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The Focolare Movement's Communication Policy concerning sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults

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With this document, the Focolare Movement (FM) defines its Information Policy (henceforth referred to as the "Policy") on the safeguarding of the person and, specifically, on cases of sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults. A 'vulnerable adult' is defined as 'any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want, or otherwise resist the offence' (cf. Vos estis lux mundi, Art. 1, § 2, b).

The Policy indicates the ways in which such communications will be made public, respecting the privacy of the victims and the person who committed abuse, according to the laws of the different countries in which the events occurred.

It also specifies that these communications will be published on the Focolare Movement's web page, in the section dedicated to the safeguarding of the person.

With regard to other forms of abuse (e.g. abuse of power, conscience, spiritual, economic) not covered in this document, please refer to the document [Towards a Culture of the Integral Protection of the Person \(Report on cases of abuse of children and vulnerable adults; spiritual abuse and abuse of authority within the Focolare Movement with reference to measures of reparation, new investigation procedures and training activities for the safeguarding of the person\)](#) published by the Focolare Movement on 31 March 2023, and to future measures and publications that the Movement intends to adopt.

What is the Policy

Policy means the method and the time frame with which the FM publicly communicates:

- the compulsory formation activities addressed to all adult members of the FM; the activities specifically addressed to those who hold roles and responsibilities within the FM¹; the formation process for those who accompany, for formators and the assistants of children who take part in the activities of the FM;
- all actions taken or in progress concerning safeguarding of the person, with particular attention to children and vulnerable adults who participate in the FM's activities;
- any information and changes concerning the appointments of members of the specific commissions dedicated to safeguarding the person within the FM;
- dismissals and other measures taken against members of the FM who are considered responsible for sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults;
- the annual summary which brings together the work carried out by the F.M., by the Central Independent Commission and its Supervisory Board in matters concerning the safeguarding of the person.

¹ As is specified in the "Guidelines for the Formation in Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults" formation for those who are in positions of responsibility is compulsory for the members of the General Council, the members of the International Centre of the FM, those responsible for the geographical areas and those responsible for the Movement in an individual country.

The purpose of the *Policy*

The first priority of this document is to ensure communication that promotes the safeguarding of every person involved in FM's activities through the following:

- **Prevention:** to implement continuous communication on safeguarding for preventive purposes and to encourage people who have been abused and/or persons with knowledge of facts to report possible sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults.
- **Formation:** to support formation programmes promoted by the FM on safeguarding for the purpose of prevention and to ensure a safe and healthy environment for those who attend Focolare activities;
- **Transparency:** to guarantee the transparency and accessibility of information on safeguarding while respecting everyone's good name;
- **Reporting:** to raise the awareness of all FM members of the need to report sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults to the appropriate authorities;²
- **Disclosure:** to facilitate the disclosure of information about the dismissal of people who have committed sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults and/or any measures taken by competent or judicial bodies to accompany people who have been abused in the pursuit of due justice, which is a high priority of the FM.

Where and how is the *Policy* applied

Any report of sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults will be submitted and processed according to the Protocol for Dealing with Abuse in the Focolare Movement.

A communication will be circulated to all members of the FM, and, via the official website, also to the public, to the media, as well as to ecclesiastical and civil institutions.

Communications will be made exclusively through the official organ, in this case the Focolare Movement's Communications Office, which will report the decisions taken. Any local or territorial communications may be agreed with the central Communications Office, after an evaluation of its appropriateness and necessity.

In addition, the people who are responsible in the different areas have the right to contact the local communities, meet them and evaluate the process of communication and how to accompany them.

Communication will be given first and foremost, through press releases, communications on the FM's official website, letters from the president, co-president or FM central delegates, and the annual report on the FM's activities in safeguarding.

² This can be found in the protocol explaining the proceedings for reporting an abuse case.

We also reaffirm the importance of guaranteeing spaces for personal and community dialogue in the territories where the FM is present, at the discretion of those who are responsible and at the solicitation and request of individual members and/or communities.

Main reasons for publication³

The Focolare Movement took the decision to publish the cases identified primarily because of its commitment to focus on the people who have been abused and, as already mentioned, to continue along the way of transparency and prevention as regulated by this policy. While we are aware that this choice may not be without controversy and possible negative effects, it is motivated by the desire for the good of the people involved in the cases in various ways.

Listed below are some possible positive effects that publication could have on:

People who have been abused (known and unknown):

- Recognition of abuse can facilitate the healing process of people who have been abused.
- It helps to re-establish justice and to redress the damage in cases where an abused person has not been adequately assisted or has even been slandered.
- It encourages other potential abused people to make a report and receive support if they so wish, helping them in that delicate phase of reopening and addressing the wounds caused by the abuse.
- Reassures abused people that the person who has been accused or convicted will no longer frequent Focolare environments where children and/or vulnerable adults are present and will not have any role of responsibility in them.

People who have committed abuse:

- It can help the person to become aware of what they have done, enabling processes of care and accompaniment.
- It can encourage them to embark on a path of reparation.
- It helps them to observe the sanctions and restrictions imposed on them.

³ For the following two sections, the FM has drawn ideas and examples from the extensive research, in-depth study and drafting of the principles and protocols adopted by the **Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ**. However, the FM is aware that situations and case histories differ in many points, and therefore the following guidelines have been adapted to the specific characteristics of the Movement.

Social environment and local communities of the FM:

- It emphasises the FM's abhorrence for any abusive behaviour.
- It raises awareness of abuse in general, but also in specific situations, preventing the risk of further abuse.
- It helps the FM to fulfil its duty to protect children in its care and young people in general.
- It informs society about people who have been found guilty of abuse and who have been dismissed from the FM;
- It contributes to healing the social wounds that have been caused;
- It fosters within society the development of a culture of care and protection of children.

Members of the FM:

- It contributes to living in truth and acting coherently, according to the FM's commitment, addressing and healing the wounds caused by abuse, both personal and structural.
- It provides clear and necessary information for taking on personal and institutional responsibility in this matter.

Different types of publication according to the person's identity

This section of the document aims to communicate the criteria according to which the FM will proceed with the publication of the names of individuals who have committed sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults or against whom judicial or internal proceedings are in progress to ascertain the abuse and subsequent responsibility.

Publication takes place in compliance with the laws in force in the countries where the abuse occurred and with the principles described above and specifically the need for protection for people who have been abused, prevention of new abuse and transparency.

The different forms are as follows:

Publication with name and surname

Full names are used for cases that are already public or where a definitive sentence has been passed or a judgment which is considered final and is not open to appeal, and which establishes the liability of the person who committed the abuse.⁴

Publication with initials of name and surname

The initials of the first name and surname, the country in which the abuse took place, the branch of the Movement to which the person belongs, and the decade in which the events occurred are used in the following cases:

- when someone is dismissed from the FM as a result of a dismissal order following an internal process in which the truth has been definitively established;

- when, despite a final judgment, the applicable civil law does not allow the publication of surnames or abbreviations of surnames.⁵

Publication using a reference number

Recording the identity reference number, the country where the abuse took place and the decade in which the events occurred are used in the following circumstances:⁶

1. when there is a well-founded request by the person abused not to identify the person who committed the abuse;

2. when a law explicitly prohibits the publication of someone's name;

3. when a trial is still in progress, or an assessment of probability, since the right to presume innocence prevails until guilt is established;

4. when the reasons for publishing the name of a FM member - i.e. the healing of the person abused, the restoration of justice, the reparation of the scandal, the possible reconciliation between the person abused and the abuser, the prevention of future abuse - are achieved by other means.

⁴ The information will be published without delay, as soon as the sentence becomes definitive, or the case becomes public.

⁵ The information will be published without delay, as soon as the dismissal order becomes definitive.

⁶ The information will be published annually.

It should be noted that in the case of offenders dismissed for abuse as covered by this document, whose names or initials cannot be disclosed, it will always be specified that they will no longer come into contact with children during the activities promoted by the FM or on its premises.

Even in cases where the conditions relating to a single fact cannot be made public, the Focolare Movement undertakes to guarantee attentive and organised supervision within its environments and conventions, particularly when children are present.

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