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# **Whistleblowing Policy**

## **Society of the Divine Word (SVD)**

### **- IBP British District**

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## Policy Purpose

The Society of the Divine Word (SVD), Irish–British Province, British District, is committed to maintaining an open, transparent, and accountable culture, and to upholding the highest standards of integrity, safeguarding, and ethical conduct.

This Whistleblowing Policy sets out the procedure for raising concerns about wrongdoing, unsafe practice, or unethical behaviour within the SVD IBP British District. It aims to ensure that all concerns raised in good faith are taken seriously, investigated appropriately, and that individuals who raise concerns are protected from detriment or retaliation.

## Policy Scope

This policy applies to all persons connected with the SVD IBP British District, including:

- Religious members (priests and brothers)
- Employees
- Volunteers
- Trustees
- Contractors or agency workers

This policy clarifies that Religious members of the Society of the Divine Word are explicitly entitled to use this Whistleblowing Policy, alongside staff, volunteers, and Trustees.

Employees may also raise concerns through the Grievance Policy, but whistleblowing concerns that relate to public interest matters, safeguarding, illegality, or serious misconduct should be raised under this policy.

## What Is Whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which an individual reasonably believes shows wrongdoing or malpractice that is in the public interest. This includes:

- Criminal activity
- Safeguarding failures or abuse
- Risks to health and safety
- Miscarriages of justice

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- Environmental damage
  - Financial impropriety or facilitation of tax evasion
  - Breaches of legal, regulatory, or professional obligations
  - Attempts to conceal any of the above

Whistleblowing is distinct from personal complaints, grievances, or employment disputes, which should normally be raised through the Grievance Procedure.

## **Legal Protection**

The SVD IBP British District undertakes to comply with all applicable legislation, including the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1988, which provides legal protection to whistleblowers who raise concerns in good faith.

Any individual who raises a concern honestly and reasonably under this policy will be protected from victimisation, harassment, bullying, or disciplinary action as a result of making a disclosure.

## **Failure to Disclose**

Failure to report known or reasonably suspected wrongdoing, particularly where safeguarding, safety, or legality is concerned, may itself be regarded as misconduct.

## **How to Raise a Whistleblowing Concern**

1. **Initial Reporting**
  - Concerns should normally be raised with the individual's line manager or superior, either verbally or in writing.
  - The whistleblower should clearly state that the concern is being raised under the Whistleblowing Policy and provide relevant facts, dates, and names where possible.

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## 2. **Alternative Reporting Routes**

- If the whistleblower feels unable to raise the concern with their manager or superior, they may raise the matter directly with:
  - The Safeguarding Lead
  - Any Trustee of the SVD IBP British District

## 3. **Meetings and Investigation**

- The whistleblower may be invited to a meeting to discuss the concern and may be accompanied by a colleague or Trade Union representative.
- The SVD IBP British District will investigate the concern promptly and may involve external specialists where appropriate.
- The whistleblower will be kept informed of progress, subject to legal and confidentiality constraints.

## 4. **Anonymous Disclosures**

- Anonymous disclosures will be considered but are discouraged, as anonymity may limit investigation and feedback.

## 5. **Escalation and External Reporting**

If concerns are not satisfactorily addressed internally, or if the whistleblower believes it is inappropriate to raise the matter internally, advice or disclosure may be made to external bodies, including:

- The Charity Commission
- Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA)
- Fundraising Regulator
- Health and Safety Executive
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Police (in cases of suspected criminal activity)

## **Malicious or False Allegations**

Concerns raised in good faith will always be treated seriously, even if they are not upheld. However, knowingly making false or malicious allegations may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal or canonical consequences where applicable.

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## **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

The SVD IBP British District will make every effort to keep the whistleblower's identity confidential where requested. However, disclosure may be required where:

- Required by law
- Necessary for police or regulatory investigations
- Required by a court

The whistleblower will be informed at the earliest appropriate opportunity if disclosure becomes necessary.

## **Protection and Support for Whistleblowers**

No individual will suffer retaliation or detriment for raising a concern in good faith. Any act of reprisal, intimidation, or victimisation will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.

If a whistleblower believes they have been treated unfairly after raising a concern, they should raise this immediately with their manager or follow the Grievance Policy.

Independent advice is also available from Protect, an independent whistleblowing charity:

Website: [www.protect-advice.org.uk](http://www.protect-advice.org.uk)

**Advice Line: 020 3117 2520**