

The Poor Clares of Arundel

Baseline Audit Report
July 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is a baseline audit of the safeguarding arrangements for the Poor Clares of Arundel, West Sussex. The Poor Clares are a contemplative order founded 800 years ago by St Clare of Assisi, inspired and guided by St Francis of Assisi. The order is known as the Second Order of St Francis and there are over 20,000 nuns living in monasteries worldwide. This report is a baseline audit of the Poor Clares of Arundel. The Poor Clares have been resident at Arundel since 1886. Currently there are 24 active members who live a contemplative life with no external outreach activities. The sisters welcome guests into their guest house for personal retreats and spiritual guidance and members of the public to join them in their chapel for daily worship. The sisters hold an annual celebration for the Feast of St Clare and welcome invited guests to share these celebrations. The Poor Clares of Arundel are not a registered charity but are part of a wider United Kingdom Federation that provides some oversight and sisterly support.

1.2 The CSSA assess Religious Life Groups against a categorisation scheme based (of) on the safeguarding risk that is likely to be associated with their activities and size, from Level 1, a small community with minimal outreach and no known safeguarding concerns known as an Apostolic or an Enclosed Order, Level 2, a medium sized community with some outreach with vulnerable populations and/or providing some Diocesan activities such as a Parish Priest and Level 3 a large community and/or one with significant outreach with vulnerable populations and/or a disproportionately high number of open safeguarding cases. The Poor Clares of Arundel were audited as a Level 1 Enclosed Order.

1.3 The CSSA recognises the rich diversity of the Religious and acknowledges that the Religious Life Groups within any category may vary significantly in terms of size, ministry and safeguarding practice. Consequently, CSSA analysts may use professional judgement to ensure that Religious Life Groups are graded against the national standards in such a way that reflects their uniqueness.

2. Scope and Methodology

2.1 The CSSA notified the Poor Clares of Arundel of their intention to audit on 6 December 2024. An information request was made the same day that included the provision of a self-assessment document with an agreed completion date of 17 February 2025. The bespoke Level 1 – Enclosed Orders self-assessment tool enables RLG to provide information on their adherence to the eight National Safeguarding Standards¹ and progress in the overall implementation of said standards. An initial pre-audit meeting was held between the CSSA analyst and the safeguarding lead on 18 January 2025 to discuss the audit requirements and a scheduled date for the audit of 20 March 2025 was agreed. A further email confirming the arrangements was sent by the CSSA analyst to the safeguarding lead on the 12 March 2025.

2.2 Information provided within the self-assessment was analysed by the CSSA, alongside additional documentary evidence provided by the community together with information from the community's website.² Further confirmation of engagement was sought from the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS).³ This evidence was assessed against a bespoke Level 1 Enclosed Orders Maturity Matrix⁴ to arrive at ratings for each standard and a combined overall grade.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Interviews

Interviews were held on 20 March 2025 with the following members of the community:

- The Abbess
- The Vicaress

¹ Full details of the eight standards and underpinning sub standards are available here: [The Eight National Safeguarding Standards](#)

² [Poor Clares Arundel](#)

³ The Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) is an independent team of safeguarding professionals offering safeguarding services to the Religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

⁴ [APPENDIX-5-LEVEL-1-ENCLOSED-MATURITY-MATRIX-FINAL.docx](#)

- The safeguarding lead
- The infirmarian
- The sister who cares for the guests
- A focus group of active members of the community
- The current President of the Federation who is a member of the community at Arundel.

2.3.2 Document review

A review of the following documentation was undertaken:

- The self-assessment document
- The community safeguarding policy
- The community safeguarding statement
- Safeguarding training records and certification
- Disclosure and Barring Service records and certificates
- Minutes from Community and Council meetings
- Safeguarding messages and communication documents

2.3.3 Casework review

No allegations or concerns have been reported to, or about, the Poor Clares of Arundel within the previous 12 months therefore it was not possible to examine casework during this audit or assess some aspects of direct safeguarding practices.

3. Audit grading

3.1 Safeguarding practice is assessed against the Eight National Safeguarding Standards adopted by the Catholic Church in England and Wales and graded in accordance with the CSSA Maturity Matrix for Enclosed Orders. Each standard is graded on an ascending three-point scale of Not Met, Met with Recommendations, and Met. Grades for individual standards are combined to produce an overall grading. The audit draws on evidence generated from self-assessment, supporting documentation and interviews.

Overall grading	Met with recommendations
Standard 1 – Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body’s leadership, governance, ministry and culture	Met with recommendations
Standard 2 – Communicating the Church’s safeguarding message	Met with recommendations
Standard 3 – Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed	Met
Standard 4 – Effective management of allegations and concerns	Met
Standard 5 – Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)	Met with recommendations
Standard 6 – Robust human resource management	Met
Standard 7 – Training and support for safeguarding	Met with recommendations
Standard 8 – Quality assurance and continuous Improvement	Met with recommendations

3.3 This report summarises the findings of the audit undertaken with the Poor Clares of Arundel and their progress towards meeting the eight safeguarding standards. The overall grading for the Group is assessed as Met with recommendations. The Poor Clares have demonstrated a proactive, open and positive culture of safeguarding practice and have completed many actions that evidence this

commitment. The Poor Clares need to now formalise their safeguarding actions through the creation of plans that will provide an audit trail for evaluation.

4. Audit findings against each standard

4.1 Standard 1 Safeguarding is embedded in the Church body's leadership, governance, ministry and culture

4.1.1 The Poor Clares of Arundel strive to achieve a culture of openness and transparency regarding safeguarding. The community have a clear safeguarding statement and safeguarding policy both developed with the support of the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS). These have been made freely available to all community members and the wider public through publicisation on the community's website and on noticeboards throughout the public areas of the monastery (entrance hall and guest accommodation) and chapel. These two safeguarding documents are both underpinned by Integrity in Ministry⁵ which has been widely shared and discussed within the community as evidenced by the notes of chapter meetings and the understanding of the community during discussions. The safeguarding policy clearly defines the safeguarding responsibilities of all members of the community, providing guidance and well-defined processes to be followed in the event of a safeguarding issue.

4.1.2 The community have a nominated safeguarding lead who has a clearly defined role, and responsibilities set out within the safeguarding policy, providing a point of contact for the whole community and support and advice for the Abbess. The safeguarding lead is supported by the Vicaress with both having received additional training in safeguarding and enabled to attend the RLSS conferences on

⁵Integrity in Ministry is a code of conduct of Religious engaged in ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales

behalf of the community. Due to her significant experience in safeguarding and having held senior positions in the community, the safeguarding lead is able to provide valuable insight and practical support and guidance to the newly appointed Abbess. Forward planning is taking place with the current safeguarding lead mentoring the Vicaress in the role of safeguarding lead building in both current and longer-term resilience.

4.1.3 The governance arrangements for safeguarding are managed within the community. The safeguarding lead and the Vicaress are members of the Abbess' Council which meets regularly. The safeguarding lead and Vicaress are responsible for reporting on safeguarding matters; a standing agenda item for this meeting demonstrated by comprehensive minutes. Other ad hoc meetings occur as per need and these discussions and decisions are also recorded. Outcomes from all meetings are shared with the community at monthly chapter meetings. There is a clear audit trail of discussions, decisions, actions and evaluation of safeguarding practice from the Abbess through to the rest of the community.

4.1.4 The Poor Clares of Arundel are not a charity and do not therefore have Trustees. They are members of the UK Federation of Poor Clares who meet as an assembly every three years. The President of the Federation has a council of members who meet quarterly. There is no overarching safeguarding policy for the Poor Clares. Each community of Poor Clares is autonomous and has an individual safeguarding policy to meet their own needs. Safeguarding is reported on by the individual communities to the President's council as demonstrated by minutes from these meetings and is also a topic of discussion at the assembly. The President liaises with RLSS from a Federation perspective and will visit and provide safeguarding support for communities alongside RLSS if this is required.

4.1.5 The leadership of the Poor Clares have all demonstrated through discussions with the CSSA analyst an awareness of the safeguarding needs of their community and shared actions previously taken to ensure that there are robust policies and procedures in place to promote safeguarding. The community has just been through a significant period of change with the election of a new Abbess and of other community members into new leadership roles. To this end, although safeguarding work has been ongoing, there is not a current formal safeguarding

implementation plan. The development of this was put on hold until after the elections and is a priority for the new Abbess.

4.1.6 The Poor Clares of Arundel have a contract with both the RLSS and CSSA. They have received in-house training from the RLSS, and the safeguarding lead has worked closely with them to review and update safeguarding policy and processes. The Poor Clares of Arundel have links with Safe Spaces⁶ as well and can signpost people to them if needed. The community has a good relationship with the diocese in which they are situated and can contact them if they need to.

4.1.7 From an environmental perspective the Poor Clares of Arundel have made many adjustments to the living areas of the house to improve safety. Glass panels have been added to areas where sisters may meet privately with individuals including the Abbess' office, the parlours and the room that is used for confessions. There is clear signage that shows where private areas are to set boundaries for those who come as visitors. The porch has a security alert that can be set off if a sister is concerned or feels at risk of harm from someone who comes to the door. Ramps and lifts have been installed to help the frailer members of the community, and a lot of work has been completed to the infirmary wing to make sure that the bathrooms and bedrooms are safe for those with mobility issues. Basic personal care support is currently provided by the infirmarian who facilitates access to additional care from local NHS services should this be required. The community have also changed how they manage the visitors who come for the Feast of St Clare to make sure they are never alone with vulnerable people or children and have also introduced an invite only approach to this occasion so that those that come are known to the community.

4.1.8 The Poor Clares of Arundel have shown a commitment to embedding safeguarding in the governance and culture of their Religious Life Group. The sole area for development and only recommendation is the provision of a safeguarding

⁶ Safe Spaces Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal, and safe space for anyone who has been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales

implementation plan that will formally show the planning, recording and evaluation of improvements in safeguarding practice.

Graded: Met with recommendations

4.2 Standard 2 Communicating the Church's safeguarding message

4.2.1 The Poor Clares of Arundel safeguarding policy document has been shared with all the community and evidence from the focus group held as part of this audit demonstrated that they understand safeguarding messages and agree that good safeguarding practice is a priority for the community. There is however currently no formal safeguarding communication plan.

4.2.2 The Safeguarding lead stays in regular communication with the Abbess whenever issues arise that have even a small aspect of safeguarding within them, they are discussed and taken to the community where the issue is shared and any action needed is agreed upon together. Safeguarding messages including Integrity in Ministry are shared with the community through the regular chapter meeting discussions and through readings at mealtimes. Chapter meetings provide the sisters with the opportunity to discuss safeguarding issues and how the community will work towards the shared safety of all.

4.2.3 Posters with safeguarding information including the safeguarding statement are on noticeboards in both private and public areas with the contact details of the safeguarding lead and information about Safe Spaces. The safeguarding statement and policy are both on the community website. No safeguarding information was available in large print for visually impaired people or in other languages due to lack of current need, however, going forward the community may want to consider providing this. There is a hearing loop set up in the community meeting room so that those with a hearing impairment can contribute to meetings. There is also a translator set up on an iPad for a sister with profound deafness to ensure that she too can contribute fully to the meetings and discussions.

4.2.4 The community are aligned with and receive updates and information from the Conference of Religious.⁷ Although they have positive working relationships with the diocese there has been no recent need to contact them regarding safeguarding matters. The community have access to Canon Lawyers through the Federation and if required through the diocese which also provide references and celebrets for visiting clergy.

Graded: Met with recommendations

4.3 Standard 3 Engaging with and caring for those who report having been harmed

4.3.1 The Poor Clares of Arundel have clear processes to be followed if they receive a disclosure of harm. All active community members have received basic safeguarding training that would enable them to manage the initial disclosure. Discussions with the community showed that they were aware that they needed to contact the safeguarding lead or in her absence the Vicarress or Abbess following a disclosure of harm for support and guidance. They recognised the need to record the disclosure as accurately as possible and to pass this to the safeguarding lead for further action. The safeguarding lead was clear about her actions and the need to inform RLSS as soon as practicably possible as well as statutory authorities and the CSSA should this be required.

4.3.2 The safeguarding lead and the Vicarress have both undertaken additional training in managing disclosures and supporting those who make them. The Abbess is newly elected and will be undertaking this additional training as soon as possible.

4.3.3 The safeguarding lead has in the past supported an individual with reporting their experience of domestic abuse to the police. She recognised that the time spent with the person was very important to find out if there were other people that

⁷ [Conference of Religious](#)

they would like to speak with or spend time with. She was able to give them the space they needed and arranged with their consent for them to see a more appropriate person when they needed to. The community have a network of people that have been used in the past for people needing support in some way; a good GP surgery and both priests and other religious who have proved invaluable to the community in the past. If these individuals were not able to help the safeguarding lead was confident that they would be able to make recommendations for accessing local support services. Further recommendations for support services could be accessed via the RLSS and the Diocese. The community also has links with Safe Spaces.

4.3.4 The safeguarding lead and the community have not had much experience of people disclosing harm – from what they have experienced they recognised the importance of giving them time and listening to them in a completely open and non-judgemental way and assuring them of belief in their story. They identified that if someone is reporting being harmed it is important to realise that there is no one way that they will say their story or how they might react when they are sharing it. They talked about the need not to be shocked at what they might share as in these circumstances it is possible they are also ‘hearing’ it themselves for the first time.

4.3.5 The safeguarding lead and Abbess recognised the importance of learning from feedback from those with whom they interact and would encourage them to share this with them. The community would then discuss this feedback and agree on changes in practice that would reflect the feedback they have received.

4.3.6 The community demonstrated an awareness of how to raise concerns for themselves and were confident that these would be listened to and acted upon.

Graded: Met

4.4 Standard 4 Effective management of allegations and concerns

4.4.1 The Poor Clares of Arundel have a robust safeguarding policy and clearly defined processes that should be followed in the event of an allegation or the awareness of a safeguarding concern. Basic training in safeguarding has provided the whole community with the skills and knowledge to recognise a safeguarding allegation or concern and act in accordance with policy. The discussions at the community focus group showed that there is a good awareness of incidences that might require a safeguarding concern to be raised and the processes to be followed.

4.4.2 There were no recent examples of disclosures or allegations received by the sisters that had required notification to statutory authorities, but the policy is clear on this requirement and the process for doing so. This policy was developed in association with RLSS and is consistent with both the requirements of civil and canon law.

4.4.3 The community demonstrated an awareness of the requirement for the accurate and objective recording of a safeguarding concern or allegation and felt that with the support of the safeguarding lead, this would be achievable. The safeguarding lead and Abbess showed a good understanding of the need to maintain confidentiality when appropriate to do so and were knowledgeable about the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)⁸ and data protection requirements and how and when to share personal information.

4.4.4 The community members may hold their own personal information in their cells including their Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)⁹ Certificates and training certificates. Any other personal or confidential information including potential safeguarding reports is held in a locked filing cabinet in the Abbess' office. Access

⁸ GDPR governs how the personal data of individuals may be processed and transferred.

⁹ DBS [Disclosure and Barring Service - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service)

to this is restricted to the Abbess (the Vicaress in her absence) and the safeguarding lead.

Graded: Met

4.5 Standard 5 Management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents)

4.5.1 The Poor Clares of Arundel have had no experience of supporting sisters who have been the subject of an allegation or concern. Should this happen, they would work closely with RLSS accepting their advice and help. Although currently they have no written policy or guidance for this situation, they were able to articulate the need to fully support the subject of the allegation in whatever way was needed. If the allegation was from within the community the subject could stay outside the enclosure in the community guesthouse; if the allegation was from outside, the subject would remain supported within the community, unless they requested otherwise.

4.5.2 The community have access to a Franciscan Friar who can provide Canonical advice should this be required. The RLSS and the diocese would be approached for help with suggestions for civil legal support.

4.5.3 The Poor Clares of Arundel are clear that a respondent would be fully supported by the community in any ways that they need; and arrangements would be made for them to see counsellors, a spiritual director if they do not already have one and would have access to any medical support that is necessary.

4.5.4 If a situation arose that required a respondent needed to be away from the daily life of the community, the Abbess and safeguarding lead would investigate the various possibilities of where they could go taking in the preference of the individual: to go to another RLG, male or female, or maybe for them to go to a member of their family or a close friend.

Graded: Met with recommendations

4.6 Standard 6 Robust human resource management

4.6.1 The Poor Clares of Arundel have robust policies and procedures for managing safer recruitment. The community employ two part-time members of staff and have a regular volunteer all of whom have up-to-date DBS certificates appropriate to their roles. Enhanced DBS Certification has been secured for those who have direct contact with the public. Currently the community has one out of date DBS certificate and mitigations have been put in place although this individual is not involved in any ministry with the public. The safeguarding lead has oversight of the safer recruitment processes and monitors the DBS update service used by the community to ensure compliance. Help with DBS checks and advice is sought from RLSS as required.

4.6.2 Formation enquiries start with a virtual meeting and the individual is invited to spend some time with the community staying in the guest house. Visits occur over a period of one year building up in frequency and length. Before the individual enters as a postulant they may be asked to undertake a psychological assessment and references are obtained. As a postulant they meet with their formator once per week for a time of sharing and formation. If any issues arise with their mental health or wellbeing that cannot be managed by spiritual direction, they are referred to a specialist counsellor or other professional. All postulants undergo safeguarding training during their first year. The community do not take postulants from overseas. Currently the period for formation until solemn vows is at least nine years.

4.6.3 Visiting clergy are required to provide a letter of introduction from their bishop and an up to date celebret. These are checked by the sacristan and those without them would not be allowed entrance. The visiting clergy are all known to the sisters and they have a 'regular' priest who celebrates Mass and hears confession. Occasionally they have priests that come for a retreat but again these must provide references and a celebret. Copies of the celebrets are not kept on file and this may be a consideration for the sisters to provide an audit trail for this action together with a register of visiting priests.

4.6.4 The safeguarding statement is clearly shown in the entrance to the house and chapel. Copies of the statement and policy are available throughout the house and guests and visitors are made aware of them when they enter the guesthouse.

4.6.5 The Poor Clares of Arundel have had no recorded whistleblowing incidents. There is a clear process for whistleblowing outlined in the complaints policy (within the safeguarding policy) and all members of the community spoken to felt confident in raising a concern if they had one. The whistleblowing policy has been read to the community and is readily available to them if they wish to refer to it. The community know that everyone is free to talk with the safeguarding lead, the Abbess, another sister or anybody from outside the community about any issue. They can also contact the RLSS, the Bishop, the Vicar for Religious of the diocese, and the Federation President if they have issues regarding the RLG leadership.

Graded: Met

4.7 Standard 7 Training and support for safeguarding

4.7.1 The whole community of the Poor Clares of Arundel have completed basic safeguarding training delivered in-house by the RLSS training lead. In addition to this the safeguarding lead, the current President of the Federation (who is a community member) and the Vicaress have all completed additional safeguarding for leaders training. The new Abbess has only been in post for one month and is scheduled to complete this training in the next few months. Safeguarding adults training has been booked for later in 2025 for those sisters who require it for their roles (Abbess, safeguarding lead, Vicaress, infirmarian, sisters who care for the guests. The safeguarding lead has also completed DBS training and audit training with RLSS.

4.7.2 Training compliance is monitored by the safeguarding lead and reported to the Abbess' council quarterly. Compliance at time of audit was 100%.

4.7.3 There is currently no formal safeguarding training plan. The safeguarding lead receives a monthly update on training opportunities from RLSS and training is allocated according to role and responsibilities with an expectation that learning is shared with the whole community at the chapter meetings. Evidence from the minutes of chapter meetings showed this to be the case.

4.7.4 Although there is currently no formal feedback process for training and education the members of the community have shared their individual feedback from the RLSS training with each other in chapter meetings.

4.7.5 A training needs analysis and training plan would enable the Abbess, the Vicaress and the safeguarding lead to understand the training needs of the community, plan to meet these needs and provide a formal feedback process for evaluation of training effectiveness.

Graded: Met with recommendations

4.8 Standard 8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

4.8.1 The Poor Clares of Arundel have a proactive attitude towards safeguarding and demonstrated the ways in which this approach has been put into practice for example the introduction of a safety alarm at the front door and the installation of glass panels in solid doors where members of the community meet both peers and guests. Scrutiny of safeguarding is robust through the meeting structure within the community. Decisions and actions are shared with the entire community who participate in finding resolutions to the issues that arise which centre around the needs of an ageing and increasingly frail and vulnerable community.

4.8.2 The Poor Clares of Arundel have accessed appropriate support from RLSS and have developed their safeguarding policies and processes to ensure that they are in line with the eight national safeguarding standards and best practice. They continue to look for ways to enhance their safeguarding practice and have self-identified areas for development including the need for a policy and formal guidance for managing the subject of an allegation or safeguarding concern.

4.8.3 Resilience has been built into safeguarding practice through the training of the Vicaress in being a safeguarding lead, which demonstrates the community's commitment to safeguarding. Providing additional support to the safeguarding lead will enable the plans the community have for developing safeguarding

practice, the development of formal safeguarding implementation and communication plans can be initiated and embedded in a timely way.

4.8.4 The Abbess and safeguarding lead demonstrate positive and proactive communication with external agencies including RLSS in their commitment to monitor, evaluate and improve their safeguarding practice. The safeguarding lead and Vicaress have both attended all the RLSS conferences and have shared their learning with the community to enhance their understanding and practice especially in understanding the experiences of those who have been harmed.

Graded: Met with recommendations

5. Summary of overall findings

5.1. The Poor Clares of Arundel have shown a positive, proactive and open culture toward safeguarding. They have identified their strengths and are aware of their challenges. They have a committed leadership and safeguarding lead who work well together to enhance safeguarding practice. The community are equally committed to improving the safety of each other and those that visit them and actively participate in discussions and the decision-making processes required for any changes that are required.

5.2 The community have taken an active approach to enhancing the safety of the more elderly and frail members and have made adaptations to accommodation and methods of communication to ensure that everyone has equality of access to community life. There is an atmosphere of mutual care, love and support within the community that ensures that all are kept safe.

5.3 The Poor Clares of Arundel welcome guests and have made sure that all safeguarding measures have been put in place to ensure a positive and safe experience for all.

5.4 The Poor Clares of Arundel are clear on how they can and should enhance their safeguarding practice and have the leadership, experience and the drive to achieve their aims. Their priority now should be to formalise through the

development of written plans, the actions currently being undertaken and those that will be done in the future to achieve their strategic safeguarding aims. By doing so they will have a clear direction of travel with measurable outcomes that will provide safeguarding assurance for both the community and the Federation. ☒

6. Recommendations

To support improvement, the following recommendations are made:

Within 3 months

- The Abbess should complete the safeguarding for leaders training from RLSS
- The development of a policy and formal guidance for the management and support of subjects of allegations and concerns (respondents).

Within 6 months

- The development of a safeguarding implementation plan to formally show the planning, recording and evaluation of improvements in safeguarding practice
- The development of a communication plan to ensure that all communication needs are met and to formalise oversight and updating of current safeguarding communications going forward.
- The completion of a training needs analysis and the creation of a training plan.

7. Arrangements for follow-up

7.1 In line with this overall rating of Met with recommendations a re-audit of the Group by the CSSA should not normally take place for a two-year minimum period, subject to no indicators of a raised safeguarding risk arising.