

Rocca di Papa, 26th March 2019

To the members of the Focolare Movement all over the world

Dear All,

As you know, it is almost eight years now that the Movement, here at the Centre and in the zones, has been working to develop structures, rules and procedures that can help us improve within the Movement the promotion of the wellbeing and protection of minors.

The reflections of recent Popes, and the directives regarding conduct given by Pope Francis to the Church, have been light on our path to enable us to define, in April 2014, the “Guidelines of the Focolare Movement for the Promotion of the Wellbeing and the Protection of Minors”.

As foreseen in these Guidelines, a Commission for the Wellbeing and Protection of Minors” (in Italian: *Commissione per la Promozione del Benessere e la Tutela dei minori CO.BE.TU.*) was established in 2015. Its work is overseen by a central supervisory body. This Commission has the task of protecting, but also of promoting formation activities for our members, especially those who work with minors. Local commissions in various countries have been created for this purpose and well qualified people have been appointed to be responsible for carrying out this task.

Members of the Commission and the people responsible in the zones met for the first time at Castel Gandolfo (Italy) from 14th-17th March 2019 to take stock of their work. It was a very fruitful meeting, characterised by great maturity and a professional approach on the part of the 162 participants who came from 38 countries and all continents. The meeting was also an opportunity to make an important contribution to the current work of revising, updating and rendering more global the “Guidelines” which will be finished shortly.

In addition to the precious work regarding formation and prevention, the commissions also have the task of receiving reports of alleged abuse and to undertake a process of verification within the Movement. This is not an easy task and we are deeply grateful to them.

It deeply pains us to recognise that, also in our own large family of the Focolare, some cases of abuse regarding minors caused by people who belong to the Movement, or by people who have taken part in meetings organised by us, have occurred. Most of these episodes occurred in the remote past (even over 20 years ago), but unfortunately some have occurred in the recent past. Consecrated members of the Movement were also involved in these.

With the help of the Central Commission and the local commissions we have taken into consideration every single case that was reported (up to now about 20) to understand how to do justice to the victims, how to accompany them and their families and what provisions to make within the Movement regarding the authors of the abuses, in addition of course to the judicial procedures envisaged by the laws of the respective countries.

We take this opportunity to invite all of you to commit very responsibly to this very important aim of promoting the wellbeing and protection of minors. There are various ways of doing this.

Without doubt, our Movement too adopts a zero tolerance approach concerning any form of violence, abuse, mistreatment or acts of bullying/cyber-bullying with regard to any person, paying particular attention to minors and vulnerable adults. This means reporting to the local commissions and to the Central Commission every suspicion of abuse or violence.

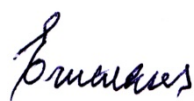
In this context, it is a real temptation if anyone thinks of not reporting cases for the good of the Movement, to avoid scandal or protect someone's good name. Hence we strongly urge you, even those who up to now have not had the courage to do so, to report cases of violence or abuse, or situations that a person considers might constitute a situation of risk for the wellbeing of persons and the protection of minors.

Recently, Pope Francis has spoken of a "great purification" occurring in the Church with the abuse scandals. For us too, in our smaller context, every single case represents a deep purification for the Movement. We accept it with humility and deep compassion for those who – perhaps through our lack of attention – have undergone indescribable traumas. And let's commit ourselves to direct or re-direct our behaviour, as individuals and as a Movement, towards an ever more conscientious and mature commitment regarding protection and wellbeing, especially of minors.

Furthermore, we invite all of you – and not only those who are directly engaged with minors in our Movement – to study the "Guidelines" and take part in training opportunities on these subjects, because all of us have something to do with youth realities.

We encourage you, in addition, to look beyond our Movement. On the journey towards the fulfilment of unity, we cannot fail to make our own the cry of pain of all the children and teenagers in the world. The violation of the rights of minors and the abuse of all kinds perpetrated against them in every part of the world, are one of the greatest wounds of our times, one of the countenances of Jesus Forsaken today. It is part of our vocation to go towards them. That is why we must be on the front line in defending those who are weaker, wherever they are victims of any kind of violence or abuse.

United in unconditional love for Him, our Only Good,



PRESIDENT



CO-PRESIDENT