



Welcome

Survivor Assistance: Updates &
Trends

October 2025

Agenda

- Introductions & What's On Your Mind
- Universal Guidelines Framework
- Spiritual Abuse
- Discussion



HELLO!



One thing that I'd like to discuss today is...



Universal Guidelines Framework

VOS ESTIS LUX MUNDI

Carta apostólica
en forma de *motu proprio*
del Santo Padre
FRANCISCO



Vos Estis Lux Mundi

*“any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty **which, in fact, even occasionally,** limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence.”*

Archdiocese of San Francisco's definition:

A Vulnerable Adult is defined as a person 18 years or older who is physically, mentally, or emotionally impaired, whether temporary or long-term, or that is disabled, or that is otherwise unable to function in one or more ways that results in an impaired ability to respond as a typical adult is expected to function. A Vulnerable Adult may also be someone who comes for Spiritual Direction and confession, depending on that person's mental, emotional, or psychological frame of mind at the time, as well as upon his or her physical condition.





definition, part II:

This includes, but is not limited to, individuals

- *of diminished capacity to consent due to age, illness, or disability*
- *in crisis, seeking pastoral, spiritual, or emotional support*
- *reliant upon another person for emotional, psychological, physical, or spiritual care or support*
- *in a context of positional power imbalance, unable to give free, informed consent (parishioner, staff member, ministry recipient or participant, spiritual directee, pastoral counselee, seminarian, supervisee...)*
- *in a context of personal power imbalance (poverty, financial dependence, anxiety, depression, abuse, loss, trauma, immigration status, maturity...)*
- *in a spiritual power imbalance, having sought the expert spiritual advice from the person representing faith/spirituality/God*
- *who are subject to a special relationship of power and/or dependence which can exist in a pastoral context*
- *who sought safety in the ministerial role of the priest (though they may not even be Catholic or a parishioner)*
- *who received professional help and support from the priest – even without knowing his role, his status, his function, his priestly promises, etc.*

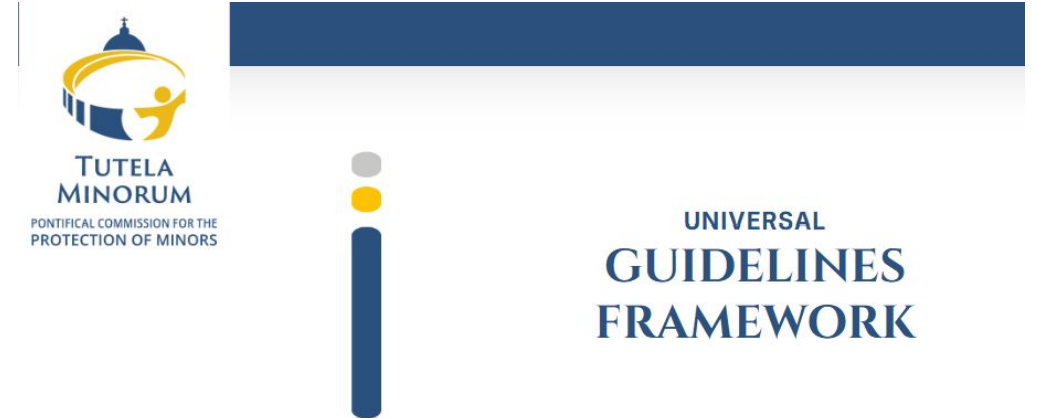
definition, part III:

A Vulnerable Adult can be anyone who is in a care-giving or ministerial relationship with another person where there is a presence of unilateral power. Despite the age, consent, and disposition of an adult in this type of relationship, the adult who is ministering is always responsible to uphold professional boundaries. Individuals approaching others for help are always vulnerable in this regard.



Universal Guidelines Framework

- Developed by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.
- A mandate for 10 universal guidelines to be put in place in every single worldwide jurisdiction within the Church.
- Similar to what we know and have been doing:
 - leadership committed to safeguarding
 - pastoral care for survivors
 - guidelines for responding
 - contextualizing safeguarding within a culture
 - ongoing education and formation



Why it is significant: UGF definition of abuse includes both adults and minors.

● Abuse

when used throughout the UGF document this is an inclusive term covering both child and adult abuse.

● Abuse of Power

means the abuse of position, function or duty to take advantage of another. This can take many forms and include situations where a person has power over another person by virtue of their relationship (e.g. employer and employee, teacher and student, coach and athlete, parent or guardian and child, clergy/ religious and parishioner) and uses that power to their advantage.

● Accessible language

means information is provided in multiple formats for individuals with different levels of English literacy and proficiency, modes of communication, languages, and cognitive abilities.

● Adult

means any person 18 years or older. When used throughout the UGF document this is an inclusive term referring to all adults, including vulnerable adults.

● Adult abuse

means the improper treatment of an adult that results in the actual and/or likelihood of causing physical or emotional harm. Abuse can come in many forms, such as: physical or verbal maltreatment, neglect, injury, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices, crimes, exploitation, or other types of aggression.

There are several categories of abuse of adults, such as:

- + Sexual abuse*
- + Physical abuse*
- + Emotional/psychological abuse*
- + Neglect*
- + Elder abuse*
- + Financial abuse*
- + Exploitation*

Within the context of the Catholic Church it is also important to recognize spiritual abuse* as an additional subtype of abuse.

● **Grooming (child)**

refers to a pattern of behaviour aimed at engaging a child as a precursor to sexual abuse. It includes establishing a 'special' friendship/relationship with the child. Grooming can include the conditioning of parents and other adults to think that the relationship with the child is 'normal' and positive.

● **Grooming (adult)**

is the predatory act of maneuvering another individual into a position that makes them more isolated, dependent, likely to trust, and more vulnerable to abusive behaviour.

● **Guardian**

refers to the person(s) who has the legal authority to care for the personal and property interests of another person.

● **Ministry**

means any activity within, or conducted by, an Church Body, that is authorised by formal appointment and designed to carry out the apostolic and charitable works of the Catholic Church.

● **Neglect (adult)**

is the failure of a carer to provide the necessities of life to a person for whom they are caring.

● **Neglect (child)**

refers to a failure by a caregiver to provide the basic requirements for meeting the physical and emotional developmental needs of a child. Physically neglectful behaviours include a failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, supervision, hygiene or medical attention.

● **Safeguarding Co-ordinator**

means an individual who champions safeguarding and co-ordinates the implementation of the UGF and local church's safeguarding protocols within an Church Body.

● **Safeguarding Implementation Plan**

means a documented plan which articulates actions to be taken across the Church Body to ensure safeguarding practices are in place. It includes actions, strategies, responsibilities, delegations, and accountabilities, and tracks review and progress. It is overseen by the Safeguarding Committee.

● **Safeguarding policies and procedures**

means any policies and procedures of the Church Body that address elements of safeguarding children and adults. For example, but not limited to:

- + recruitment;
- + risk management;
- + complaint handling; and,
- + acceptable use of online applications.

● **Seminarian**

a student in a theological formation and education centre preparing for ordination as a priest.

● **Seminary**

means a centre for the formation and education of students preparing for ordination.

● **Sexual abuse (adult)**

Sexual abuse is a form of sexual assault. Sexual abuse includes rape, indecent assault, sexual harassment, and sexual interference. Sexual activity with an adult who is incapacitated by a mental or physical condition (such as dementia) that impairs his or her ability to grant informed consent, is defined as sexual assault/ abuse. Sexual assault/abuse includes where by force, threats or abuse of authority an individual commits a canonical offence or forces someone to perform or submit to sexual acts. Sexual assault is a crime.

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● **Spiritual abuse**

means abuse of a person that invokes a person's religious beliefs and faith to perpetrate harm. Spiritual abuse can occur as a secondary experience of abuse when abuse is perpetrated by someone in a position of spiritual authority and trust within the Church and can negatively impact a person's spirituality.

● **Substantiated complaint**

means under the civil standard of proof an allegation of abuse for which the investigator finds that sufficient evidence exists to believe that the alleged conduct more likely than not occurred.

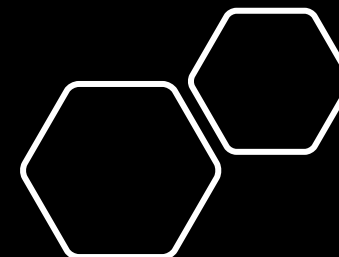
● **Third parties**

means any individual, group or legal Church Body outside the Church Church Body who contract services and facilities to or from the Church Church Body.

● **Transient Risk**

means short-term risk, experienced by people at different stages in their life: e.g. when someone is vulnerable due to:

- + grief
- + bereavement
- + relationship breakdown
- + homelessness
- + unemployment
- + financial hardship





Trends

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a string of light-colored prayer beads. To the right, a small, weathered Buddha statue is visible, adorned with a dark, beaded necklace. The background is dark and out of focus.

Spiritual abuse

Sr. Theresa

SHAME



From the UGF

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Power Differential



Discussion:

*what does this mean for your
ministry to survivors? For your
institute's policies?*



A large, three-dimensional graphic of the words "Thank You!" in a blue, metallic font. The letters are thick and have a reflective, faceted appearance. They are set against a light gray background that reflects the letters, creating a sense of depth and realism. The lighting comes from the upper left, casting soft shadows to the right.

Thank you!

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