

PASSIONIST APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY AND SAFE MINISTERIAL POLICY & PRACTICES

Introduction

We wish to begin this document with an affirmation of the great dedication of our members to the proclamation of the gospel through the witness of their lives. We affirm the generosity, tirelessness and self sacrifice of our men in responding to the call of Jesus to follow him. We affirm the fraternal charity, friendship and witness to the Kingdom of God that each of our communities strives to live in the Church and in the midst of our societies.

Many of our own brothers have lived heroically with suffering or illness and have persevered in our life often at great personal cost. In many parts of the world we share our spirit and Charism with countless men and women and provide formation opportunities for them as they seek to deepen their association with us and to extend our Passionist family.

Universally our members seek to live our life as the Founder would have wished – they preach the gospel of the Passion by their lives and work. They are good shepherds of peoples' souls; they are kindly confessors, pastors and missionaries. Our brothers stand in solidarity with the crucified and suffering peoples of this world in many and various settings. Our brothers lead people to find hope in the midst of their sufferings and help many to bear the crosses of life.

Thus we wish to mirror such dedication in all our practices and actions.

Our 46th General Chapter echoed this theme when it stated that

Inspired by the life and witness of the Crucified Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, the values and teachings he gave us in His Gospel, the best traditions of the Catholic Church and the Spirituality of our Holy Founder, St Paul of the Cross, the 46th General Chapter declares that: The Congregation of the Passion, an International Congregation of Religious priests and brothers, adheres to the policies of professional standards for priests and religious that have been approved by the Holy See, as well as those set up by regional Conferences of Religious Men and by Episcopal Conferences.

In light of our call, the General Council offers the following reflections, advice and policy to every member of the Congregation.

We do so at a time when the scandal of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons across the globe has undermined the trust that many people have in the Church's leadership and institutions, and at the same time this scandal has placed our living and serving as ministers in today's world under particular scrutiny.

For our part then, let us respond to this challenge in ways that are open, honest and life giving.

Let us affirm that the Congregation of the Passion is committed to living and ministering in ways that reflect the love Jesus Christ showed throughout his life and particularly in his death and resurrection.

Let us affirm in our community living and in our ministry the dignity of all persons and let us reject any action or attitude that would devalue human life or is contrary in any way to the gospel of Jesus or to the dignity and meaning that God has given to human life.

More specifically and categorically, let us affirm that any kind of abuse – emotional, verbal, physical or sexual – of anyone to whom we minister but most especially of minors and vulnerable persons is utterly rejected by every member of our Congregation.

Our commitment to care for the most vulnerable

We acknowledge and we commit ourselves to the following standard:

We have an individual and corporate responsibility to protect children and vulnerable adults from any kind of sexual abuse or other forms of abuse.

If we are to be true to the gospel and mission of Jesus Christ we must have a good and clear understanding of our role and responsibilities, we must maintain safe ministerial practices and create boundaries for our personal and professional lives that ensure safety for those we serve and who place their trust in us. Such boundaries protect not only those we serve but also protect our own members from any misperceptions that people might infer or from any false accusations that, although rare, may indeed be made.

If there are failures on the part of our own members, or on the part of those who work with us or for us, and such failures lead to occasions of abuse of children or vulnerable persons, then we must acknowledge these and rectify as best we can any damage done. We cannot tolerate or acquiesce to attitudes or to any system that keeps abuse hidden and secret and thus unaddressed. Silence and a failure to seek further assistance or advice can be a form of

acquiescence and must be avoided through an open system of communication within communities.

We share in a challenge that exists for the whole Church community

Universally our Church leaders recognise now, that sadly until recent times, sexual misbehaviour and sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults was often treated as an internal matter – one for bishops, religious superiors or one's confessor to handle. Incidents often went unreported and were kept out of public view and secrecy and avoidance of scandal were high operative values. The great suffering and long term effects of sexual abuse were not always understood or recognised and often victims received far less attention than was, and is, appropriate as we have come to comprehend in more recent times. This sad past has led to many damaging and hurtful experiences for these victims of abuse, for their families and for the Church at large.

In the past too, factors such as poor understandings or acceptance of the need for boundary systems and a lack of accountability may have created a climate in which some Church representatives - even though statistically a small minority but whose behaviour was deviant and criminal - believed they could exploit and abuse victims with immunity from discovery or punishment. Such attitudes or practices must not find any tolerance inside our Congregation.

Today, in the various societies we serve across the globe, both the Catholic community and wider society rightly insist on high standards of behaviour from clergy and religious. Neither the Church nor civil society will tolerate abusive practices on the part of clergy or religious nor will they tolerate the failure to act upon knowledge of such practices by those entrusted with leadership and responsibility.

We are challenged not only by the gospel, but by our very societies and our wider lay family to live a more accountable life.

In response to this challenge we are called to adopt a new awareness, to live our lives with great integrity and to adhere to new practices that ensure the safety of all.

This leads us to propose the following standards of behaviour for our Congregation and all its members (and those who work with us).

- 1. We must respond to the challenge of today by making every effort to be informed and aware of the practices and strategies that ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults and which ensure safe ministerial practices. We must also become informed about the demands made by local or national governments and by local dioceses where we serve.*

In essence, we must embrace a new kind of conversion.

The 46th General Chapter challenged us in this same way:

Based upon the specific policies established by each Episcopal Conference and Conference of Religious, each Province, Vice Province and Vicariate is to write and publish its own policies and procedures for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, and for dealing with a religious if he is accused of sexual misconduct. These policies should respect the rights and needs of those who may bring forth allegations and the rights and needs of the priest or brother who is accused. All written policies are to be kept on file by the Procurator General.

As the Chapter reminds us, across many nations the Catholic Church has established guidelines, procedures, standards and bodies for dealing with complaints and seeing them through to some conclusion that will bring some healing to victims and appropriate consequences for offenders. We must also draw upon this wisdom and knowledge and ensure that each Province, Vice Province and Vicariate of our Congregation both adheres to civil and Church requirements and has its own policy and norms for dealing with abuse or sexual misconduct. It is essential that those in positions of leadership acquaint themselves with the law pertaining to any jurisdiction in which they minister.

Thus this document is meant to be a statement of our principles and does not *overwrite* or *supersede* those policies and procedures that apply in each nation and which comply with the respective civil and ecclesiastical laws of each nation.

In the case of Congregational juridical entities based across several nations, Passionists will conform to the standards of our Congregation and to the particular laws of each particular nation. While travelling or engaged in ministry across countries or Provinces, no one is ever exempted from the highest form of responsibility.

The Responsibilities of Leaders

In this Document the General Council also wishes to place before our Leaders and members a strong challenge to be proactive. It is not appropriate to wait until problems arise. Instead, we must be vigilant in preparing and supporting our members to face the challenges of our modern times.

Leadership must provide opportunities for every member to be fully aware and to understand the demands upon us as professional, pastoral workers in the vineyard of the Lord.

Each member has a mutual responsibility to participate in seminars and programmes as planned or recommended by our leadership and which address these issues. Leaders and members together must seek growth in knowledge, awareness and in the application of norms and procedures that lead to safe ministerial practices.

Thus:

2. *Every one of our Provinces, Vice Provinces and Vicariates should organise programmes that are essentially non threatening and non confrontational, but which are appropriate environments to enable a sustained effort to renew ourselves and to increase and deepen our knowledge, skills and vocabulary to deal with matters like sexual abuse and other forms of abuse, the development of skills in living with integrity and the creation of safe ministerial practices. It would be the responsibility of community leaders to keep accurate records of attendance at these programmes and ensure appropriate follow up of those members unable or unwilling to attend for any reason.*

The responsibility of each member

Leaders cannot be solely responsible for ensuring that our Congregation lives by the high standards needed in the world of today and to which our vows orient us.

Each member of our Congregation has an important role in maintaining a high standard of behaviour. In our community life and in our shared pastoral work we must encourage an openness whereby a troubled brother can speak of his concerns either among brothers or with a professional counsellor. As brothers we can assist each other in adhering to our own standards and policies.

Apart from assistance to and education of our members, we must build within our pastoral fields and within our institutions, good effective systems of supervision at local levels and with the necessary checks and balances, external scrutiny and accountability to higher authority.

A further way of being proactive is to strengthen fraternal bonds within our communities and wider entities.

If our members become aware of situations that are dangerous or involve activities where boundaries are being ignored or broken – and thus could be potentially dangerous - then they have a responsibility to bring this to the attention of the community and others responsible. Ultimately if a situation is unaddressed it should be conveyed to the Major Superior for direct action to correct any behaviour that is not prudent or compliant with accepted policy.

Thus we may say that:

3. *Every member of the Congregation has a responsibility to ensure that safe ministry and personal boundaries are maintained in our communities and pastoral settings. This responsibility is at once personal and communitarian and it*

cannot be ignored or simply passed over or assumed to be the responsibility of the local Leader or Major Superior. Having said this, it is the ultimate responsibility of the Major Superior to ensure that suitable boundaries, practices and standards exist to ensure the safety of those we minister to and our own members.

Responding to Victims

In the sad event of an accusation being made against one of our religious, the Major Superior or his delegate should always act within the guidelines established for every national entity and in accord with the accepted policies of our entity in that nation.

We must always treat these situations with the utmost seriousness and respond promptly to any accusation or occasion of abuse.

Firstly, we must always focus on the victim as well as the community affected by any offence by one of our members. We must listen with pastoral sensitivity and respond with compassion and charity to any situation of wrong doing. That is, we are called to a genuine pastoral response.

We must ensure that our response to an accusation is fair and just to the one accused and to everyone concerned; we must ensure too that the person who is making an accusation is always treated with kindness, sensitivity and openness. Victims of abuse must be listened to, they must feel safe and they must receive appropriate care and any ongoing resources necessary for their recovery.

If an accusation concerns criminal behaviour, then the person making the complaint is to be encouraged to report the matter to the appropriate law enforcement agency according to the laws and procedures of the civil society. We must be aware too of our own responsibility to report matters to the appropriate civil authority especially where this concerns abuse against children and minors.

Above all we must be aware that what victims of abuse seek most from the Church is compassion and concern, apology and pastoral care.

We may sum this up by stating that

4. *In the case of an accusation of abuse we are called to focus on the victim as well as the community affected by the offence. That is, we are called to a pastoral response. We also must have protocols and policies that ensure that not only is there a timely response to any victim of abuse, but that we also respond to those people in the wider community who may have been*

hurt or shocked to hear the stories of victims and to learn of abusive actions on the part of their ministers.

- 5. If the one who is accused denies any wrong doing, a just process must be followed to determine the truth of the matter.*

Responding to those accused

In the situation where a member has admitted his guilt, there is a need to make an adequate response to the member of the Congregation. This response, while respecting his dignity and rights, must also ensure that he is no longer a risk to any other person and that he is not exercising a ministry that exposes others to danger.

Secrecy, embarrassment, reluctance to name some things all contribute to the difficulties and disturbing situation of sexual abuse. We must confront issues and behaviour in the lives of our own members who may have offended.

Firstly, and most importantly, we must fully comply with the legal requirements of the civil societies in which any abuse may have occurred.

- 6. In accord with national policies and legal requirements, each entity should have ready the necessary strategies to remove an offending religious immediately from situations where they may cause further harm and be able to demonstrate that he is not at risk of further offending.*

If an offence is against children or minors, and as such is a crime, we must ensure that we comply absolutely with civil or ecclesial procedures applying to this situation.

We must also provide pastoral support and also adequate supervision for any person known to have abused others.

Formation for Community Life and Ministry

In our initial formation programmes attention must be given to personal and professional preparations for an authentic community life and ministry in today's society and Church.

From earliest days a student member must experience in our Congregation an atmosphere where children and vulnerable persons are especially protected and considered.

Initial formation programmes must include formation in all aspects of awareness of, and prevention of, any abusive practices and they must promote safeguards and standards in ministerial practice.

The Community Leaders and all members engaged in ministry must be careful and attentive to those times when work and even over-work takes us from the community base and robs us of opportunities to appreciate our community life and time together. A healthy fraternal community life is not only a great support to our men in their ministry but is also a valuable foundation to ensure safe ministerial practices.

Our 46th General Chapter reminds us of the need to work together to create formation programmes that assist us to live a more integrated, caring and authentic experience of community life - one that is firmly based upon our Charism.

We must be aware of the ongoing demands for professionalism and competence in all of our public ministries in the Church today.

Ministry in today's world requires us to not only have adequate theological training and pastoral skills, but we also need to live by a code of conduct, be accountable to others in our ministry and comply with any civil or ecclesiastical processes to enable us to respond to complaints or misconduct.

To be an effective minister today calls for ongoing professional development, utilising a mentor or supervisor, engaging in a professional network, undertaking professional reading and talking with others about aspects of the activities and life.

There are professional expectations of ministers in many parts of the world today. Some of these are to have good communication skills, to be in professionally supportive relationships, to have appropriate interpersonal relationships, to have a sense of emotional and psychological well being, to be able to keep appropriate records and have administrative capacity as well as being aware of policies in regard to appropriate personal boundaries and behaviour.

The pastoral care of others, can place us in positions of great influence and power, it can feel good to be needed and appreciated, it can be 'seductive'. It is important to check our work surroundings are conducive to professionalism and that they are safe for us. We also need to differentiate between work and personal (private) space. We need to engage in pursuits that assist our physical, emotional and spiritual well being. This should be an important focus during formation.

7. Both our initial and ongoing formation process must assist our religious to gain skills not just in ministry, but in adopting a professional, disciplined and safe approach to ministry with children and vulnerable adults. This will take effort, trust and sustained attention to this area of our lives.

Some Practical matters when developing our policy Documents.

While these standards need to apply across the entire Congregation, the General Council recognises that cultural, civil and legal requirements around the world will differ, and that the policies created by Church Authorities will also vary according to local needs. We must firmly adhere to these policies. here there is significant difference in standards and expectations, the higher standard should always apply.

Nevertheless, each entity in our Congregation should also have its own internal policy and procedures in place so that they can:

- a) comply with both civil law and ecclesiastical policies of each country,
- b) reflect the spirit and directions of this document
- c) put into effect the recommendation of our last General Chapter.

When Provinces, Vice Provinces and Vicariates draw up their own internal policy, such documents – as a minimum – should contain a statement about the following:

- Our policies should emphasise the value of support systems, a healthy level of fraternity and communication in Community life, the value of having a spiritual director, pastoral supervisor or confessor and the need for ongoing education, self reflection, retreats, and regular reviews of our pastoral practices and systems of safety.
- A clear statement that a 'child' means any young person below the age mandated by civil society. Normally this is 18 years of age and this should be our standard even in countries where the age of marriage or consent to sexual activity may be lower.
- A clear statement that the term 'vulnerable adult' means any person who has turned to us for pastoral care, advice, counsel or for whom we have a duty of care. In essence, a "vulnerable person" may be considered as anyone who due to age, culture or a mental or physical disability and who may be unable to protect or speak up for himself or herself against significant harm, grooming or exploitation.
- A statement about the personal responsibilities of each of our members to participate in the establishment and maintenance of safe 'systems' for the protection of those we serve.
- A statement relating to and supporting the practice of regular training and awareness raising programs.
- Whilst we would hope and expect that it would not be the case, nevertheless our local policies should state clearly the responsibilities of our Leaders and procedures they must follow, once a situation of abuse comes to their attention.
- Our policies should also make clear the responsibility of members to identify and then 'report' behaviour that is suspect or worrying.
- Major Superiors should also be careful to document any misbehaviour or actions on the part of a member or employee that are abusive.

- There must be commitment to never promote, support or tolerate the cover-up of criminal behaviour by any of our religious.

Conclusion

In all matters concerning violence, harassment or sexual abuse we wish to ensure that the focus of our Congregational effort should be primarily on the prevention of abusive actions (by the creation of safe systems) rather than on those actions to be taken after an act of abuse.

Our focus must also be on responding with compassion and justice to any victims

The General Council entrusts this document to each Province, Vice Province, Vicariate and Mission area in the firm hope that it will contribute towards the creation of safe systems for our members and employees.

We sincerely hope that the standards and values contained in this Document will become a source for personal reflection, community discussion and of course, implementation in each reality.

Our Founder, St Paul of the Cross, gathered companions to preach the gospel of the Passion by word and by the witness of their lives. Let us firmly reject any practice or behaviour that is contrary to the gospel and to the life, freedom and hope that Jesus Christ gained for us by his passion, death and resurrection.

Jesus loved those who were his own in the world till his death; let us strive to imitate his loving approach to people and let us be always, good shepherds to all, especially children and vulnerable adults.

May the Passion of Jesus Chris be always in our hearts.

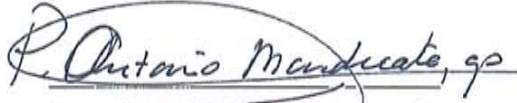

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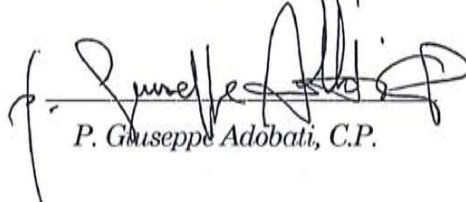
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