best practices and wisdom from professional experiences. We discussed these at our initial meeting and look forward to building our collective knowledge of safeguarding in Catholic entities.

Increased use of the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal

The NCSS Self-Assessment Portal allows Catholic entities to complete a self-assessment against the NCSS, and to identify any gaps or areas for improvement in a simple and accessible online portal designed by ACSL.

17 new entities joined the NCSS Self-Assessment Portal in 2024, bringing the total number of entities using the Portal to 92. Some of these entities have also set up multi-service accounts, allowing their sub-entities (such as parishes in a diocese) to simultaneously complete individual safeguarding self-assessments, providing highly targeted information to the entity.

We have been delighted to offer support to an increasing number of entities keen to progress their self-assessments. We have spent considerable time with a range of entities to assist them in using the Portal, and have been heartened that so many entities are now investing time to make use of this practical safeguarding tool.



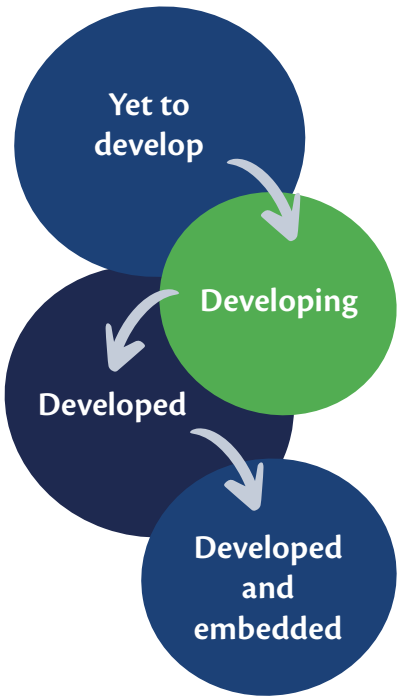
In 2024 we also refined a section of the Self-Assessment Portal intended for very small entities to be more fit for purpose. For entities with few members and little or no engagement in ministry—where a self-report was deemed more appropriate than a full audit—their lower-risk profile made the original self-assessment process feel overwhelming and cumbersome. To address this, we refined the questions in the self-report (or lower-risk assessment) to better reflect their specific circumstances.

In 2025 we will have at least two entities using the updated self-report self-assessment.

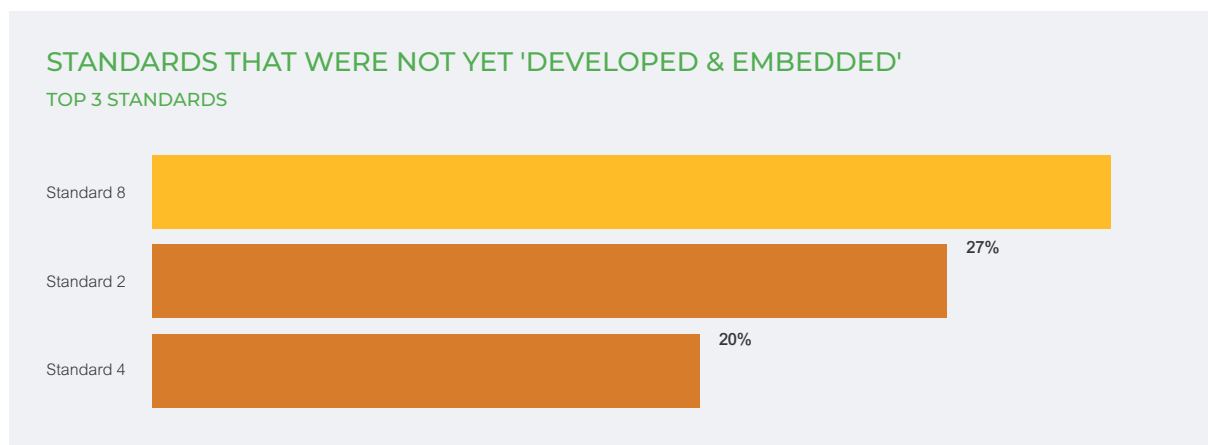
Audit trends in 2024

In 2024 ACSL examined trends emerging from the year’s audits, to see where entities are currently struggling in their implementation of the NCSS and where entities are well-progressed.

The NCSS Audit Framework uses a maturity scale to assess implementation of the Standards.



It emerged that in 2024, the three Standards that were most frequently not yet rated as 'developed and embedded' were:



Drilling further into the data, we have isolated some specific NCSS indicators that were most frequently rated as not yet developed and embedded across an entity's practices. They were:

#### **Standard 8: Safe physical and online environments**

- Indicators most struggled with related to monitoring of the online environment (8.2.2) and the management of physical and online risks (8.1.1).

#### **Standard 2: Children and adults are safe, informed and participate**

- Engaging with adults at risk to seek their views on safeguarding practices (2.1.2) and providing adults at risk with information about safe and respectful relationships (2.3.1) were two areas in need of further attention.

#### **Standard 5: Robust human resource management**

- Ensuring seminary and initial formation programs include developing pastoral responses to victims and survivors of abuse (5.6.2) was one area in this crucial standard where there is work still to be done for some entities.

#### **Standard 7: Equity is promoted and diversity is respected**

- Providing training around cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (7.5.1) and also awareness training for safeguarding from diverse cultural backgrounds (7.5.2) were areas where further progress could be made for some entities.

#### **HOW WE'LL USE THIS DATA TO SUPPORT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

This audit trend data will be considered by our team to help to prioritise the development of future learning activities and resources, to better support Catholic organisations to implement the NCSS.

#### **INDEPENDENT MEMBERS APPOINTED TO THE BOARD AUDIT REVIEW COMMITTEE**

The Board Audit Reporting Committee (BARC) plays an important role in ACSL's internal quality assurance process. Once an audit report has been completed, the BARC's role is to review the report to ensure it has met the scope set out in the audit agreement, and to probe any inconsistencies in the report, or at times delve deeper into findings. In 2024 we enhanced the oversight of the BARC by appointing two independent members of the Committee – Dr Zachariah Duke and Mr Joe Zabar. Dr Duke and Mr Zabar both have significant Catholic Church expertise and join two ACSL Board Directors on the Committee. The appointment of these two independent means that voices from outside ACSL now also have the opportunity to review NCSS reports before publication.

## AUDIT CASE STUDY – CHILD SAFEGUARDING PRACTICES EMBEDDED IN THE DIOCESE OF TOWNSVILLE



From left: ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens, Bishop Tim Harris of the Diocese of Townsville and ACSL Board Chair Mr David Penny.

The Diocese of Townsville covers an area of 434,400 square kilometres, extending from Townsville on the Coast to the Whitsunday and Burdekin regions in the South and North to Ingham and Halifax, south-west to Winton, and west to the border with the Northern Territory.

The significant geographic reach has not acted as a barrier to safeguarding efforts though, with ACSL's 2024 NCSS audit finding that 100 per cent of the NCSS indicators relating to its operations were substantially progressed at the time of review.

The Diocese of Townsville was one of the last dioceses to be audited by ACSL against Edition 1 of the NCSS, checking for implementation of the child safe standards only. Several areas of good practice stood out in the audit, which the audit team credited to solid investment in child safeguarding at a leadership, cultural and resource level.

Despite the evidence of well-developed child safeguarding practices, the audit team noted some areas for further improvement. These recommendations were accepted by the Diocese and these will be implemented over the next 12 months.

*"The Diocese of Townsville ACSL audit was conducted in May 2024. Having been in the role of safeguarding manager for nearly seven years at the time, I welcomed the opportunity for an external independent audit to assess how safeguarding policy and processes is reflected to a very high standard in our practice. The National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) Portal was a valuable resource tool to self-assess and to upload the documents to evidence our compliance to the NCSS. The portal enables the Diocese to work from a meaningful action plan to further develop towards compliance and to educate and support our senior leader team and all personnel. Dr David Treanor was clear in communicating his approach prior and during the audit process and Dr Ursula Stephens and David made time to meet with Bishop Tim Harris and myself to walk us through the findings and recommendations. I commend ACSL on their commitment to assist our Diocese in reaffirming our commitment to create and maintain a safe and nurturing environment for all who engage with our parishes, ministries and agencies in the Diocese of Townsville."*

- Craig Brereton, Director - Safeguarding Culture and Shared Services for the Diocese of Townsville



## AUDIT CASE STUDY – REVIEW AUDIT SHOWS IMPROVED SAFEGUARDING AWARENESS AND PRACTICE FOR THE MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE



*Oblates members pictured with Bishop of Wagga Wagga Most Rev Mark Edwards OMI. Photo supplied by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.*

The Oblates are a male congregation working in ministries across dioceses, hospital chaplaincy, youth ministry, school governance and homeless ministries in Australia.

Having undergone their first safeguarding audit in 2021, the Oblates committed to a second safeguarding audit in 2024 to assess their safeguarding practices for adults at risk as well as children, in line with the new requirements of NCSS Edition 2.

The audit found that 99 per cent of the NCSS indicators have been implemented and that the majority of recommendations from the first audit had been implemented too.

ACSL's audit team made seven further recommendations to the Oblates to further strengthen their practices, including updating existing safeguarding training, developing

easy to read charts to make reporting a concern as simple as possible, and rolling out more information about safe and respectful relationships for adults at risk.

Fr Christian Fini OMI, the Australian Provincial of the Oblates at the time of the audit said that implementing the audit's findings is a priority.

*"The Australian Province remains dedicated to prioritising safeguarding and is committed to implementing the audit's recommendations so that we may continue to minimise the risk of harm and ensure appropriate responses to disclosures and allegations."*

*"We want to thank all the employees and staff for their ongoing commitment to ensuring safeguarding is an integral part of their work and to the team at ACSL for working alongside us to achieve a great result,"* Fr Christian said.

## Feedback on our audits in 2024

Entities who undergo an NCSS audit with ACSL are invited to complete an evaluation survey of the audit process and its impacts. We regularly review this feedback and take onboard comments and suggestions to improve our practice.

### In 2024:

**100%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the audit process was collaborative and provided an opportunity for the entity to build safeguarding capacity.

*"They modelled synodality: deep listening, dialogue and assisted us in articulating our implementation of safeguarding and NCSS etc."*

“

*"We are all on the same page, ACSL has helped Staff and members to be more aware and alert."*

*"The recommendations from the audit report make sense and are necessary, achievable and realistic."*

*"The ACSL audit process was a positive boon to the inculturation of safeguarding across the Diocese, particularly the parishes and schools. As a direct consequence of the audit process the second attempt to establish a local network of volunteers promoting safeguarding has been successful."*

**90%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they now have more robust safeguarding practises and processes in place to keep children safe as a result of the audit.

**100%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the audit team met their expectations for the audit.

*"The provision of information prior to and during the process was excellent; clear, informative and accurate. Having participated in multiple audits conducted by statutory authorities the comparison was very much in ACSL's favour."*

*"Both auditors conducted themselves with great professionalism. While clearly the task of undertaking the audit was serious, they also displayed great kindness, empathy toward everyone and maintained a friendly disposition which put everyone at ease."*

”

## Meeting with entities during audit fieldwork and presenting NCSS certificates

In 2024 our audit team traversed the continent to meet with entities during fieldwork. To acknowledge the effort involved in an audit, we also provided entities with an NCSS Audit Certificate to recognise their achievements, and showcase to their communities that safeguarding is a top priority.



*David Treanor presenting the NCSS Audit Certificate to Sr. Monica Cavanagh RSJ, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart.*



*Audit fieldwork in the Diocese of Sale, with Professional Standards Officer Paul Desmond, ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens and ACSL Director of Safeguarding and Compliance Dr David Treanor.*



*From left: ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens, Bishop Joe Caddy AM of the Diocese of Cairns and ACSL Board Chair Mr David Penny.*



*Audit fieldwork in the Diocese of Cairns, with then Diocesan Administrator Fr Kerry Crowley, Safeguarding Officer Ms Patricia Andersen and ACSL's David Treanor.*



*From left: ACSL CEO Dr Ursula Stephens, Bishop Greg Bennet of the Diocese of Sale and ACSL Board Chair Mr David Penny.*





*From left: Father Michael Boudaheer, Secretary General; Monsignor Marcelino Youssef, Vicar-Genral, His Excellency Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay of the Maronite Eparchy of Australia; Dr Ursula Stephens; Deacon Sayed Issac, Business Manager and In-House Counsel and Ms Claudia Hatem-Azzi, Safeguarding Office.*



*From left: ACSL Board Director Mr Michael Moore, Sr Mary Clare Holland OP (Prioress of the Dominican Sisters of Eastern Australia and Solomon Islands) and Sr Julianna Drobik OP, Senior Safeguarding Representative.*



*From left: Andrea Probert, Safeguarding Coordinator, Archdiocese of Hobart; Mother Teresa Benedicta, OCD and Sr Elizabeth OCD, Carmel Carmelite Monastery, Launceston.*

## Looking ahead to 2025

In 2025, we look forward to another full year of audits. While many Church entities have chosen ACSL as their auditor, others are engaging auditors from the NCSS Auditor Register. This growing pool of auditors brings us closer to achieving our goal of having all Church Authorities audited against the NCSS.

Governments at all levels are giving greater priority to safeguarding the welfare of children and adults at risk. Embedded in our Catholic traditions, many Church organisations are in contact, either in funded or volunteer capacities, with these groups, and by undertaking a NCSS audit, Church entities can demonstrate their policies, processes and procedures are meeting best safeguarding practices.





# SERVICES

## – COMPLAINTS RESPONSE

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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.

In 2024 we embraced continuous improvement by launching the review of the National Response Protocol, introducing training for Church personnel on complaints response, and facilitating a professional standards Community of Practice. These projects occurred alongside our core work of responding to complaints and managing reviews of complaints.

### Complaint enquiries in 2024

Between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2024 ACSL received 137 complaint enquiries. ACSL reviewed and assessed each enquiry to determine whether it was within our scope.

### Complaints and reviews managed by ACSL

During this period, ACSL assisted in progressing one complaint against a Church Authority and facilitated two reviews to completion.

One review related to a review of the investigation process and findings, however the other related to a review of the way in which the complaint was handled by the Church entity and the alleged failure to come to an agreed outcome.

While only three enquiries were within ACSL's scope, we provided guidance and assistance to many complainants, victims and survivors, respondents, Church personnel, safeguarding officers and Church Authorities on a wide range of disclosures and complaint related enquiries.

### 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 continues to be chaired by The Hon. Duncan Kerr, however the Deputy Chair, The Hon. Dr Patricia Kavanagh stepped down from her position in 2024 after many years of service. We are very grateful for her expertise and contribution.

The work of the Panel, and discussions during the reviews undertaken, has provided invaluable feedback into the ongoing work to review the National Response Protocol.



*Complaint Management training in development on the ACSL Learning Platform.*

## Dedicated training on complaints through the ACSL Learning Platform

In the past year, ACSL has prioritised the development of new and specialised Complaints Management Training to enhance the capacity of Church entities to respond effectively to safeguarding complaints, particularly those relating to the abuse of children and adults at risk.

This training program is being co-designed to support entities in handling complaints with professionalism, sensitivity, and adherence to best-practice principles. It will provide a structured framework for receiving, assessing, and responding to complaints, ensuring alignment with national safeguarding standards, civil and canon law obligations, and trauma-informed approaches.

In 2024 we released an online training module introducing the National Response Framework and National Response Protocol. This module provides an overview of the Church's national approach to responding to historical and contemporary safeguarding complaints, ensuring consistent and survivor-centred responses.

By equipping Church personnel with the necessary skills and knowledge, ACSL continues to strengthen the safeguarding culture within Catholic communities, reinforcing a commitment to transparency, accountability, and survivor-centred practices in complaints management.

## Professional Standards Community of Practice

We have hosted four virtual meetings of the Provincial Professional Standards Offices in 2024. These meetings provide an opportunity for collaboration, discussion and support across geographically dispersed offices.

Recent meetings have explored the possibility of expanding this community of practice into a broader Complaints and Professional Standards Community of Practice.

## Safeguarding Notification Data Project

In 2024 ACSL launched the Safeguarding Notification Data Project. This project aims to build a national dataset relating to the receipt and management of complaints and allegations relating to the safeguarding of children and adults at risk by the Catholic Church.

Collecting a national dataset is crucial for understanding the broader landscape of misconduct, grievances, and safeguarding challenges nationally. Such a dataset allows for a comprehensive analysis of trends, patterns, and recurring issues across different locations, services and entities, helping to identify systemic problems that may otherwise go unnoticed.

It supports the evaluation of existing complaints management and becomes an invaluable tool for proactive safeguarding measures — enabling the Church to anticipate risks, allocate resources more effectively, and implement targeted prevention strategies.

## Looking ahead to 2025

In 2025 ACSL will continue our work with the Provincial Professional Standards Office Community of Practice to establish a broader community to share knowledge, resources and support in the Church's safeguarding mission.

To support the implementation of the Safeguarding Notification Data Project ACSL will continue to engage with Church entities and other partnerships to shape this important project for the Church. As we work towards the end of the National Redress Scheme and the 10-year anniversary of the Royal Commission in 2028, our aim is to have substantial datasets that can demonstrate the impact of the safeguarding efforts of the previous decade.



*By fostering transparency and accountability, a national dataset can help rebuild trust within communities, demonstrating a commitment to learning from past failures and prioritising the safety and well-being of all individuals, particularly vulnerable populations.*



# SERVICES

## – AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MINISTRY REGISTER AND CATHOLIC MINISTRY FORMATION REGISTER

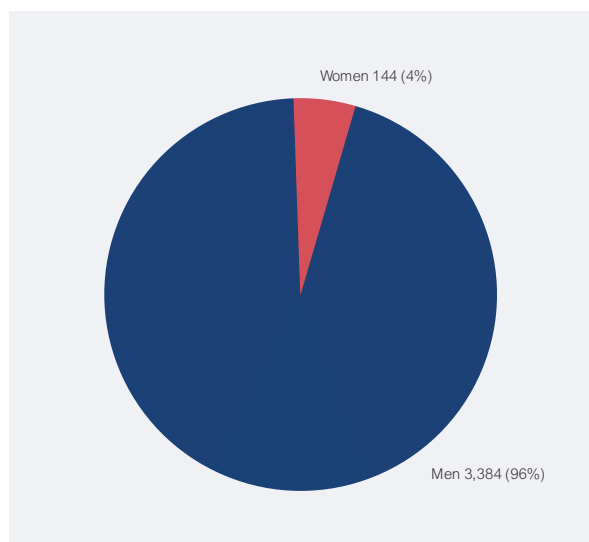
### Australian Catholic Ministry Register (ACMR)

The Australian Catholic Ministry Register assists clerics, religious and their Church Authorities in the safe management of movement for ministry.

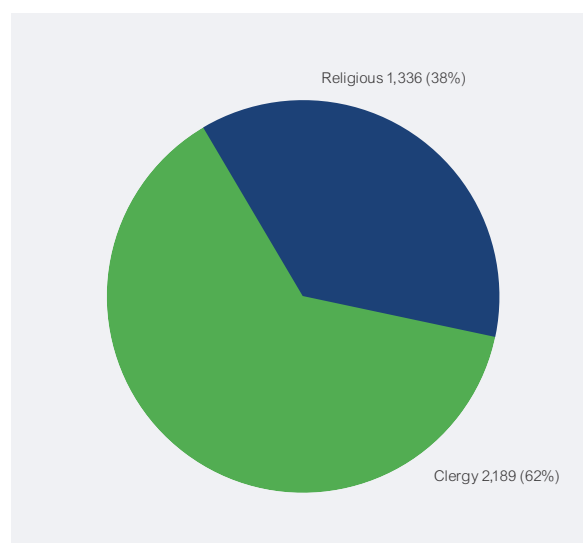
It offers a means to help entities fulfil indicator 5.7.1 of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

In 2024, 3,528 individuals held an ACMR ID. This marks an increase of six percent from 2023.

The vast majority of ACMR ID holders are men:



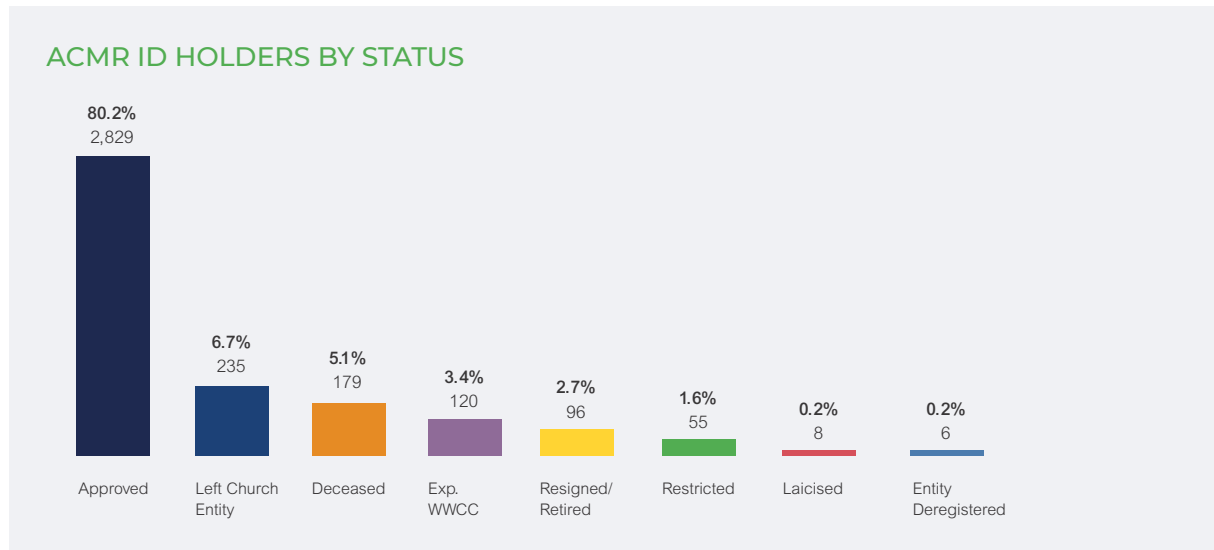
More clergy than religious are represented on the register:





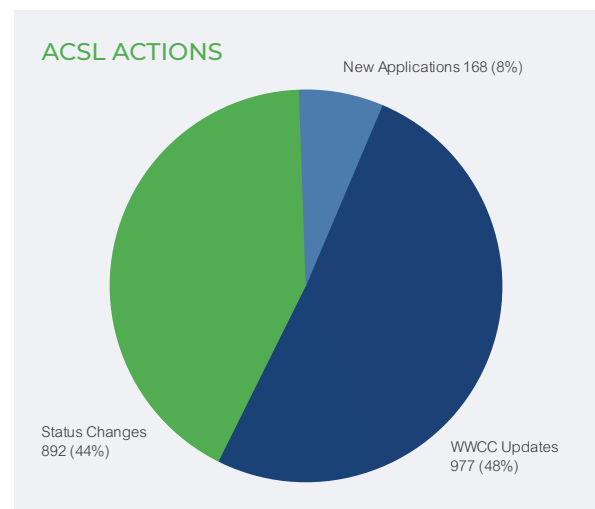
The majority of ACMR ID holders on the Register hold an 'approved' status, meaning they have

satisfied the safeguarding statements affirming their good standing to provide ministry.



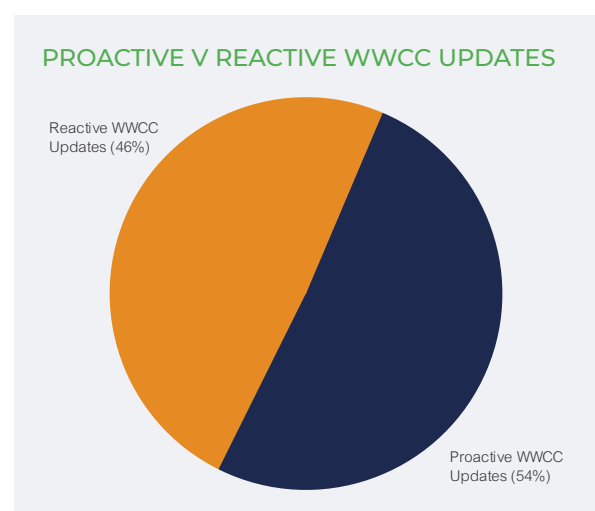
ACSL's work in 2024 to maintain and improve the register:

- ACSL's team actioned 2,037 ACMR updates.
- 86% of updates were actioned in under 10 business days.



Entities were more proactive in providing Working With Children Check updates for their ACMR ID holders, meaning fewer ID holders were unnecessarily deactivated.

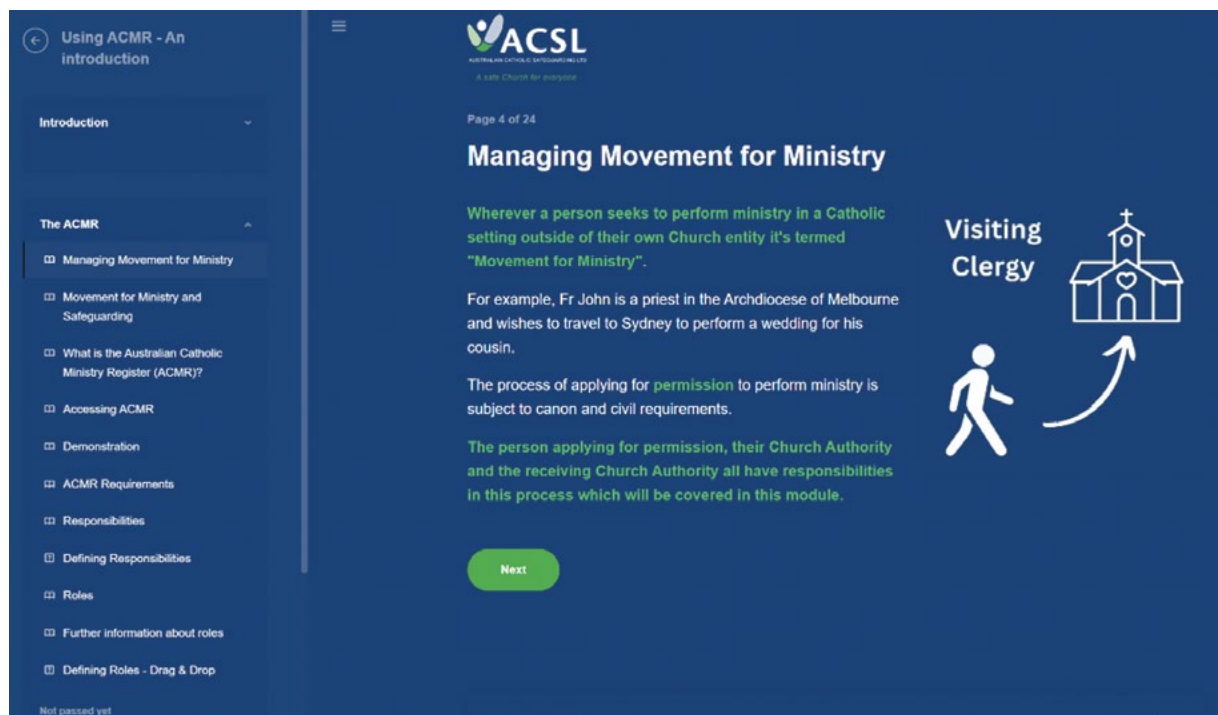
- 81% of entities completed the Annual Affirmation Statement, meaning accurate information about ACMR ID holders was affirmed and fewer ID holders lost their approved status.



## New training module on the ACMR launched

Catholic entities using the ACMR often contact ACSL for support when a new person takes on responsibility for managing their entity's movement for ministry. To assist new users of

the ACMR at the entity level, ACSL has introduced a self-paced training module providing learners with the skills and knowledge to use the ACMR system. The availability of the new module has meant that information about using the ACMR is conveniently on-demand for new starters and those needing a refresher.



The 'Using the ACMR' module is available on ACSL's Learning Platform.

## ACMR USE SURVEY

After three years of ACSL managing the ACMR, it was time to assess the user experience of the ACMR. We launched two surveys in mid-2024: one for individual ACMR ID holders and the other for those within Church entities who work with the ACMR.

- 2,800 ACMR ID holders were emailed and 570 responded (or 20%), a response which exceeded our expectations.
- 76% of Church entities, either at a key decision maker level or administrative contact level responded to the survey.

The overall picture for the ACMR and **ACSL's management** of it is **positive**.

Over 80% of replying ID holders said that the ACMR makes managing movement for ministry easier.

From Church entities, 95% of those who manage incoming movement for ministry agreed, along with 88% who assist with outgoing movement for ministry.

Sentiment about ACSL's administration is also excellent. Among Church entity respondents over 94% agreed that their overall experience with the ACMR has been positive and that our forms are user friendly. Crucially 95% also agreed that we have become easier to engage with and manage.

While feedback from Church entities was mainly very positive, some reported frustration in relation to deactivations.


91% of respondents said that ACMR guidance materials are helpful and comprehensive.

However, understanding about the ACMR (purpose, function and scope) remains mixed, indicating that there is more work for ACSL to do in communicating about the ACMR.

We also received a trove of suggested improvements to the Register. Many of these suggestions were already covered by potential improvement options outlined by ACSL, suggesting ACSL has a very good grasp on the pain points of the system.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025

In 2025 and beyond, ACSL will investigate the viability of many of the suggestions for improvement.



*We are immensely grateful to the many individuals and entities who provided such thoughtful responses to our survey and look forward to providing improvements to the ACMR where feasible.*

## Catholic Ministry Formation Register (CMFR)

The CMFR was newly established in 2024, to assist seminary, diaconate, and lay ministry formation programs, and vocation offices, by capturing details of participants in Catholic ministry formation programs – seminarians, deacon candidates, and eventually men and women preparing for lay ecclesial ministry positions. It will also help Church entities to identify whether a person who is discerning or applying for formation towards clerical or religious life, has previously sought formation elsewhere.

The CMFR currently has 15 entities registered and 19 participants. There is growing interest in how this register can be expanded to incorporate information about Catholic ministry formation programs across the country and the region.

Building this register and reporting on its data is another important and positive measure of the Church's efforts to address public confidence in its safeguarding efforts.





# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PROFILE

In addition to our direct engagement with ACSL Subscribers and other Catholic entities, ACSL engages with federal and state regulators and forges partnerships with safeguarding industry leaders to ensure Catholic organisations are a vital part of the conversation on safeguarding. Our communication efforts reflect our mission to support Catholic entities to embed a culture of safety and protection of children, young people, and adults.

## ENGAGEMENT IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Communicating with and meeting our Subscribers continues to be a top priority for ACSL. In 2024 we embraced opportunities to meet with our Subscribers and peak bodies face to face wherever possible.



*ACSL's Director of Professional Standards and Complaints Karen Mosley and Director of Safeguarding and Compliance David Treanor meeting with the Queensland Province Office.*

## ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMONWEALTH AND STATE REGULATORS

While the National Child Safe Standards have been adopted across the country, there are some variations to indicators and criteria in local jurisdictions. ACSL plays an important role in having national oversight of the requirements and works closely with state and territory regulators to support consistency in their approaches to training, audits and reviews and compliance measures.

- ACSL participates in the National Office for Child Safety (NOCS) Sector Leaders Group and has provided important advice and context to measures being considered at the national level.
- In this forum we share our resources and experiences with interfaith colleagues and other secular organisations within this group, that are earlier in their safeguarding journey.
- In July our CEO Dr Ursula Stephens presented to the NOCS Sector Leaders Group on ACSL's efforts to promote a national approach to safeguarding in the Church, and in particular the alignment between the NCSS and National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.
- In December ACSL was asked by NOCS to facilitate a response from the Catholic Church to the Child Safety Annual Reporting Framework Consultation Paper.



*CEO Dr Ursula Stephens presenting to the Missionaries of Sacred Heart in March 2024.*

- The NSW Office of the Children's Guardian has undertaken several investigations within Catholic organisations this year and has encouraged ACSL to continue to support these entities as they respond to the OCG directions, particularly in relation to WWCC and instances of Reportable Conduct.
- Early in 2024 our meeting with the Queensland Family and Child Commission allowed us to provide advice on the development of the Queensland Governments Child Safe legislation and aspects of their Reportable Conduct Scheme.

## INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

The Australian Church has proven itself a global leader in safeguarding and in 2024 we were pleased to exchange ideas and insights with other national churches and in international forums.

### 2024 International Safeguarding Conference

ACSL's Director of Safeguarding and Compliance David Treanor and Director of Professional Standards and Complaints Karen Mosley joined a large Australian delegation to the Conference, held in Rome.

The 2024 ISC theme was Safeguarding and Disability. Dr Treanor presented on the recent findings from the Australian Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation and its implications for parishes and ministries who are engaged with persons with disabilities.

While the Conference provided rich presentations on the theme, the ability to meet and engage with a range of people working in the same roles and environments across the world was a stand-out benefit of the Conference for ACSL's delegates.

The introduction of the Universal Guidelines Framework by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, and the first Global Report on Safeguarding by Tutela Minorum have highlighted the urgency of increasing solidarity among episcopal conferences within our region, to mobilise resources for a universal standard in safeguarding.



*Australian delegates at the ISC 2024.*



*ACSL's David Treanor presenting at the ISC as part of a panel on Australian Perspectives. Also pictured from right: ACSL Board Director, Dr Robyn Miller; CEO of Child Safeguard Mr Marco Blanco; and Senior Research Officer at the ACU Institute of Child Protection Studies Mr Douglas Russell.*

### Engaging with the National Office for Professional Standards for the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand

In July 2024, New Zealand's Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care handed down its report, with significant findings exposing abuse within Catholic institutions. ACSL and the National Office for Professional Standards for the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand continue to share lessons from the Australian experience and work towards bilateral sharing of resources and knowledge.



*CEO Dr Ursula Stephens speaking to an audience at the Kids First Australia Conference, which ACSL was proud to sponsor.*

## MAINTAINING THE SAFEGUARDING DIALOGUE ACROSS DENOMINATIONS

In 2024 we continued our role on the Professional Standards Interdenominational Network. Comprised of representatives from a range of Christian churches in Australia, this group meets bi-monthly. This year a focus was on the need for all churches to access and deliver more safeguarding training for personnel. ACSL has joined a working group to consider the potential for shared training across the network.

In May our CEO also joined the Christian Ministry Advancement conference in Melbourne, to hear from leaders across Christian churches on tackling complex governance issues and networking with leaders from around the country.

## SUPPORTING COMMUNITY SAFEGUARDING EVENTS

In October we were proud to be the primary sponsor of the Kids First Australia Child Sexual Abuse and Harmful Sexual Behaviours Conference. The Conference was a valuable opportunity to hear from researchers and practice experts on emerging areas of concern and ways forward for safeguarding professionals. In our capacity as sponsor, CEO Ursula Stephens provided attendees with an overview of safeguarding developments in the Catholic Church and facilitated a number of panels.

In October, our Board Chair Mr David Penny joined our CEO Dr Ursula Stephens at the first National Showcase from the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse. With a theme of 'Reshaping the Conversation', speakers at the conference explored the complexities of preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. A number of survivors from the National Centre Survivor-led College also had the opportunity to address the conference. We were especially proud to hear from outgoing Board Director Dr Robyn Miller, who delivered a plenary on understanding and responding to Harmful Sexual Behaviours within an education setting.

## ACSL'S WEBSITE

In 2024, 16,000 people visited ACSL's website to learn more about our purpose, services and access our resources.

Our most viewed pages included the NCSS landing page, our publications and reports page, our learning platform home page and our tools and guides page. This tells us that our audit reports are being well-read, our training is being sought out, and entities are actively seeking ways to embed the NCSS in their processes by accessing implementation materials.

## ACSL'S NEWSLETTER

3,056 people read ACSL's e-newsletter in 2024 across 10 editions. The newsletter is a critical communication tool for ACSL where we share program updates, professional development opportunities, and publicise audit outcomes. The newsletter also serves as an important channel to share information about legislative changes that may impact Catholic entities, and to share safeguarding news and resources from sector partners.

## MEDIA RELEASES

As part of ACSL's commitment to transparency and accountability, we issue media releases for each safeguarding audit report we publish. In 2024 all our media releases were carried by CathNews, meaning that audit outcomes reached 13,000 Subscribers of CathNews daily newsletter.

We also issued media releases to mark important company updates and comment on nationally significant events. 18 media releases were issued in 2024.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025

Stakeholder engagement will be a primary area of focus for ACSL in 2025. We know there is much more we can do to be more consultative with our Subscribers, and that there are areas of the Church we have yet to significantly engage with.

There are also exciting opportunities in 2025 to broaden our international engagement and we are already looking forward to joining a delegation to the International Safeguarding Conference, and leading a safeguarding pilgrimage to Ireland in 2025.

# ACSL SUBSCRIBERS

**Our Subscribers enable ACSL to deliver safeguarding services and are directly supporting a whole-of-Church approach to safeguarding.**

All dioceses are Subscribers to ACSL, along with many religious institutes, a number of MPJPs and some other Catholic entities. We wholeheartedly thank our valued Subscribers for sharing our commitment to a safe Church for everyone. 131 entities have demonstrated their commitment to safeguarding through subscribing to ACSL for the 2025 calendar year. They are:

## Dioceses

Archdiocese of Adelaide  
Archdiocese of Brisbane  
Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn  
Archdiocese of Hobart  
Archdiocese of Melbourne  
Archdiocese of Perth  
Archdiocese of Sydney  
Diocese of Armidale  
Diocese of Ballarat  
Diocese of Bathurst  
Diocese of Broken Bay  
Diocese of Broome  
Diocese of Bunbury  
Diocese of Cairns  
Diocese of Darwin  
Diocese of Geraldton  
Diocese of Lismore  
Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle  
Diocese of Parramatta  
Diocese of Port Pirie  
Diocese of Rockhampton  
Diocese of Sale  
Diocese of Sandhurst  
Diocese of Toowoomba  
Diocese of Townsville  
Diocese of Wagga Wagga

Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes  
Diocese of Wollongong  
Eparchy of Saints Peter and Paul (Ukrainian)  
Eparchy of St Michael, Archangel (Melkite)  
Eparchy of St Thomas (Chaldean)  
Maronite Eparchy of Australia  
Military Ordinariate of Australia  
Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross  
Syro-Malabar Eparchy

## Religious institutes

Adoration Sisters -  
Congregation of the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament  
African Mission Fathers -  
Society of African Missions SMA  
Antonine Sisters - Maronite Congregation  
Augustinians  
Benedictine Monks - Subiaco, New Norcia  
Blessed Sacrament Fathers  
Brigidines  
Canossian Sisters - Canossian Daughters of Charity

Carmelite Fathers  
Carmelite Friars - Order of Discalced Carmelites  
Christian Brothers  
Company of St Ursula - Secular Institute of St Angela Merici  
Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth  
De La Salle Brothers  
Discalced Carmelite Nuns  
Goonellabah  
Discalced Carmelite Nuns, Launceston  
Discalced Carmelite Nuns, Ormiston  
Divine Word Missionaries  
Dominican Sisters of North Adelaide  
Dominicans - Order of Preachers  
Family Care Sisters (Grey Sisters) - The Company of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament  
Franciscan Friars - Order of Friars Minor Conventual  
Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood  
Good Samaritan Sisters -  
Institute of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict



Good Shepherd Sisters - Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

Holy Spirit Sisters - Missionary Sisters, Servants of the Holy Spirit

Institute of the Sisters of Reparation

Little Company of Mary

Loreto Sisters - Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Marist Brothers

Marist Fathers

Marist Sisters - Congregation of Mary

Michaelite Fathers

Missionaries of Charity

Missionaries of God's Love Fathers and Brothers

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart

Missionary Franciscan Sisters - Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception

Missionary Sisters of Service

MSC Sisters - Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

Norbertine Canons

Oblates - Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

OLSH Sisters - Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

Passionist Sisters of St Paul of the Cross

Passionists

Pastorelle Sisters

Paulists - Missionary Society of St Paul

Presentation Sisters - Wagga Wagga Congregation

Presentation Sisters - Western Australia Congregation

Priestly Fraternity of St Peter

Religious of the Sacred Heart - Society of the Sacred Heart

Resurrection Sisters - Congregation of the Sisters of the Resurrection (of Our Lord Jesus Christ)

Salesian Sisters - Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

Scalabrinian Missionaries

Servite Sisters - Mother of Sorrows Servants of Mary

Sisters Adorers of the Blood of Christ - Croatian Sisters

Sisters of Charity - Congregation of the Religious Sisters of Charity of Australia

Sisters of Mercy - Brisbane Congregation

Sisters of Mercy - Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea

Sisters of Mercy - North Sydney Congregation

Sisters of Mercy - Parramatta Congregation

Sisters of Nazareth - Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions

Sisters of St John of God

Sisters of St Joseph Lochinvar

Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition

Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart - Josephites

Society of Christian Doctrine - Preca Community

Society of St Paul

St Columbans Mission Society  
The Congregation of Sisters of Mary Queen of Peace (Banmethout Diocese)

Ursulines of the Roman Union  
Verbum Dei Missionary Fraternity - Female Branch, Sydney

Vincentians - Congregation of the Mission

## Public Juridic Persons (PJPs)

Calvary Ministries Ltd

Dominican Education Australia  
Edmund Rice Education Australia

Good Samaritan Education

Kildare Ministries

Loreto Ministries Ltd

Mary Aikenhead Ministries

Mercy Partners

MercyCare

St John of God Australia Ltd

## Associations of Christ's Faithful

Focolare Movement

## Peak Body

Catholic Mission

Caritas Australia

Catholic Social Services Australia

Catholic Schools NSW Limited

St Vincent de Paul Society

Pathways Response  
Victoria Ltd

## Other

Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT

Canterbury Baptist Church

The Australian Association of The Sovereign Military Order of Malta

Marymead CatholicCare  
Canberra & Goulburn

Missionaries of God's Love Sisters

Queensland Catholic Education Commission



# NON- SUBSCRIBERS

As our Chair has noted in his report, some Church Authorities have elected not to subscribe to ACSL.

They have done so for a range of reasons and pursue safeguarding practices and assurances independently of ACSL. They include 106 Religious Institutes, many of whom have few members or are not in active public ministry, and 3 MPJPs. Religious Congregations that are joining Emerging Futures will be included in future Subscriber numbers from 2025.

*We are continuing to promote the value of being an ACSL Subscriber, and supporting this whole of Church ministry, to these and other Catholic organisations.*

# GOVERNANCE

## Members

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.



*Pictured from left: Back row - Mr David Penny, Mr Neville Owen, Bishop Michael McCarthy, Fr Tom McDonough CP, Bishop Greg Bennet, Mr Henry Pruyn, Mr Julian Widdup.*

*Front row: Ms Audrey Brown, Sr Kath Tierney, Mr Michael Moore, Dr Maria Harries, Dr Ursula Stephens.*

## ACSL MEMBER REPRESENTATIVES

ACSL Member Representatives met four times in the reporting period (1 January 2024 – 31 December 2024).

The Member Representatives for ACSL in 2024 were:

### ASSOCIATION OF MINISTERIAL PUBLIC JURIDIC PERSONS

- Mr. Neville Owen, Trustee, St John of God Health

### 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. Catherine Reuter RSM, Congregational Leader, Sisters of Mercy Brisbane

# OUR BOARD

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 eight times in the reporting period.



**PROF THE HON MICHAEL  
LAVARCH AO LLB**

Chair of the Board

*\*Term concluded in April 2024*

Committees:

- AFRAC



**MR DAVID PENNY**

Chair of the Board

*\*Commenced term as Chair  
in April 2024*

Committees:

- AFRAC
- Governance



**MS AUDREY BROWN**

Committees:

- BARC (Chair)
- Governance
- CARC



**DR MARIA HARRIES**

Deputy Chair of the Board

Committees:

- Governance (Chair)
- BARC



**DR ROBYN MILLER**

*\*Term concluded in September 2024*

Committees:

- CARC



**MR MICHAEL MOORE**

*\*Term commenced in April 2024*

Committees:

- AFRAC
- CARC



**SR KATH TIERNEY**

Committees:

- CARC (Chair)



**MR JULIAN WIDDUP**

Committees:

- AFRAC (Chair)

#### COMMITTEES:

- Audit, Finance, Risk and Compliance Committee (AFRAC)
- Board Audit Reporting Committee (BARC)
- Complaints and Review Committee (CARC)
- Governance

With deep thanks to our independent committee members:

- BARC
  - Dr Zachariah Duke
  - Mr Joe Zabar
- CARC
  - Mr Nick Halfpenny



## Board attendance

Name	Role	Number eligible to attend	Number attended
Prof The Hon. Michael Lavarch AO	Chair <i>(until 17/04/2024)</i>	2	2
Dr Robyn Miller	Director	6	4
Sr Kathleen Tierney RSM AO	Director	8	7
Mr David Penny	Chair <i>(from 17/04/2024)</i>	8	7
Mr Julian Widdup	Director	8	8
Ms Audrey Brown	Director	8	7
Dr Maria Harries	Director	8	8
Mr Michael Moore	Director	6	4
Dr Ursula Stephens	Company Secretary	8	8

### FORMER ACSL BOARD MEMBERS HONOURED FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO SAFEGUARDING IN THE CHURCH

This reporting period saw the departure of two original board members, with The Hon Michael Lavarch AO and Dr Robyn Miller concluding their terms in 2024. We also welcomed new Board Director Mr Michael Moore in this period.

In November 2024, the Hon Michael Lavarch AO and departing board member Dr Robyn Miller were honoured for their contributions to safeguarding in the Church at a dinner with Australia's Catholic bishops in Sydney. The Hon Lavarch AO and Dr Miller received medallions for service to the Church, presented by Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. They were also thanked for their contribution to safeguarding in the Church by Chair of the Bishops Commission for Professional Standards and Safeguarding, Bishop Greg Bennet.



*Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB presents Prof the Hon Michael Lavarch AO with his medallion while Bishop Greg Bennet looks on.*



*Dr Robyn Miller with ACSL chief executive Dr Ursula Stephens.*

# OUR STAFF

ACSL's small team has a diverse range of skills, including expertise in executive and social services management, investigations, audits, safeguarding, adult learning, communications, and administration.



**URSULA STEPHENS**  
Chief Executive Officer



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



**DAVID TREANOR**  
Director, Safeguarding  
and Compliance



**KENDRA BOSWORTH**  
Manager, Professional  
Development and Programs



**TANIA WALKER**  
Executive Assistant



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



**MARY JAMIESON**  
Audit Team



**MAREE CHARNLEY**  
Senior Finance Officer



**LLYWELLYN O'BRIEN**  
*\*Concluded employment in December 2024*

Manager, Information and Systems



*Our staff at the conclusion of a two-day Mental Health First Aid training in Melbourne, facilitated by Dr Michael Carr-Gregg and Dr Emma Steer.*



# OUR FINANCIALS

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2024.

	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>Income</b>		
Contribution/Subscription fees	1,518,054	1,750,000
Service Income	344,519	256,341
Interest Received	31,101	11,136
	1,893,674	2,017,477
<b>Expenses</b>		
Cost of rendering services	(203,598)	(209,328)
Administration expense	(275,370)	(295,444)
Employee benefits expense	(1,188,963)	(1,075,947)
Director fees & related costs	(213,183)	(222,233)
Depreciation and amortisation	(30,211)	(27,021)
Interest expense - leases	(1,098)	(697)
	(1,912,423)	(1,830,670)
<b>(Deficit)/Surplus for the year</b>	<b>(18,749)</b>	<b>186,807</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>		
Other comprehensive income for the year (net of tax)	-	-
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>(18,749)</b>	<b>186,807</b>

The above statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income should be read in conjunction with the accompanying notes to the financial statements, which can be found [here](#).

## Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2024.

	31-Dec-2024 \$	31-Dec-2023 \$
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	769,335	1,043,224
Financial assets	252,897	-
Trade and other receivables	169,661	141,054
Other assets	52,076	37,753
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>1,243,969</b>	<b>1,222,031</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Property, plant and equipment	-	-
Right-of-use assets	209,053	-
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>209,053</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>1,453,022</b>	<b>1,222,031</b>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	404,337	395,669
Provisions	62,043	53,792
Lease liabilities	26,975	-
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>493,355</b>	<b>449,461</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Provisions	44,131	20,934
Lease liabilities	182,649	-
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>226,780</b>	<b>20,934</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>720,135</b>	<b>470,395</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>732,887</b>	<b>751,636</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Accumulated funds	732,887	751,636
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>732,887</b>	<b>751,636</b>



*A safe Church for everyone*

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