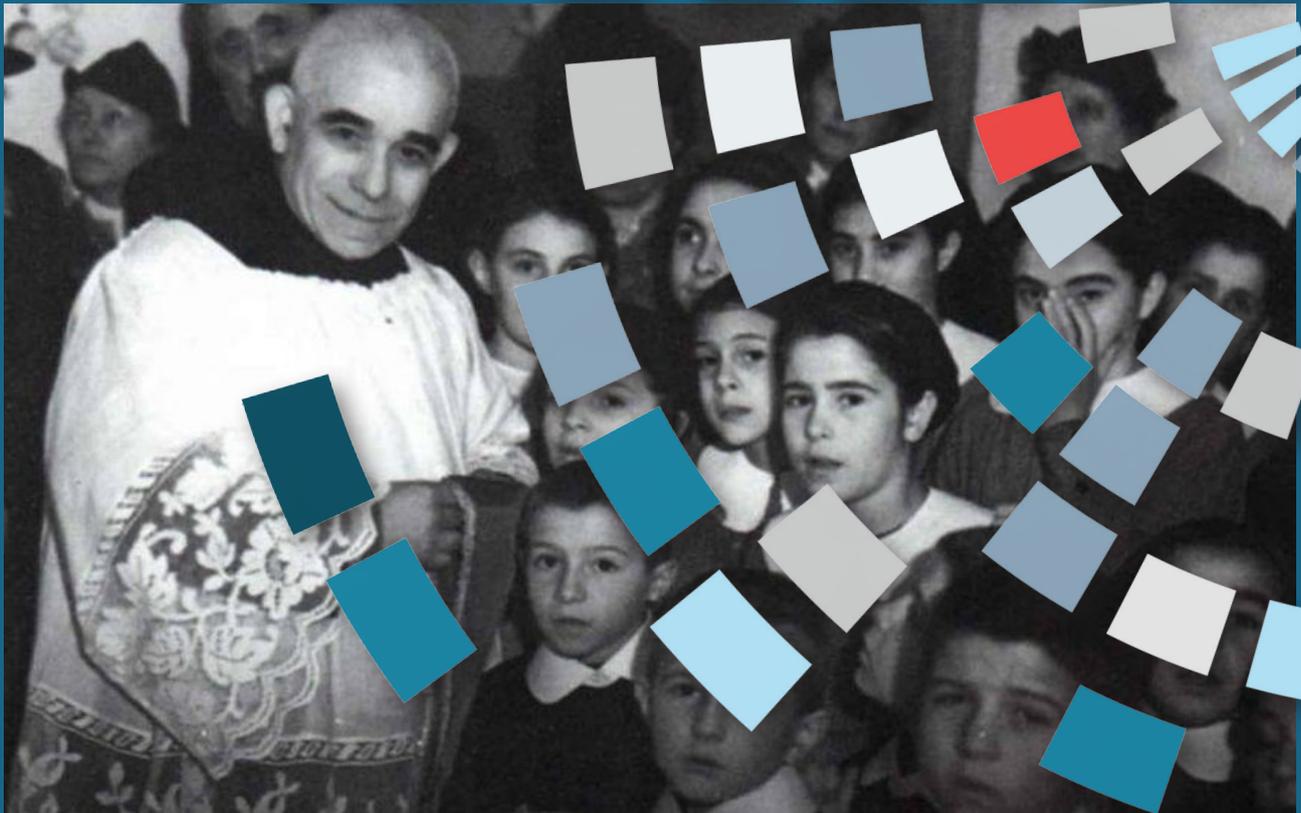


**LITTLE WORK OF DIVINE PRVIDENCE  
(OPERA DON ORIONE)**



***Guidelines for the Protection of Minors  
and Vulnerable Persons***

Rome, June 23, 2025



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«If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). These words of Saint Paul forcefully echo in my heart as I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons. Crimes that inflict deep wounds of pain and powerlessness, primarily among the victims, but also in their family members and in the larger community of believers and nonbelievers alike. Looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient. Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated. The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults».

(POPE FRANCIS, *Letter to the People of God*, August 20, 2018)

# 1. Introduction

The Church has always been committed to educating, accompanying, and protecting the smallest, the poor of society. For several years now, it has been working forcefully to ensure that, as Pope Francis says, “awareness matures in all that the Church must increasingly be a safe home for children and vulnerable persons.”<sup>1</sup>

Aware that the well-being of minors and vulnerable persons are supreme values to be safeguarded and protected, the Little Work of Divine Providence, since its birth, has always dedicated itself to the education of youth, to the care of the poor and people abandoned by society. As the Constitutions of the Sons of Divine Providence indicate, the mission of the Institute consists in “leading the weak and defenseless to full integration into human society: every chain that takes freedom from the children of God must be broken, every exploitation of one person over another must be suppressed in the name of Christ; [...]” (Const. Art. 119 §§2-5). Working for and with the smallest and most vulnerable persons, both in the work of evangelization and in works of social assistance, the Little Work of Divine Providence is committed to offering its members and lay collaborators an instrument that can help them promote a culture of promoting human dignity in minors and vulnerable persons. Indeed, for Saint Luigi Orione, interest in young people and attention to the abandoned of society were an existential and historical vocation of primary importance. He was not satisfied with giving an educational line, but formed the continuators of his charism. The 15th General Chapter of our Congregation commits each and every religious to promote a true culture of prevention of abuse and exploitation, as well as a true culture of protection of minors and vulnerable persons.

In these guidelines, every Province and equivalent entities will find the fundamental principles of our theme: first, the necessity of creating a culture of protection, the responsibility of every religious and of superiors; moreover, the document commits to attention to victims, to their accompaniment; finally, the Institute’s relations with civil authorities, the way to communicate and give information on the part of the Institute, and some practical questions regarding the elaboration of Protocols and codes of conduct in the Provinces.

To facilitate the drafting and reading of the text, when this document speaks of Province or Provincial Director, it means not only the provinces but also all entities assimilated to them by our Constitutions, that is, the Vice-province and the Delegation.

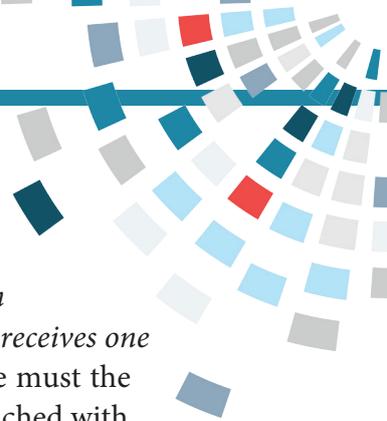
## 2. Fundamental Principles / Illumination

### In the Light of the Gospel

Jesus welcomed every person who approached Him: sinners, the sick, women, men, but especially the little ones. The Synoptics, for example, report Jesus’ words concerning the “little ones,” when he is asked: “*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*” (Mt 18:1; cf. Mk 9:33-37; Lk 19:46-48).<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, Jesus is asked to lay hands on children and pray (Mt 19:13-15; cf. Mk 10:13-16; Lk 18:15-17). To the disciples who scolded them, Jesus said: “*Let the children come to me, for the kingdom*

<sup>1</sup> A. GISOTTI. *Declaration of the ad interim Director of the Holy See Press Office*, 29/03/2019 [BO263].

<sup>2</sup> With this question begins chapter 18 of Matthew; it is the fourth discourse, the so-called ecclesial one. In it “Matthew deals with multiple situations that the community encounters and that must be resolved with Gospel spirit” (B. MAGGIONI, *Il racconto di Matteo*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi 2001, p. 227).



of heaven belongs to such as these” (Mt 19:14).

“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” the disciples ask. And Jesus “called a child, placed it in their midst, and said: ‘Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven... And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me’” (Mt 18:1 ff.). We ask ourselves: in what sense must the disciple resemble a child? In Matthew’s context, the word “child - little one” is enriched with multiple meanings. The first emphasizes that, to enter the Kingdom of heaven, one must be available, trusting, simple; one needs the simplicity of a child. The second, in light of the affirmation that the greatest is the one who becomes small, introduces a new perspective, that of service: if you want to enter the Kingdom, you must become small, that is, you must place yourselves in an attitude of service. The third, in light of “whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,” must be read keeping in mind the parable of judgment (Mt 25:31-46). “Thus the child takes on yet another new meaning: it is not the child in the proper sense, nor the symbol of availability, nor the one who doesn’t count nor the one who serves: it is more precisely the needy. It is the thirsty, the hungry, the naked, the prisoner, the marginalized.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus’ discourse continues with particularly harsh words: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come!... See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father” (Mt 18:6-7.10). A new motif is introduced: that of scandal. Here the word “little one,” at first, does not refer to children, but to simple faithful, whose faith is still fragile, and for this reason the community must create an environment that facilitates their integration and, above all, their perseverance, without becoming discouraged. Those more mature in faith must not create occasions for stumbling, otherwise the weaker (“little ones”) risk succumbing. In this sense, those who seem to count least, who have no weight, must not be neglected. But, secondly, the word also takes on a moral significance, because who is more fragile and defenseless than a child, as a child? That is why Jesus warns and reminds us that “their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father” (Mt 18:10).

The little ones, therefore, recall fundamental values of human dignity such as: purity, delicacy, limpidity, integrity, human beauty, innocence. Whoever touches a child violates this integrity, shatters it, causing irreparable damage to their growing personality.

## In the Light of the Magisterium

The Magisterium, beginning especially with Benedict XVI, has intervened several times on this very delicate matter, not only initiating a clear reflection to prevent and eradicate abuses, but also giving clear and severe directives to the whole Church.

“The protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message that the Church and all its members are called to proclaim throughout the world. Christ himself, in fact, has entrusted us with the care and protection of the weakest and defenseless: “whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me” (Mt 18:5). Therefore, we all have the duty to welcome openheartedly minors and vulnerable persons and to create a safe environment for them, with their interests as a priority. This requires a continuous and profound conversion, in which personal holiness and

<sup>3</sup> B. MAGGIONI, cit., p. 230

moral commitment come together to promote the credibility of the Gospel proclamation and to renew the educational mission of the Church.”<sup>4</sup>

Our Congregation is in full harmony with these words of the Pope and makes its own the indications contained in the decisions of the Magisterium.

## Don Orione

At the school of Don Bosco (1886-1889), Don Orione learned a style that marked him for his whole life. “The Salesian experience was decisive. It showed him a vast field of apostolate, rekindled in his heart devotion to Our Lady, love for the Church and the Pope, prepared him to become the father of so many young people to educate in the sentiments of faith, family and homeland, inebriated him with the holy passion for souls to save.”<sup>5</sup> The first sprout was Mario Ivaldi, expelled from catechism because he was disruptive. The cleric Orione met him in the sacristy of the Tortona cathedral, while he was crying. It all began with a question asked to that boy: “Why are you crying?” Thus was lit “the spark from which then draws nourishment his first work: the festive Oratory of Saint Luigi, in Tortona.”<sup>6</sup> And after Mario, “other boys immediately came like sparrows attracted by a table of crumbs.”<sup>7</sup>

In a letter written from Argentina on June 24, 1937, Don Orione wrote: “*Sustained by the grace of the Lord, and by the maternal goodness of the Church, I evangelized the little ones, the humble, the people, I tried to evangelize the poor, to comfort them with Faith and with the spirit of Christian charity. I confess that I should have done much, much more, and I ask the Lord’s forgiveness. I evangelized the little ones, the humble, the people, the poor people.*”<sup>8</sup> This passion for the little ones was concretized throughout his life with the opening of boarding schools, in favor of the weakest classes; with aid to children orphaned by earthquakes (the Calabrian-Sicilian one of 1908; that of Marsica in 1915); with the welcoming of the disabled and war-mutilated children.

Following the Founder’s example, we too today are called to make the culture of life resound around us, having at heart the smallest, most fragile, most defenseless. Remembering that “*their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father*” (Mt 18:10) and because, as Don Orione himself said: “*In the most miserable of men shines the image of God.*”<sup>9</sup> For this reason, so that this image may not be defaced, the theme of the protection of minors was the subject of dialogue in the XV General Chapter, which invited everyone at their own level to draw up a protocol for the prevention of abuses and protection of minors and vulnerable persons. It is for this reason that we have prepared these “guidelines,” to which each Province and Delegation can then refer to draw up its protocol.

4 FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter in the form of «Motu proprio» On the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, March 26, 2019. See also: Address of the Holy Father Francis to members of the Pontifical Commission for the protection of minors (29/04/2022); Address of the Holy Father Francis to members of the Pontifical Commission for the protection of minors (May 5, 2023); Address of the Holy Father Francis to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for the protection of minors (07/03/2024). Cf. H. ZOLLNER, «Le ferite spirituali causate dagli abusi sessuali», in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2017 IV 244-254 (Issue 4017 – 4/18 Nov 2017); J. HANVEY, «Sradicare la cultura dell’abuso. Pope Francis’ letter to the People of God», in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2018 IV 271-278 (Issue 4041 – 3/17 Nov 2018). See also the Pastoral Letter of Pope BENEDICT XVI to Catholics of Ireland (19/03/2010).

5 D. SPARPAGLIONE, *Il Beato Luigi Orione*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1998, p. 44.

6 D. SPARPAGLIONE – A. GEMMA, *Don Orione*, Edizioni Lux Veritatis, Isernia 2004, p. 51. The inauguration of the «Oratory San Luigi» is of 03/07/1892; the first college in San Bernardino is opened on 15/10/1893.

7 D. SPARPAGLIONE – A. GEMMA, *Don Orione*, cit., p. 51.

8 DON ORIONE, *Nel nome della Divina Provvidenza. Le più belle pagine*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato, April 2004 (II updated edition), p. 115.

9 IDEM, p. 107.

### 3. Creating a Culture of Protection

On the occasion of the Angelus of January 1, 2023, Pope Francis said that *“if we want to reconstruct hope, we need to abandon the language, those actions and those choices inspired by egoism and learn the language of love, which is to take care of. To take care of is a new language that counters these languages of egoism. This is the commitment: to take care of our lives – each one of us needs to take care of our own life – to take care of our time, of our souls; to take care of creation and the environment we live in; and even more, to take care of our neighbor, of those whom the Lord has placed alongside us, as well as our brothers and sisters who are in need and who call for our attention and our compassion.”* This “taking care” applies especially to minors and fragile persons.

Therefore, it is this “taking care” that must orient our formation, motivate educational choices, and animate behaviors. At the center always remains the person, who grows and develops to the extent that they are cared for and protected. It is like “replanting” a garden in Eden (cf. Gen 2:8 ff.). And it is precisely this text from Genesis that makes what we are saying extremely relevant. The two verbs present in the text - “to work” (abad) and “to keep” (shamar) – “define man’s task: the first indicates the labor that breaks up the ground, the work that transforms and cultivates; the second the action that welcomes the gift and faithfully and respectfully preserves it. To keep (shamar) is the verb used to designate the fidelity of man who observes God’s commandments, and God’s fidelity who keeps his people (Ps 121:4). To keep speaks of the care that must accompany man’s activity, as when one has in hand a precious good that does not belong to oneself. The world is God’s, not man’s.”<sup>10</sup> And what is more precious than a child? It is clear, therefore, that if there is no care there is no growth; if there is no care it is difficult to prevent the onset of evils that impede a healthy and balanced integral development of the person, which involves feelings, aptitudes, behaviors and values that allow a stable and clear construction of self.<sup>11</sup>

In this line we understand Don Orione’s intuition, who spoke of a “Christian-paternal” method.<sup>12</sup> One of the fundamental indications of the Christian-paternal method consists precisely in “taking care.” *“Love them in the Lord as your brothers, take care of their health, their education and all their good: let them feel that you are interested in raising them as honest, hardworking, honored young people! (...). Never say bad words to them, never, never! Be educated yourselves, and you will educate them: be polite yourselves, kind yourselves, and they too will become kind. Always have for all and for each beautiful words, good words. Play with them, work with them, pray with them! There is no ungrateful*

10 B. MAGGIONI, *Il seme e la terra. Note bibliche per un cristianesimo nel mondo*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2003, p. 6.

11 Cf. G. CUCCI, «L'autostima e il senso del valore di sé. Aspetti psicologici», in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2012 I 126-139 - issue 3878 (January 21, 2012).

12 In a long letter, sent from Victoria (Buenos Aires), on February 21, 1922, Don Orione wrote among other things: *“Scandalous speeches, gestures or acts should not be tolerated... The first basis of civil life and of all sound education is morality and honesty of customs, and this not only for us Catholics but for any people and under any sky... To safeguard our pupils from wolves, and raise them to an honest and truly Christian life I recall that one of our principal rules and proper to our education system, is that of keeping the young always under watch and never, ever leaving them alone... Our system, which we will call “Christian-paternal”, not only absolutely banishes all punishments too long, painful and humiliating, but, for no reason, permits us ever to go so far as to beat the young whether students or artisans, small or tall, poor orphans or children of distinguished families. Never beat, for any reason. Whoever exceeds, yields, and is finished: has finished being able to do good. Strict discipline should not be used, except as medicine, in rare, very rare cases, and always without passion, without anger, but in the tranquility of spirit, in the tranquility of light, in the calmness of reason, keeping the spirit very high, in God!... But, as I said to banish punishments, anti-pedagogical and anti-Christian, and to use and establish a new system of ours of education, “the Christian-paternal system”, so I must prohibit the other excess, that is that boys be caressed. No beating and no caressing... No effeminacy, no mawkishness, no softness, among boys or with boys, ever! None of us use such familiarity with the young!”* (DON ORIONE, *Lettere I*, p. 375 ff. - passim).

and sterile ground that, through long patience, cannot finally be brought to fruit; so it is with man.”<sup>13</sup> Educational care, therefore, is grafted into care for the whole person as happens in family relationships. Taking care is also preventing, preventing some irresponsible and immoral gesture from violating the minor’s intimacy. The one who educates is called to always have pure, limpid, transparent gestures.

Relationship makes one grow, and in this relating, gestures have a primary place: the gaze, the eyes, gestures of the hand, of the body, but above all the intentions of the one who educates.<sup>14</sup> In particular, faced with ambiguous or abusive situations, we are called to move from a culture of silence, of silencing, of fear of scandal, and move to a culture of truth and transparency.<sup>15</sup> An educational journey is possible only in truth. Jesus reminds us that only the truth will make us free (cf. Jn 8:32).

Therefore, formation at all levels is necessary, and for all.<sup>16</sup>

- Formation must aim to form religious, priests and lay collaborators, with a deep moral conscience, capable of discerning what is good and makes one grow, from what causes wounds in the other. Young people who wish to be part of our religious family must have within themselves, first of all, the human values required for a mature, serene, conscious choice.
- Formation must be taken to heart by every religious in their life journey, as a principal aspect of growth before God and men. Awareness of one’s own weaknesses and the desire to have a heart like Don Orione’s heart must help human and spiritual growth over the years of life.<sup>17</sup>

13 DON ORIONE, *Lettere II*, 558. Letter sent from Rome on October 14, 1939 to the Clerics of the Institute of Rhodes.

14 “The young person, remember it well, is always of whoever enlightens and loves him: of whoever is sincere with him”, wrote Don Orione to Don Biagio Marabotto on August 5, 1920 (*Lettere I*, 220).

15 “The awareness grows that it is not isolated cases, but rather a structural and systemic problem that remained unnoticed for long only thanks to emotional blackmail, concealment, fear and silence of victims [...]. The fundamental problem lies in the fact that power structures are, in many cases, poisoned and polluted. On the other hand, in an abuse - whether of authority, of power or sexual - all those who see and remain silent are accomplices by omission. That silence, because of its consequences, is often more grave than the abuse itself. The act of washing one’s hands is never neutral, but rather means taking sides with whoever abuses” (J. M. MARTINS LOPES, «Abusi in nome di Dio?», in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2023 IV 587-599 [here 589-591] – Issue 4164 (16 Dec 2023/6 Jan 2024).

16 Cf. G. CUCCI, H. ZOLLNER, «Il contributo del formatore a una formazione integrata», in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2011 III 119-130 - Issue 3866 (July 16, 2011). “It is certainly indispensable that the educator has known and faced in an adequate manner problems and personal difficulties at the affective and sexual level, reaching that interior freedom and capacity for distance required for accompaniment. Otherwise, an interior dissatisfaction will remain that will emerge in the most varied ways, such as, for example, in the management of aggressiveness, in the modality of interventions, in the tendency to bind people to oneself, seeking supporters for one’s own battles, in preferences toward possible «favorites», thereby wounding others” (Idem, p. 119).

17 Cf. G. CUCCI, H. ZOLLNER, «Gli aspetti psicologici nella formazione integrata al presbiterato», in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2010 IV 576-586 - Issue 3852 (December 18, 2010). “The maturity of a person - the two authors write, answering the question “what does it mean to be mature?” - can be identified under two fundamental aspects: a) as a fundamental interior freedom, capacity for openness to reality and to relationships; b) as desire to grow, to know oneself increasingly, from the intellectual, spiritual, social, affective, spiritual point of view. From both the psychological and spiritual point of view it affects that show themselves as the deepest interrelation of the various dimensions of the subject, to the point that the affectivity of the human being cannot be conceived without a reference to the cognitive and decisional dimension. This does not mean that the ideal of formation is given by the absence of problems and difficulties; rather this illusion could prove very dangerous. It is rather about recognizing one’s own areas of fragility and integrating them. The mature person is not a machine, but a person capable of giving unity to their cognitive, volitive and affective faculties, not hiding from themselves the steps to take and the difficulties to overcome”.

- There must also be formation for our collaborators, at every level, who help us in works: educators, pastoral operators, those who perform services in the economics office, volunteers, all are called to make these Guidelines their own so that our Works may be safe environments for those who live there and frequent them.

## 4. The Gravity of Abuse

Often we limit ourselves to speaking of sexual abuse, but, as Pope Francis reminds us, first there is an abuse of power and a spiritual abuse, and then sexual abuse.<sup>18</sup> *“At the root of such abuses is the inadequate management of power, often aggravated by manipulation of conscience. Little by little in the Church - analogously to what happens in the world - we have learned to seduce, to distort facts and to manipulate the attention and emotions of the recipient, using disinformation in the service of the sender and discrediting the victim so that their eventual reaction is not appreciated by anyone.”*<sup>19</sup>

The Vademecum at n. 1 emphasizes that the crime being discussed comprises every external sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue committed by a cleric with a minor.<sup>20</sup>

**Abuse of power:** is any intervention by someone who, availing themselves of their role of authority, does not respect the dignity and autonomy, freedom and responsibility of another person, pushing them to act for their own advantage.

**Abuse of conscience:** in the Catholic context is a sort of abuse of legal or spiritual power that controls the victim’s conscience to the point that the aggressor, substituting themselves for God, obstructs or annuls the freedom of judgment of the victim and prevents them from being alone with God in their conscience.

**Spiritual abuse:** is the act of taking God’s place, of becoming spokesperson for God’s will for someone else and being able to tell someone what God wants for them.

**Sexual abuse:** it is defined by the World Health Organization as follows: *“The involvement of a minor in sexual acts that they do not fully understand, for which they are unable to consent or for which the minor has not yet reached an adequate level of development, or that violate law and social taboos. Minors can be sexually abused both by adults and by other minors who are, by reason of their age or level of development, in a position of responsibility, trust or power vis-à-vis the victim”*.<sup>21</sup>

**Minors** are those who, not yet having completed 18 years or those who habitually lack the use of reason (Cf. Vademecum n. 5), find themselves in a situation such as not yet being fully capable of deciding consciously, freely and responsibly about their own actions and those of others. One must take into account when defining whether the “minor” was effectively such, according to the definition of Law in force at the time of the facts.

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18 The Pope associated the three elements «sexual, power and conscience abuse» in the Letter of the Holy Father to the people of God, August 20, 2018.

19 J. M. MARTINS LOPES, «Abusi in nome di Dio?», cit., p. 589.

20 DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, «Vademecum on some points of procedure in the treatment of cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics», Ver. 2.0, 5.06.2022.

21 WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, *Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention*, 29-31 March 1999, Ginevra 1999, documento WHO/HSC/PVI/99.1, p. 15. The definition of sexual abuse by the World Health Organization (1999, 2002) has been adopted by the main Episcopal Conferences worldwide, including the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI-CISM 2023), as a reference standard for the Catholic Church in the protection of minors.

**Vulnerable person:** any person who is in a state of infirmity, of physical or psychic deficiency, or of deprivation of personal liberty that in fact, even occasionally, limits their capacity to understand or to will or in any case to resist the one who abuses.

**The gravity of abuse:** if every abuse is grave in itself, because it injures the dignity of the person, when it is perpetrated on a minor or a person at risk, it becomes even more grave because it wounds the psychological health of the victim, with emotional and relational damage that often reverberates in their life for years. Often the abuser is a person who has somehow earned the trust or esteem of the victim, making them more vulnerable in this way; therefore, to the wound inflicted by the fact itself is added also that of betrayal by a friend who often conditions future capacities of free and healthy relationships.

In this regard it is important to know the “VADEMECUM on some points of procedure in the treatment of cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics.” Indeed, it specifies that: “The typology of the crime is very broad and can include, for example, sexual relations (consensual and non-consensual), physical contact of a sexual nature, exhibitionism, masturbation, production of pornography, inducement to prostitution, conversations and/or proposals of a sexual nature even through means of communication.”<sup>22</sup>

## 5. The Responsibility of Superiors

### *Status quaestionis:*

In the old canonical legislation, the superior was called to be a father for all and to use pastoral means toward confreres who failed in ecclesiastical discipline (Cf. Can. 1339). This norm permitted superiors to cover those who committed crimes or to move them from one parish to another to avoid a scandal for the Church. The new legislation, which implements zero tolerance, calls the same superiors to act firmly.

*Vos estis lux mundi* provides that “*Except in the case of knowledge of the report by a cleric in the exercise of ministry in internal forum, whenever a cleric or a member of an Institute of Consecrated Life or a Society of Apostolic Life has notice or well-founded motives to believe that one of the facts referred to in Article 1 has been committed, they have the obligation to report it promptly to the Ordinary of the place where the facts would have occurred or to another Ordinary among those referred to in canons 134 CIC and 984 CCEO, except as provided by § 3 of this article*” (VELM n. 3). Now, it is not only the duty of superiors, but also of every confrere who has knowledge of a probable abuse, to report what they have learned. Whoever comes to know and does not give a report will be accused of complicity or of having sought to cover their own confrere.

The Director General, as the person in charge of guiding the Congregation, is also the principal referent for every problem concerning abuse of minors or vulnerable persons throughout the Congregation.

### **Therefore, he will take care:**

- 1) to establish, with the collaboration and approval of his Council, a central committee to help him in discernment and in decisions to be made in all situations concerning the protection of

<sup>22</sup> VADEMECUM: I. What constitutes the crime?, n. 2.

minors and the prevention of abuses and the formation of confreres and lay workers of our works. For its functioning he will also make use of external expert support;

- 2) that all confreres and houses faithfully follow the directives of the Catholic Church regarding cases of abuse;
- 3) that these guidelines are disseminated and known throughout the Congregation and by all persons, even external, who collaborate with the Congregation.
- 4) that, to guarantee a more rapid and effective intervention, in each Province there is also established an organism that, together with the Provincial Director, has the task of collaborating for all activities concerning formation, prevention and direct intervention in cases of abuse. At the head of this organism there is a person with the function of main Referent. The organism will be composed of religious, of laity engaged within the Congregation and of experts in the field of protection of minors and vulnerable persons. This Organism, and the person of the Referent, are known so as to also represent the first listening point to which persons can turn to report their accusations;
- 5) that each Province prepares a protocol on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons and ensures that in each of its works there is a Code of conduct;
- 6) that, in each Province, or if necessary, also in our institutions, moments of formation and updating are created for confreres and all personnel operating in it. Preventive activities are promoted, the adoption of procedures and operational tools, also making use of persons and materials prepared by other institutions with apostolic purposes similar to ours;
- 7) that such prevention and formation initiatives, as well as their methods of implementation, are monitored and documented;
- 8) that in the formation of candidates for religious life and priesthood, the aspect of respect for the dignity of every person and the prevention of abuses is adequately taken into consideration and in discernment for admission to vows or sacred orders this theme is considered.

**A prior notice** is information about a possible crime that reaches the Ordinary in any way. It is not necessary that it be a formal denunciation.

Should a case of abuse be brought to his knowledge, the Director General ensures that:

- a) a “prior investigation” is done immediately, through a person of trust appointed by him ad hoc, on the truthfulness of the formulated accusation;
- b) that meanwhile the person accused of abuse is placed in a situation of safety. Should the *notitia de delicto* be “verisimilar,” the Director General can impose disciplinary measures on them;
- c) that the victim receives all the support and help they need;
- d) that at the end of the investigation the related dossier is sent to the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith in the Vatican;
- e) that everything is done according to the norms of the Catholic Church and in respect of civil legislation in this regard.

At the beginning of the prior investigation:

a. should the *notitia de delicto* be “*saltem verisimilis*”: if such verisimilitude proves unfounded, one could not proceed with the *notitia de delicto*; it is advisable however that the Ordinary give the CDF communication of the *notitia de delicto* and of the decision to suspend the prior investigation for manifest absence of verisimilitude;

At the end of the prior investigation:

b. According to art. 10 § 1 SST, once the prior investigation is concluded, and whatever its outcome, the Ordinary has the duty to send an authentic copy of the relative acts to the DDF, in the quickest times. To the copy of the acts and to the summary table referred to in the Annex, he adds his own evaluation of the investigation’s findings (*votum*).

## 6. The Responsibility of Each Religious

The protection of minors is a moral and religious duty that requires the active commitment of every religious. Through coherent conduct, profound fidelity to one’s own commitments, a climate of openness and fraternity, concrete help to confreres in difficulty, the courage to denounce illicit situations and the creation of safe environments, religious can contribute significantly to building a society that protects and values the smallest. Therefore, every religious, by virtue of their vocation and their role in the community, has the responsibility to act actively for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons. This translates into a concrete commitment that is articulated in several key points:

- a) **Testimony of coherent religious life:** the first and most important form of protection is the testimony of a religious life coherent with Gospel principles and with the values proper to the charism. A religious who lives with integrity, who demonstrates love and respect for all, who is attentive to the needs of the most fragile, automatically becomes a positive point of reference for minors, creating a safe and trusting environment.
- b) **Fidelity to commitments made:** fidelity to religious vows and to the state of consecration to God represents a fundamental commitment for every religious. This fidelity translates into ir-reproachable conduct, both inside and outside the community, that inspires trust and security in all the people they encounter, especially the weakest and most defenseless.
- c) **Climate of openness and fraternity:** it is important to create and cultivate a climate of openness and fraternity within the religious community. In this climate of trust and mutual support, anyone who finds themselves in difficulty or in situations of risk must feel encouraged to ask for help without fear of judgment or repercussions.
- d) **Help to confreres in difficulty:** every religious has the duty to help confreres who find themselves in moments of difficulty, in situations of risk or who manifest illicit behaviors. Fraternal support and spiritual accompaniment are fundamental to help them recognize their own errors, to repent and to undertake the right path.
- e) **Denunciation of dangerous or erroneous situations:** faced with situations that put minors at risk or that violate ethical and moral principles, every religious must have the courage to speak in the right way and with the right people. Denunciation, done with discernment and sense of responsibility, is an act of love toward minors and vulnerable persons, and of protection of the community.

- f) **Safe and protected environments:** the responsibility to guarantee safe and protected environments does not fall only on individual religious, but also on the entire community. It is necessary to create and maintain apostolate environments where minors feel welcomed, valued and safe from every form of abuse or exploitation.

## 7. Attention to Victims

At the center of every protection action there must always be the well-being and care of victims. It is an act of love and justice that requires compassion, professionalism and respect for the dignity of every person. Only through concrete commitment and a holistic approach is it possible to accompany victims on their path to healing and restore to them hope for a better future.

For this reason, it is fundamental to adopt an approach that recognizes them as gravely wounded persons and places them at the center of a path of reconciliation, interior healing and peace.

Some points to ensure:

- a) **Recognition and empathetic listening:** the first and fundamental action is to recognize the victim as a person with a deep wound. This is not simply a witness or a party involved in a process, but an individual who has suffered trauma that has marked their body and soul. One must listen to the victim with attention and without judgment, creating a safe and trusting environment where they feel free to express their emotions, thoughts and fears. It is important to respect the dignity of the victim at all times, avoiding blaming them or putting them in doubt. Their word must be welcomed with seriousness and respect, even if fragmentary or painful.
- b) **Support and accompaniment:** as Christians, and even more as Orionines, we are called to take care of victims and their families, offering them concrete support and accompanying them on a path of healing. This support can include psychological and spiritual assistance, which helps the victim to rework the trauma, to regain confidence in themselves and to rebuild their life. The path of reconciliation and healing must be personalized and adapted to the specific needs of each victim, taking into account their age, family and cultural context and the gravity of the trauma suffered.
- c) **Civil denunciation:** should civil legislation require it and/or the parents or legal guardians of the victim deem it appropriate, they can be helped to also file a civil denunciation of the abuse suffered.

## 8. Accompaniment of the Accused

It is always necessary to pay maximum attention to the protection of the rights of all parties involved, first and foremost those of the person who claims to have been a victim of sexual abuse, but also those of the person against whom accusations are formulated.

- 1) In conformity with canonical law and civil law, any religious accused of sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable person will be granted the presumption of innocence until their guilt has been proven or established by the competent judicial authority. The authority is called to find the right balance between the presumption of innocence and the protections to be adopted toward the ecclesial and family community affected. The presumption of innocence entails respect for the rights of the denounced religious, such as allowing them to respond and defend themselves against the denunciation. However, it cannot be interpreted as an exemption from investigation, nor as contentment with the denial of facts by the denounced religious, nor as a basis for postponing the adoption of precautionary measures, if necessary.
- 2) The Major Superior can adopt precautionary measures; however, it must be clearly established that the adoption of such precautionary measures does not constitute an index of responsibility in the denounced facts, but rather the concern of authorities to conduct a completely transparent investigation for all parties and, at the same time, not to allow other victims to arise while an investigation and/or canonical process is underway. In this regard, through the prior investigation, superiors evaluate, with the help of expert persons, not only the truthfulness of the accusations, or at least the possibility that they are true, but also the possibility of recidivism.
- 3) It is fundamental that the Major Superior agree with the denounced religious on the follow-up modality of their process, also offering them the possibility of individual therapy and a rehabilitation program not only to help them become aware of their error, but also to help them face the emotional consequences of their crime, such as guilt, shame, anger and depression. They should be accompanied by adequate spiritual support to help them reflect on their error and to find forgiveness and redemption. It is important, moreover, that even in a discreet manner and animated by charity, continuous monitoring is maintained to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and their progress in reducing the risk of recidivism. Experience demonstrates that whoever is denounced for a crime of this nature tends to deny and minimize the facts; therefore, all those who intervene in this process must keep this situation in mind. Considering that being denounced for such a grave act can generate in the religious a defensive attitude, it is important that from the beginning of the investigation they are provided a space of trust in which they can face the truth, whether they recognize themselves as innocent or guilty of the imputed crimes. Likewise, beyond the clarity and firmness necessary in addressing the denounced religious, it is also important that they be welcomed as a member of the People of God in their pain or sin.
- 4) Despite the grave crime committed, it is important to remember that the individual is not reduced to their error. It is fundamental to maintain an attitude of respect and dignity toward the person, while firmly condemning their actions. An attitude of respect can and must favor reflection on their error, to understand its gravity and to feel sincere repentance. The whole process that is initiated toward the confrere serves to encourage the individual to take responsibility for their actions and to be willing to compensate the victims for the consequences caused.

- 5) Responsibility for committing a sexual crime is personal. Definitive condemnation for sexual abuse must impose on the perpetrator a just punishment, both canonical and civil. Each government has appropriate legislation on the theme which however varies greatly depending on cultural conditions and local traditions. The Church has also equipped itself with clear and effective norms. It is important that any initiative taken for and with the accused confrere be done in collaboration with local authorities. Which, if required by local legislation and desired or accepted by the victim's family, must be promptly notified. Care will also be taken to act in full respect of canonical norms.
- 6) Even should the religious prove guilty, after due process and investigation for sexual abuses, including what may entail expulsion from clerical state, they must not be left alone, but accompanied in their path of responsibility, request for forgiveness, if possible, both to the damaged persons and to the community; they should be supported also in the process of reconciliation, reparation, psychological attention and spiritual support, if they wish to receive them. It is fundamental to create a climate of collaboration that will subsequently help them reintegrate into society. This is necessary, above all in cases where gradual reintegration into ministry and missionary activity is possible.

## 9. Relations with Civil Authorities

Relations with civil and ecclesiastical authorities must be based on maximum collaboration and transparency; we must, therefore, be willing to follow the instructions we receive, when appropriate, from those who have competence and authority.

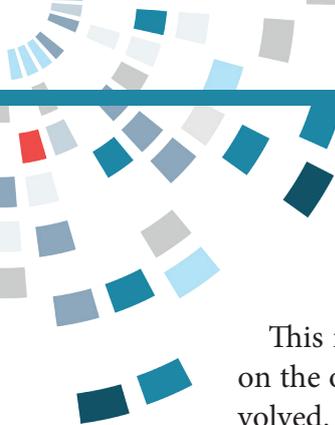
Sexual abuse, beyond being a canonical crime and a very grave sin, constitutes a crime prosecuted and punished by civil authorities, according to the legislation of each individual country. Therefore, the Congregation will fully fulfill the obligation to inform the judicial authority, in respect of the penal legislation of each country or nation and the directives of the local episcopal conference.

This collaboration with civil authorities is not limited only to cases of sexual abuse committed by members of the Congregation, but also refers to situations that involve personnel who, in different forms, render service in the structures of the Congregation and have with it a dependent work relationship.

## 10. Information and Communication

Timely information and adequate communication are already an integral part of an increasingly necessary process of continuous formation of the whole ecclesial community, which must be carried out with maximum responsibility and good sense. Timely communication is also called to become a protagonist of prevention and protection action within the same ecclesial community and the entire society.

Considering the various often delicate aspects of the persons involved and their relationship with society, keeping in mind the necessity of timely information that also helps prevent the spreading of ambiguous or incorrect information, once the prior investigation is initiated, the Major Superior,



together with the Provincial Director, the provincial organism charged with protection, and possibly after consulting a lawyer and the victim's family, studies the best way and appropriate times to inform those who need to know.

This information must take into consideration the laws and customs of the place to avoid on the one hand incorrect information and on the other ruining the image of the persons involved.

Faced with a case of denunciation of sexual abuse, it is important that the ecclesial community be informed in the most appropriate way, aware of what is happening within it and what necessarily involves it. At all times one must seek to convey that the Church, through the Congregation and its communities, is committed to the search for truth and assistance to possible victims, as well as to the care of whoever has been denounced, whether innocent or guilty. Likewise, pastoral care must reach the environment of the respective families and ecclesial communities affected and, in particular, emphasize the protection of minors.

Also within the Congregation, truthful and transparent information is of great value, which seeks to avoid instrumentalization and partiality. All religious of the Congregation must be adequately informed of the denounced situation and of the decisions made by the Congregation. This helps transmit serenity, tranquility and cohesion.

As part of the Church, we are called to progress in transparency, but in respect of the due secrecy of investigation and also of the honor of persons connected to it. For communications it is advisable that the Major Superior or a delegate specially appointed for this purpose take care of them, with necessary competencies and concerned that both the secrecy of investigation and the honor of persons involved be respected.

## 11. Elaboration of Provincial Protocols and Codes of Conduct

These lines of action are intended as a general foundation for the entire Congregation on which the necessary local regulations that make them operative in the concrete situations that each reality presents are based.

Therefore, it is important that each Province have a protocol of norms that must take into consideration the civil norms of the nation in which it operates, the culture and local traditions and the dictates of the local Church, all in respect of universal canonical and civil legislation.

The Province must then ensure that in each institution where minors or vulnerable persons are assisted, there is a code of conduct known and implemented by all operators involved in the work itself.

It will be the task of the General Council to accompany individual Provinces in the drafting of such protocols and indications of good practices for the protection of minors.

## 12. Verification and Updating of the Guidelines

How and when to verify implementation of the Guidelines and their updating:

- a) The Director General and his Council, in collaboration with the Referent and the Commission on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, will prepare a system of verification concerning the observance of these Guidelines and evaluation of their effectiveness.
- b) Each year, on the occasion of a meeting with the Provincials, what has been done in each Province will be shared and accounted for, to favor and implement the protection of minors and prevention of abuses.
- c) The presence at the meeting of coordinators, Provincial heads for the Protection of Minors, will also be appropriate.
- d) These Guidelines will become operative from the day of their promulgation and publication on the communication organs of the PODP.
- e) It is the responsibility of Provincial Councils to oversee the drafting and publication of application instruments to these Guidelines of the General Council.
- f) Any application instruments such as Provincial Guidelines must be approved by the General Council of the PODP.

Revision of the Guidelines is the responsibility of the General Council of the Congregation, in collaboration with the Referent and the Commission for the Protection of minors and vulnerable persons, which will ensure that they are always updated to new legislation or changes in situations.

## 13. Conclusion

In the introduction to the Motu Proprio “*Vos estis lux mundi*,” Pope Francis states that “crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, causing physical, psychological and spiritual harm to victims and injuring the community of the faithful. So that such phenomena, in all their forms, no longer occur, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church, so that personal holiness and moral commitment can concur in promoting the full credibility of the Gospel proclamation and the effectiveness of the Church’s mission.”<sup>23</sup> These strong words of Pope Francis also apply to the whole Orionine family.

These guidelines want to be an instrument and a guide that the Congregation offers to the Provinces to help them have a clear idea of the question of protection and safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons in our religious family. They are orientations, guidelines that must serve as an instrument for each Province or Delegation to elaborate the protocols that must guide communities, works and every religious in the commitment to create a culture of protection and safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons, but above all, a culture of promotion and respect for human dignity. This will manifest itself in the creation of structures capable of welcoming, listening, protecting, safeguarding and caring for abused, exploited and forgotten persons, wherever they may be.

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23 Given at Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on the day March 25 of the year 2023, Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

## 14. Reference Documents

### JOHN PAUL II

- *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio of April 30, 2001.

### POPE FRANCIS

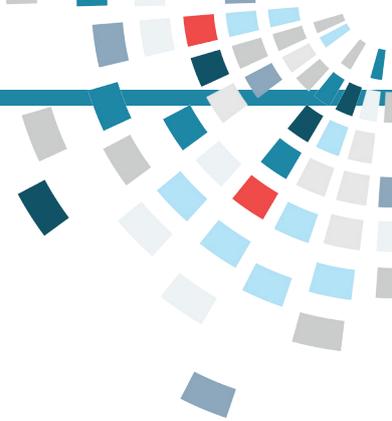
- *Come una madre amorevole*. Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio of June 4, 2016.
- Letter to Bishops on the Feast of the Holy Innocents of December 28, 2016.
- Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the People of God of August 20, 2018.
- *On the Protection of minors and vulnerable persons*. Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio of March 26, 2019.
- Law n° CCXCVII *On the Protection of minors and vulnerable persons* of March 26, 2019.
- *Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons* of March 26, 2019.
- *Vos estis lux mundi*. Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio of May 7, 2019.
- *Rescriptum ex audientia*: Rescript introducing some modifications to the “Normae de gravioribus delictis” of December 3, 2019.
- *Rescriptum ex audientia*: Rescript promulgating the Instruction on confidentiality of causes of December 6, 2019.

### CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

- *Guide to understanding the basic procedures of the CDF regarding accusations of sexual abuse* of 2010.
- *Circular letter to help Episcopal Conferences in preparing guidelines for the treatment of cases of sexual abuse of minors by clerics* of May 3, 2011.
- *Modifications brought to the “Normae de gravioribus delictis” reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* of May 21, 2010.
- *Vademecum on some points of procedure in the treatment of cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics* Ver. 1.0 of July 16, 2020
- *Norms on crimes reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* of October 11, 2021
- *Vademecum on some points of procedure in the treatment of cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics* Ver. 2.0 of June 5, 2022.
- *Meeting “The protection of minors in the Church”* [Vatican, February 21-24, 2019]. (All the Documentation of this Meeting is useful to consult)

**N.B.** All these documents of the Holy See can be found on the following link:

[https://www.vatican.va/resources/index\\_it.htm](https://www.vatican.va/resources/index_it.htm)



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