

UNION OF CATHOLIC APOSTOLATE

POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS

1. DECLARATION

The Union of Catholic Apostolate, a public association of the faithful in the Catholic Church, recognizes the rights of all people to be treated equally and with dignity. This right is fundamental to the Christian ethos and is expressed by St. Vincent Pallotti in the following manner: Our “rules are like means for the most perfect observance of love towards God and our neighbour”. (OCCC II, 31)

In keeping with this rule of observing love towards God and our neighbour in the most perfect manner possible, we uphold the right of all minors¹, irrespective of where they live or their circumstances, to be protected, nurtured and free from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation.

Therefore, as a public International association of the Faithful in the Church, the Union is fully committed to the protection of minors in the Church and in society.

When working with minors individually or in a group/institutional setting the members of the Union will strive to achieve an environment that promotes safety, love and security for the individual.

In 2012, the highest decision-making body of the Union, the General Assembly, decreed the following: “While fully recognizing the principle stated in article number 40 of the General Statutes that all the communities of the Union are autonomous and their members are subject to their own regulations, both in the internal life of the community and its apostolates, the General Assembly of 2012, in the strongest possible terms, calls on all members, collaborators and communities of the Union to ensure that the highest standards are implemented and respected with regard to safeguarding children. This means that proper procedure be followed at all stages and in all instances of the life and work of members of the UAC with children.”²

Following this decision of the last (III) Ordinary General Assembly regarding Safeguarding, this IV Ordinary General Assembly requests all the members and collaborators to follow the directives regarding minors promulgated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the National Episcopal Conferences and the civil legislation of the countries where the Union is present.

Each Community of the Union and each NCC is to have a documented policy for Safeguarding minors. This policy will be reviewed and updated every three years. Policy reviews and updates will be reported by the President of the National Coordination Council (NCC) to the GCC before each General Assembly of the Union.

The GCC also requests all the Presidents of the NCCs to ensure a climate of Safeguarding and to provide education for the members and collaborators in this fundamental duty to safeguard minors and to ensure they are protected in all the apostolic activities undertaken by and associated with the Union.

Each NCC is also instructed to appoint a Designated Person to monitor and implement the Safeguarding policy and procedures document of the NCC.

¹ In the area of protection of minors, and so for the purposes of this document, the terms ‘minor’ and ‘child’ refer to anyone under 18 years of age (see CDF, Normae de gravioribus delictis, May 21, 2010, art. 6 § 1 n. 1; Circular Letter May 3, 2011).

² Minutes of the Third Ordinary General Assembly of the Union, Proposal approved on Child Protection.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles associated with this policy are:

- Every person is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1,26); therefore every child should be cherished and affirmed as a gift from God with an inherent right to dignity of life and bodily integrity which is to be respected, nurtured and protected by all;
- Equality of persons is fundamental to the vision of the Union; therefore any action which would undermine this equality, be it towards a child or an adult, is contrary to this principle;
- There is no tolerance of abuse of minors, in accordance with the sanctity of life as enunciated by Our Lord Jesus: "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me" (Mk 9: 36-7);
- Abuse is understood as a behaviour that hurts the dignity and integrity of the child and his or her overall development. Abuse may be physical, emotional or sexual; child sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or that of others;³
- Inappropriate communication with children through the Internet, e-mail, text messages or use of other social media, may also constitute abuse;
- Visiting Internet sites that contain offensive, obscene, pornographic or illegal material is inappropriate behaviour; visiting such sites which involve children is a form of abuse;
- Children have a right to be listened to and heard: therefore any allegations and suspicions of abuse must be responded to effectively, the reporting procedure established is to be followed, and the allegation must be reported to the appropriate authorities;
- Children have a right to an environment free from abuse and neglect. Therefore, the members of the Union will seek to develop a culture of safety that minimises risk to children, which will include observing clear guidelines that set out what is and is not acceptable behaviour between adults and children and also what is acceptable behaviour among children (i.e. no bullying, or other forms of abusive behaviour);
- Children should have access to good role models they can trust, who will respect and nurture their spiritual, physical and emotional development. Therefore any member of the Union engaged in pastoral, social or charitable activity of the Union which involves children is to be vetted by the Policing Authority of the country in order to prevent those who pose a risk to children from holding a position of trust;
- Children learn through activities; therefore activities which engage members of the Union with children are to be planned and supervised in order to minimise any risk to their welfare;
- Since the Union is committed at every level to remaining in communion with the hierarchy of the Church (cf. General Statutes 21), each NCC is bound by the policies of its respective Episcopal Conference. Therefore, every NCC is to be familiar with the Child Protection policy and procedures of its Episcopal Conference, is to elaborate its own Safeguarding policy and procedures in accordance with the former, and to ensure that such policy and procedures are complied with in the context of Union life and activity;
- Every NCC is to be familiar with the pertinent civil law regarding safeguarding minors, and to ensure that such policy and procedures are complied with in the context of Union life and activity;
- The Designated Safeguarding Person in each Community of the Union and in each NCC will ensure that the policies and procedures are put in place and implemented in practice;
- The Designated Safeguarding Person is to ensure the provision of training for members and collaborators with a view to creating a culture of safeguarding which will ensure that high standards and good practice are observed;
- Every NCC must ensure that any institution under its authority which cares for minors will elaborate its own Safeguarding Policy according to civil law;

³ Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Health and Children, Ireland, 1999).

- The NCC will ensure that the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures adopted by the NCC is published and disseminated to all members, collaborators and all those who engage with the Union or work with the Union in any capacity;
- Any abuse which occurs will be reported to the appropriate authorities, both civil and ecclesiastical, in accordance with the laws of the individual countries, without prejudice to the sacramental internal forum (cf. CDF 2011, I e). Those who have suffered child abuse are to receive a compassionate and just response and will be offered appropriate pastoral care and, if considered necessary, professional care to rebuild their lives.
- Those who have harmed others should be helped to face up to the reality of abuse, as well as being assisted in healing; this will be done by the competent authority in the Union and by specially designated persons. The norms adopted by the National Episcopal Conference and by the Statutory Authorities will determine future engagement, if any, of those who have harmed others, in the apostolic work of the Union.

3. PROCEDURES AND PRACTICE TO BE FOLLOWED FOLLOWING AN ALLEGATION OF ABUSE

- I. The requirements of Civil Law are followed.
- II. Communities of the Union which are Ecclesiastically recognized entities and subject to the supervision of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are subject to the promulgated norms of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in matters relating to the abuse of minors and of vulnerable persons. The Major Superior of each Community has responsibility to ensure compliance with these norms and to indicate the appropriate procedure to be followed.
- III. Individual members of the Union, members of a community which is not ecclesiastically recognized, and collaborators, who participate in the public apostolate of the Union are bound by the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures adopted by the Episcopal Conference of the country of residence. They are also bound by this Common Declaration, Principles and Procedures Document of the Union.
- IV. When knowledge is obtained of a possible case of abuse by a member of the Union who is not a member of an ecclesiastically recognized Community and subject to the supervision of the Congregation, the Designated Safeguarding Person is informed as is the Local Ordinary of the accused member and the requirements of Civil Law are followed as indicated above.
- V. The Designated Safeguarding Person of the NCC undertakes an initial evaluation of the allegation and the Local Ordinary and the NCC President are kept informed.

4. CONCLUSION:

This Policy Statement and the outlining of principles and procedures, is, of necessity, inadequate to address the reality of what is Safeguarding children from all forms of abuse. It is impossible to formulate a Policy and Procedures Document which would cater for the entirety of the Union throughout the world. However, the safeguarding of children is a priority for this ecclesiastical body in the Church of Jesus Christ. This Policy Statement will be further amended and extended in time.