

# Report Abuse

If you or someone you know has an allegation of sexual abuse by a member of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, please reach out to your local authorities immediately.

The Indiana Department of Child Services has a Child Abuse Hotline, to report child abuse or neglect to DCS, call 1 (800) 800-5556. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The Poor Handmaids are committed to treating every accusation with the upmost care and respect. We are here to listen and help, to report an abuse, please call 574-935-1757 or email at [sbell@poorhandmaids.org](mailto:sbell@poorhandmaids.org).

## Policy

### RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

#### POLICY STATEMENT:

*Poor Handmaids bring the good news of God's love to people and strive to further a sense of human dignity and mutual respect in their areas of ministry. Constitution: p. 20*

In the light of this commitment Poor Handmaids consider any allegation of sexual misconduct by a PHJC involving a minor to be a serious matter. It is not in keeping with the Gospel or with religious life. Such misconduct is never condoned.

Desire to foster healing and console hurt that occurs in cases of sexual misconduct. The Province will respond to allegations of sexual misconduct with a minor by a Sister insofar as the members are able. The Provincial/Pro-Regional Superior's immediate willingness to respond to the allegation and provide assistance does not reflect a judgment as to the accused Sister's guilt or innocence.

Therefore this policy will be applied whenever a member of the congregation is accused of engaging in sexual misconduct toward a minor. A designated person will intervene appropriately to protect the civil and canonical rights of all individuals involved as well as facilitate justice and healing.

When there is an accusation of sexual misconduct involving a minor, the congregation will respond sensitively and directly to those making the accusation and to the Sister accused. In such cases, the appropriate civil authorities will be notified as a firm matter of policy.

This policy applies to all novices and professed members of the Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ or other PHJCs who are working or studying in the country.

The congregation commits itself to protecting the confidentiality, privacy and canonical and civil rights of the victim and the accused during the investigation.

Records of the allegation and the follow up will be maintained for an appropriate period of time. *This policy also applies, as appropriate, to sexual exploitation of a "vulnerable adult."*

# Credible Accusations

## Statement from the Provincial Team of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ

Susan Whitten, a deceased former member of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, has been accused of the sexual abuse of a minor. Whitten left the Poor Handmaid Congregation over 50 years ago when she was dispensed from her vows in 1967. Whitten's last assignment prior to her dispensation was at Bishop Dwenger High School in Fort Wayne, IN.

A member of Bishop Dwenger's class of 1967 has accused Whitten of engaging in an inappropriate relationship. Out of respect for the privacy of the individual who made this credible allegation, the Poor Handmaids will not say anything further regarding the allegation or the response to it.

The Poor Handmaids are saddened to hear of this abuse. The safety and well-being of all children, including all those served by the ministry of the Poor Handmaids, is of the highest importance to us. Abuse of any kind is appalling. The mission of the Poor Handmaids affirms our desire to respect and value each person we serve and to search for justice. Poor Handmaids are committed to responding to any allegation of abuse pastorally, with compassion and sensitivity to all those who may be affected. The Sisters' prayers go out to the individual who brought this allegation.

# Statement on Treatment of Children

## POLICY ON THE TREATMENT OF CHILDREN

### **Matthew 18:10**

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven".

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the basic human rights to which children everywhere are entitled.

#### These include:

- The right to survival
- The right to the development of their full physical and mental potential
- The right to protection from influences that are harmful to their development
- The right to participation in family, cultural and social life

### Saint Katharina Kasper, Letter 65 January 16, 1880

"Go on giving a good example among the children, as you did here, then you can and will do much good. I said that already. Pray for them daily, commending them to God's protection. You will see how God blesses what you do. We cannot always succeed in making all the children good. The good God will be content if we do what we can."

As Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, we respect all children and all persons no matter the age, color, gender, culture.

Therefore in all cultures under no circumstances do we as Religious Sisters tolerate the beating, hitting, or abuse of children in any of our institutions. No Sister or employee will mistreat a child for any reason. Only appropriate non-violent speech and behavior is to be used in correcting a child.

# Allegation Procedures

## Initial Allegation

When allegations are directed to the General Superior/Provincial./Pro-region superior or a member of the Leadership Team, they will assure the accuser that the accusation will be taken seriously and that the charges will be investigated. When the allegation involves a Province, the General Superior will inform the Provincial Superior who follows the steps outlined in this procedure.

When the allegation involves a Pro-Region, the General Superior is the legitimate authority and is responsible. She consults with the Pro-Regional Superior in following the steps outlined in the Procedure of this Policy.

**In the Provinces, the Provincial is responsible for the following procedures. In the Pro-Regions, the General Superior along with the Pro-Region Superior is responsible for the following:**

The appropriate Superior will encourage the accuser to fill out a written complaint. If the accuser is not comfortable with the form, he/she may complete their own form in writing as best they can. The accuser is free to supplement the form or add any information to the questions posed. The Provincial shall inform the accuser that only with a written document can a thorough investigation be conducted.

The appropriate Superior will notify the congregation's legal counsel who will report the allegation to the legal authorities. If it appears that the allegation may lead to a monetary claim, she will also notify the insurance company.

The appropriate Superior will inform the accused of the allegation. If it is determined by the that the Sister poses a risk to others in her current ministry she will be removed or reassigned until completion of the investigation. All applicable criminal statutes will be complied with.

The Leadership Team will appoint designated personnel consisting of a Conduct Coordinator and Review Board. The Conduct Coordinator will act responsibly to search out the truth of the allegation.

After receiving the written complaint, the **Conduct Coordinator** will meet with the accuser to review it. He/she will assure the accuser of concern for her/his wellbeing and healing and the intention of investigating the charges that have been brought forth.

The Conduct Coordinator will meet with the accused to inform her of the allegation, to review her rights, to offer appropriate assistance and to apprise her of procedures. The accused will be advised that what she says may not be privileged information and she has a right to not respond to the allegations, but may wish to seek legal counsel who will be provided for her by Provincial Leadership.

If there is a serious discrepancy in the accounts of the accuser and the accused, the Conduct Coordinator will utilize any other available resources needed to further the investigation. The Conduct Coordinator will report to the appropriate Superior and the Review Board, giving a complete and accurate summary of the initial investigation.

The Leadership Team will appoint a **Review Board** of no less than three members to determine whether there is a basis in fact to substantiate the allegation and to make appropriate recommendations to the Leadership Team regarding the issue.

The Review Board shall receive the report of the Conduct Coordinator to determine the credibility of the accusation.

If the Review Board determines that no basis in fact exists or if civil authority results in a determination that the charges were unfounded, the Board may recommend that the Sister continue in or be returned to ministry.

If the Review Board determines that a basis in fact exists to substantiate the allegation, it will recommend administrative leave for the Sister. The Board may also recommend remedies for the victim. They shall notify both the diocese where the alleged misconduct took place as well as the current diocese where the Sister ministers. They shall notify appropriate civil authorities. All deliberations of the Review Board shall be confidential.

The findings of the Review Board shall be communicated by the Board to Leadership and by the Conduct Coordinator to the accuser and the accused.

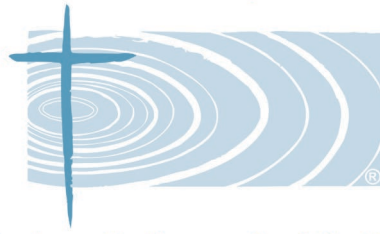
The Review Board may be requested to provide advice on other matters involving misconduct, regardless of whether a complaint has been filed.

#### OTHER:

As a vowed religious, the accused maintains her right to live in community. The Superior will help her find a community that provides the security and support needed during the process.

The assistance of a spiritual director should be offered to help the Sister through the process. A competent psychologist or therapist, familiar with the life and issues of religious women, will be made available to the Sister.

The Sister may choose to consult a canon lawyer regarding her rights and obligations. She may also select a civil lawyer with the prior approval of the Superior.



*Partners in the work of the Spirit*

**REPORT OF SEXUAL ABUSE**

Date Report Received:

---

Name:

---

Allegation Against:

---

Date Reported to Civil Authorities:

---

Outcome:

---

Other Information

---

---

---

Signed:

---

Date 

---