Congregazione dei Padri della Dottrina Cristiana
Padri Dottrinari
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The Superior General

Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons

Dearest confreres and collaborators,

With a deep sense of responsibility and a spirit of service, I present to you the "Guidelines for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons." This document is not merely a bureaucratic or legal requirement; rather, it represents an essential evangelical commitment and an act of fidelity to our charism.

In recent decades - as Pope Leo XIV states - the crisis of trust in the Church, brought about by abuses committed by members of the clergy - abuses that fill us with shame and call us to humility - has made us even more aware of the urgent need for integral formation. Such formation must ensure the human growth and maturity of candidates for the priesthood, alongside a rich and solid spiritual life. Listening to victims and accompanying them must find concrete expression within every ecclesial community and institution. […] The protection of minors and those in vulnerable situations is not an isolated aspect of ecclesial life; it is a dimension that permeates pastoral care, formation, governance, and discipline (Leo XIV, March 16, 2026).

In harmony with the directives of the Pope and the relevant Dicasteries, we wish to foster a culture of care, listening, and prevention within our Congregation. Our goal is to ensure that our communities, parishes, schools, and other apostolates become safe, transparent, and welcoming places - environments where the dignity of every individual, especially the youngest and most defenseless, is held as sacred and inviolable. Within the communities, parishes, schools, and works entrusted to the Congregation, we aim to help build safe, respectful, and conscientious environments where every person can feel welcomed, heard, and protected. For this reason, the Congregation has developed its own "Guidelines for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons," which were approved by the Definitory on October 19, 2026, and entered into force on January 1, 2027.

These Guidelines define the principles, responsibilities, procedures, and training programs aimed at preventing abuse, fostering a culture of care, and ensuring the proper handling of any reports received.

The Congregation is committed to:

- combating all forms of abuse or inappropriate behaviour;
- promoting safe educational environments;
- listening to and supporting victims;
- training religious members, staff, volunteers, and educators on matters of prevention and safeguarding.

For reports or communications regarding the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, you may write to: **superiore.generale@dottrinari.org**

Therefore, I invite you to welcome, study, and apply these norms with great openness of heart, so that our work may always be a clear reflection of God's love and protection for His youngest children.

Entrusting our catechetical mission to the Virgin Mary and Saint Caesarius, I greet you and wish you all the best.

Fr. Sergio La Pegna, dc
Superior General

Introduction

1. “You are the light of the world” (Mt 5:14). Our Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to be a luminous example of virtue, integrity, and holiness. Indeed, we are all called to bear concrete witness to our faith in Christ through our lives - especially in our relationships with others. In his address at the founding of our Congregation, Saint Caesar reminds us that “we would be only half-lit if, while sharing the light through our words, we did not simultaneously radiate the light of our actions. Everything about us must serve as catechesis; our conduct should be so well-ordered that it becomes, in itself, a living catechism.” Crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, inflict physical, psychological, and spiritual harm upon victims, and damage the community of the faithful. To ensure that such occurrences - in any form - never happen again, a profound and ongoing conversion of heart is required. This must be evidenced by concrete, effective actions that involve everyone in the Church, so that personal holiness and moral commitment may help foster the full credibility of the Gospel message and the effectiveness of the Church’s mission. This is possible only through the grace of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts, for we must always keep in mind the words of Jesus: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). Although much has already been done, we must continue to learn from the bitter lessons of the past, while looking toward the future with hope[1].

2. Through these Guidelines, the Congregation intends to reiterate the norms to be followed for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons - both those encountered during the course of ministry and those present within the institutions where the Congregation operates. These Guidelines are intended for all members of the Congregation (the "Doctrinarians"), novices, seminarians, and all others - including diocesan priests, consecrated men and women from other institutes, and laypeople - who collaborate in various capacities in the works and activities of the Congregation, or in those entrusted to it, particularly in parishes and schools. These Guidelines are based upon and refer to the norms issued by the Holy See; they are to be applied in conjunction with the regulations established by the respective territorial Episcopal Conferences, as well as the civil laws in force in the various states where the Congregation resides and carries out its apostolic work.

3. These Guidelines, which do not replace canonical laws or civil laws, aim to facilitate the correct application of the canonical norms on the matter.

A. Fundamental principles

4. Abuse is fundamentally at odds with the Gospel and the values of consecrated and ministerial life; it destroys the Gospel witness as well as the human and spiritual integrity of the victims, and it constitutes a grave scandal within the People of God. For this reason, as members of the Order of Clerics Regular of St. Paul (Barnabites), we declare that any abuse of children or vulnerable persons - beyond being a crime - is a most grave sin. We condemn and oppose every form of abuse, as well as any inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour, committed by anyone against minors or adults who are in a state of vulnerability, whether permanent or temporary.

5. As a Congregation and as individuals, we distance ourselves from instances of abuse committed by religious, priests, or deacons - including any such acts by our own confreres (even in cases that, regrettably, may not have come to light or been subject to prosecution) - as well as by anyone else.

[1] Cf. *Vos esti lux mundi*, Introduction.

Furthermore, we support the decision to hold perpetrators accountable, both under canon law and civil law, through the legal channels available to protect minors and vulnerable individuals.

6. We declare our intention to address every form of complaint or report in a serious, prompt, and compassionate manner, in accordance with the principles of natural and canon justice. We are committed to ensuring that our community, pastoral, and educational environments are safe for all minors and vulnerable adults.

7. We wish to express our disapproval of any form of complicit behaviour or the covering up of these serious crimes; we reject any action intended to help the accused evade investigations by the authorities or elude their search efforts, as well as any conspiratorial silence maintained by those who are formally called upon to provide testimony or to assume their governing responsibilities.

8. The Congregation commits itself to caring for victims and to carrying out the acts of justice and understanding that the circumstances require. It also pledges to provide ongoing training aimed at educating religious members and collaborators to care for the most vulnerable, to work together to build an environment that safeguards and protects them, and to ensure a shared, responsible vigilance against any attitude or behaviour that might endanger their dignity or their safety.

B. Glossary

9. Below are some definitions that will be useful for understanding this document:

9.1 *Abuse*: any act that causes physical or psychological harm to a minor or a vulnerable adult, that results - directly or indirectly - in damage, or that hinders the prospects for healthy and safe development. The World Health Organization defines the main categories of abuse as physical violence, psychological violence, neglect and negligent treatment, and sexual abuse and exploitation.

9.2 *Sexual abuse:* conduct consisting, alternatively or cumulatively, of the following:

a. committing an offense against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue through violence, threats, or the abuse of authority, or compelling someone to perform or submit to sexual acts;
b. committing an offense against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue with a minor, a person who habitually lacks the full use of reason, or a vulnerable adult;
c. the immoral acquisition, possession, exhibition, or dissemination - by any means or through any medium - of pornographic images of minors or persons who habitually lack the full use of reason;
d. recruiting or inducing a minor, a person who habitually lacks the full use of reason, or a vulnerable adult to engage in pornographic display or to participate in actual or simulated pornographic performances.

There are various forms of conduct that may be classified as sexual abuse, including, for example: sexual intercourse (whether consensual or non-consensual), physical contact of a sexual nature, exhibitionism, masturbation, the production of pornography, inducement to prostitution, and sexual conversations or proposals, including those made via communication technologies.

9.3 *Vulnerable adult:* vulnerable adult means any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal freedom which in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or want or in any case to resist the offense.

9.4 *Competent authorities*: the ecclesiastical authority (the Superior General, the Major Superiors, and the local Ordinary) and the competent civil judicial authority - under canon law and civil law, respectively - responsible for handling and deciding upon the matters that are the subject of the report.

9.5 *Jurisdiction over the offense against the sixth commandment:*

a. In the case of a cleric, the Superior is obligated to consider the alleged offense, evaluate it, and make a discretionary decision regarding the necessity of proceeding with dismissal from the clerical state. In the event of the abuse of a minor under the age of 18 - a category that also includes individuals who habitually lack the full use of reason - if the accused religious is a cleric, exclusive jurisdiction lies with the Supreme Tribunal of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. As with all other offenses falling under this category, the statute of limitations is twenty years; however, specifically in cases involving the abuse of a minor under the age of 18, this period begins to run only from the moment the victim reaches the age of eighteen.;

b. In the case of a religious who is not a cleric, competence lies with the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. In the cases contemplated by §2 of canon 1395, the Superior must proceed with dismissal, unless he deems it appropriate to provide otherwise for the correction of the religious, the restoration of justice, and the reparation of scandal (canon 695, §1). In the aforementioned cases, the mandatory nature of the action concerns the duty of the Major Superior to initiate the dismissal process, while observing the procedure established by law (canon 695, §2). »[2];

c. Lay persons who cooperate in various capacities in the works of the Congregation, or in works entrusted to it, are subject to legal action if accused of abuse against minors or vulnerable persons; this includes reporting them to the competent civil authorities and terminating any collaborative relationship - up to and including the rescission of their employment contract - in accordance with the procedures established by the laws of the respective states.

9.6 *Sin against the sixth commandment*:

a. by forcing someone - through violence, threats, or an abuse of authority - to perform or undergo sexual acts;

b. in carrying out sexual acts with a minor or a vulnerable person;

c. the production, exhibition, possession, or distribution - including via electronic means - of child pornography, as well as the recruitment or inducement of a minor or a vulnerable person to participate in pornographic performances, are serious crimes[3].

9.7 *Minor*: This refers to any person under the age of eighteen. Under canon law, a “person who habitually lacks the full use of reason” is equated to a minor.

9.8 *Person who is the subject of a report/complaint*: the person against whom a report and related allegations of abuse within an ecclesial setting have been made.

9.9 *Safeguarding Lead*: a person appointed by the Superior General to collaborate with the competent authorities and coordinate on-the-ground efforts regarding the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, in order to address allegations of abuse within the ecclesial sphere in accordance with canon law.

[2] CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, Guidelines, The Gift of Fidelity, the Joy of Perseverance, no. 91.
[3] FRANCIS, *Vos estis lux mundi*, art. 1, §1, a).

9.10 *Sexual exploitation:* any instrumentalization - actual or attempted - of a minor or a vulnerable adult for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, economic, social, or political gain.

C. Training for religious personnel and staff/volunteers

10. The delicate task of pastoral service requires great prudence in the criteria for admission to training, religious profession and sacred orders. Therefore, people who have not demonstrated a profound and structured human and spiritual balance are not admitted. Pedagogical itineraries are necessary that aim to form in subjects a solid identity and the authentic sense of those who freely place their lives at the service of others. It is necessary that training practice must be particularly attentive to the areas of human training, especially the affective-sexual one.

11. With regard to staff and volunteers as well, in the face of the risk of situations involving abuse, they are expected to work toward prevention, with the aim of achieving the following objectives:

a. knowledge of an individual's emotional dynamics and of phenomena related to abuse, acquired through appropriate educational tools;

b. identifying inappropriate behaviours among staff dedicated to the care of vulnerable people (employees, collaborators, volunteers, etc.) that may fall within a context of abuse and acting accordingly;

c. take appropriate measures to protect minors and vulnerable individuals.

These objectives can be achieved by focusing on the selection, evaluation, and initial and ongoing training of personnel, the development of educational programs, the monitoring of practices, and the creation of environments suitable for ensuring the safety of vulnerable individuals. Training may cover topics related to various forms of abuse, including their psychological, educational, social, pathological, legal, and ethical dimensions. Upon hiring, employees of the Congregation must sign a document confirming their acceptance of these *Guidelines.*

D. Attitudes and behaviours

12. All doctrinaire consecrated persons are personally called to reveal a style that has a profound depth of credibility. This entails the ability to live a profound interior life, as well as the freedom to come into contact with the intimacy of others in spiritual accompaniment, in interpersonal relationships and, for priests, in the ministry of confession. Care must be taken not to exercise undue manipulation and intrusion, always seeking the exclusive good of others, especially those who are weak and vulnerable.

13. All pastoral collaborators - especially educators and catechists - are called to transmit and bear witness to the Gospel within and with the Church, including through their lifestyle, their words, and their conduct. In particular, those who work with children, young people, and vulnerable individuals are called to be positive role models - companions on the journey who possess personal balance, human and emotional maturity, inner stability, a passion for education, and who offer a transparent witness of healthy relationships.

14. In activities involving minors and vulnerable people, their protection must be a priority. Therefore, during their activities, operators must:

a. treat all minors with respect;

b. exercise caution and respect when interacting with vulnerable people;

c. provide them with positive role models;

d. always remain visible to other pastoral workers - or, in any case, to other adults - when carrying out activities with minors;

e. report any potentially dangerous behaviour to one's responsible person;

f. respect the sphere of privacy and intimacy of the minor and the vulnerable person;

g. inform family members or guardians about the proposed activities and the associated organizational arrangements, and obtain the necessary authorizations.

h. exercise due caution when communicating with vulnerable individuals, including via telephone and/or on *social networks*.

15. It is strictly forbidden for everyone:

a. to inflict corporal punishment of any kind;

b. establishing an exclusive relationship with a single minor or vulnerable person, to the exclusion of others;

c. leaving a minor or a vulnerable person in a situation that is potentially dangerous to their mental or physical safety;

d. addressing a minor or vulnerable person in an offensive, inappropriate, or sexually provocative manner;

e. attending to personal care tasks (such as washing and changing clothes) that a minor could perform on their own;

f. to discriminate against a minor or a vulnerable person, or a group of minors or vulnerable persons;

g. asking a vulnerable person to keep a secret;

h. giving gifts with ulterior motives to a minor or a vulnerable person;

i. Photographing or filming a minor or a vulnerable person, sharing images of a minor online or on social networks, and/or chatting with a minor - all of these actions must only take place if the minor's parents or guardians are kept fully informed and have provided their authorization. In all cases, the utmost caution must be exercised, and all applicable laws and regulations must be strictly observed.

16. In pastoral activities, the following guidelines should be followed:

a. For group activities (altar servers, catechism, preparation for confession, etc.), parents should be provided with a written notice specifying the start and end times, as well as the location. Minors must not be kept beyond the time agreed upon with their families;

b. The celebration of the sacrament of confession should take place in settings that are liturgically appropriate - and, in any case, visible rather than secluded - while respecting the specific nature of the sacrament. The words and gestures of the confessor must never be ambiguous, even when intended to offer genuine comfort;

c. At the beginning of and throughout the catechetical year, it is important that parents be kept informed about the topics being covered.;

d. In catechetical programs for older youth, topics concerning affectivity and sexuality should be addressed with competence, preparation, sensitivity, and maturity. It may be helpful to involve experts in the fields of psychology, moral theology, and pedagogy. The use of images and films should be appropriate for the age of the young people and the specific characteristics of that particular group;

e. Should a doctrinaire or youth leader receive confidences, or notice signs of distress or mistreatment in a minor, they should speak about it with the parish priest, who will then consult the Superior General or the Diocesan Service for the Protection of Minors.;

f. Within the group, verbal violence or an aggressive tone of voice must never be used. Any reprimands - which may sometimes be necessary - must always be delivered with respect for boundaries and the children's dignity, and parents should always be involved;

g. During school camps and multi-day retreats, care should be taken regarding the room assignments for the young people. It is best to choose facilities with rooms that accommodate at least six to eight beds each, allowing for the presence of at least two staff members or chaperones. These rooms must never be locked from the inside. Areas containing bathrooms and showers should be

monitored, maintaining an appropriate balance between respecting the individuals' sense of modesty and ensuring responsible supervision.;

h. For these activities, it is necessary to obtain written authorization from the parents - including, where applicable, for video or photographic recording;

i. WhatsApp groups should be created by adults - specifically, the young people's parents - with the clear understanding that these groups are to be used solely for notices and information regarding activities. An adult, youth leader, or catechist must not engage in personal chats with the young people, nor should these groups be used by the young people to chat among themselves;

l. In order to publish photos, images, or videos on a school's or parish's websites or social media channels that feature minors in a recognizable way, both parents or legal guardians must have previously provided their informed written consent.;

m. priests and pastoral workers remember that the publication of images and videos of minors on their personal profiles (Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok...) falls to all intents and purposes under their personal responsibility.

E. Persons responsible for the protection of minors and vulnerable individuals

17. In the Congregation everyone has the duty and responsibility to welcome minors and vulnerable people with respect and attention and to create a safe environment for them, taking into account their interests as a priority. The Superior General and the Major Superiors have the ultimate responsibility for the protection of minors and vulnerable people welcomed.

18. With the consent of the Definitory, the Superior General issues norms and regulations in this regard and verifies their dissemination and observance in whatever manner he deems appropriate; furthermore, should he consider it fitting, he may appoint one or more representatives for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons. Their primary task is to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the established norms and regulations, ensuring that the community remains respectful and aware of the rights and needs of vulnerable persons, while also remaining vigilant in preventing any form of violence or abuse.

19. All reports of alleged acts of abuse against vulnerable persons within the Congregation must be submitted to the Superior General or, if one has been appointed, to the Safeguarding Officer. The Superior General or the Safeguarding Officer shall take special care to receive and support those who claim to have been victims of exploitation, mistreatment, or sexual, power, or conscience-related abuse, as well as their family members or guardians.

F. Procedure

20. Given that allegations of sexual abuse can arise from various sources - ranging from formal complaints to reports disseminated by the media - anyone who receives information regarding a potential crime (*notitia criminis*) must communicate it to the Superior General in a written and signed document; whenever possible, the individuals involved should also sign it. In verifying such information, the Superior General may seek the assistance of other prudent and wise individuals. The Superior General should express his readiness to offer spiritual and psychological support to the victims. Anonymous allegations should not be dismissed out of hand, but rather subjected to careful and prudent verification. Anonymous reports that are entirely vague, or clearly unfounded and slanderous, do not merit any attention.

21. If an accusation arises through the arrest of a member of the clergy, the canonical procedure is suspended until the civil proceedings are concluded.

22. If the news comes from a public authority and is already known, or following a precautionary action such as arrest, the Superior General should follow the confrere involved with particular attention, without failing to provide a lawyer, moral and material support, but on the other hand without falling into any type of partiality.

Preliminary investigation

23. When faced with serious evidence of sexual abuse against minors or vulnerable individuals, it is necessary to act swiftly and firmly, taking all essential measures while always safeguarding the reputation and privacy of the persons involved.

24. Both the civil community, the ecclesial community and the religious community must know that there can be no connivance with the most serious crimes, and therefore the Congregation, in solidarity with the victims and their families, deals with them in a rigorous and transparent manner, in compliance with the laws of the Church.

25. Once the credibility of the accusation has been verified, the Superior General must initiate a preliminary investigation, which may be conducted personally or through a delegate (cf. can. 1717 CIC)[4].

26. At the beginning of the preliminary investigation, the Superior General appoints a notary - a priest - to guarantee the public authenticity of the acts he draws up[5].

27. «It must always be kept in mind that the preliminary investigation is not a trial, and its purpose is not to achieve moral certainty regarding the course of the facts which are the subject of the accusation. It serves:

a. to the collection of data useful for further investigating the *notitia de delicto* (information regarding a suspected offense);

b. to establish its plausibility - or, in other words, to define what is termed *fumus delicti*: that is, a sufficient legal and factual basis to consider the accusation plausible"[6].

28. During the preliminary investigation the Superior General or his Delegate must investigate about:

a. the identity of the alleged victim (name, date of birth, place of residence);

b. the identity of the accused (name, age, roles and responsibilities);

c. the deliberate intent to commit the crime, imprudence, negligence, or culpable omission;

d. the reported facts and the circumstances;

e. the statements of the alleged victim and the accused, as well as any documentary and testimonial evidence;

f. any other element deemed useful.

29. Since the preliminary investigation is not a trial, in this phase clear evidence of the crime and the imputability of the religious person is not required, but only serious evidence. The evidence will be presented subsequently, if and when the criminal, administrative or judicial proceedings are initiated.

[4] Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Vademecum*, art. 69 e 70.
[5] Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *De gravioribus delicitis*, art. 14.
[6] Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Vademecum*, art. 33.

30. Investigations must be conducted with prudence and caution so as not to jeopardize anyone's good reputation or privacy (cf. can. 220). The obligation to respect privacy and a good reputation applies to all those involved: the religious person who has been reported, the alleged victim, family members, witnesses, the investigator, the notary, any individuals who become aware of the investigation, and the ecclesiastical authority.

31. Only the Superior General, or his delegate, shall be the official spokesperson regarding any cases of more serious crimes, while always observing the confidentiality of the investigation and, where applicable, the pontifical secret.

32. The Superior General must implement measures to safeguard the accused:

a. unless there are serious reasons to the contrary, the accused doctrinaire priest must be informed of the accusation presented, to give him the opportunity to respond to it, before referring the case to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. The prudence of the Superior General will decide what information should be communicated to the accused during the preliminary investigation[7];

b. ensure that the person under investigation receives the necessary spiritual and/or psychological support during the preliminary inquiry;

c. ensure that, during the preliminary investigation, the good reputation and privacy of the accused are preserved (cf. cann. 220 and 1717 §2).

33. The accused doctrinaire retains the presumption of innocence until proven otherwise, even if the Superior General, as a precautionary measure, limits the exercise of his ministry while investigations are underway to clarify the allegations[8].

34. An accused priest may always lodge an appeal with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith[9].

35. During the preliminary investigation into proceedings initiated by civil authorities or by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Superior General may limit a priest's ministry - for example, by imposing restrictions on his community life or his personal and pastoral activities, prohibiting the exercise of sacred ministry, suspending him from an ecclesiastical office, or mandating or forbidding his residence in a specific place or territory. He may also suggest other pastoral measures to the religious to support him.

36. Precautionary measures are taken when necessary and in light of clear, objective evidence of the accused's guilt. When the reason for their imposition no longer exists, they must be revoked; furthermore, they cease *ipso iure* (by operation of law) when the criminal proceedings come to an end.[10].

[7] Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Circular letter: Among the important responsibilities*, 3 May 2011, in AAS 103 [2011], 410.
[8] Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, art. 19.
[9] Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, art. 26-27.
[10] Cf. can. 1722; CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Circular letter: Among the important responsibilities*, in AAS 103 [2011], 410.

37. The reinstatement of a member of the institute - whether a cleric to the public exercise of the sacred ministry, or a religious to apostolic activities - must be prohibited whenever such ministry or activity poses "a danger to minors or a source of scandal for the community."[11].

38. In the interest of fairness and the reasonable administration of justice, the duration of a preliminary investigation must be proportionate to the investigation's purpose - namely, to establish a well-founded plausibility regarding the *notitia de delicto* (report of an alleged offense). An unjustified prolongation of a preliminary investigation may constitute negligence on the part of the authority. Regarding such an investigation, in the case of a religious, the following points should be kept in mind:

a. The investigation into the allegations must be conducted with due regard for the principle of privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved.

b. During the preliminary investigation, the Superior General shall adopt, with regard to the accused religious, precautionary measures appropriate to the specific case in order to prevent the risk of the criminal acts being repeated (can. 1722 and *Normae* art. 19), while maintaining the presumption of innocence until proven otherwise.

c. The Superior General or the person in charge should investigate with prudence, so that during the investigations the good reputation of anyone (can. 1717 § 2) of both the accused and the suspect is not put at risk, even when news of the crime has become public. The preliminary investigation should be conducted in the most confidential manner possible. The question is to be considered *sub secreto* pontifical pursuant to art. 30.1 of the *Normae*.

d. The subject of the preliminary investigation consists of "evidence regarding the facts and immutability" (can. 695 § 2). Mitigating or aggravating circumstances must not be omitted. By "facts," one must understand what has occurred - that which has been brought about knowingly and voluntarily by a human being.

e. The investigation must reconstruct: the facts constituting the criminal conduct; the number and timing of the criminal acts; the identities and ages of the victims; the harm caused; any potential overlap with the sacramental forum; and any other related offenses, even if they are not of a more serious nature (*graviora*).

f. It must involve an external (objective) violation of criminal law. Evidence consists of arguments presented so that the person conducting the investigation may become rationally convinced of the validity and truth of what is being asserted.

g. The admission of evidence rests with the person conducting the investigation, who acts as a guarantor for the lawful conduct of the inquiry.

h. During the course of the investigation, documents, testimonies, and information may be gathered - including by consulting Bishops of other dioceses where the person under investigation has resided, or, if the individual has served in other communities of the Congregation, the relevant local Superiors or Delegates. While safeguarding the current reputation of the accused, the victim(s) must be heard, and all documents and measures from civil authorities - where they exist - must be collected. Furthermore, to the extent possible, the matter of damages should be addressed *ex bono et aequo* (according to what is good and equitable), in accordance with Canon 1718 § 4.

[11] CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Circular letter: Among the important responsibilities*, in AAS 103 [2011], 411.

i. Regarding the taking of testimony, it is advisable to have a notary present and for the testimony to be signed (canons 1562–1569), with the witness taking an oath to tell the truth (*de veritate*). It should be noted that the accused is not to be asked to take an oath to tell the truth (canon 1728 § 2)..

l. Taking the testimony of a minor who has allegedly been harmed should only occur if it is essential for establishing the facts, and it requires the prior written consent of their parents or legal guardians. Such testimony must be gathered in a protected and private environment, in strict adherence to established methodologies and criteria for interviewing an alleged victim of sexual abuse. This process must take place in the presence of a professional with specific expertise regarding the psychological, cognitive, and emotional state of the vulnerable individual. The minor may, at any time, be assisted and supported by their parents, legal guardian, or another trusted person - whether chosen by the minor themselves or by their legal representatives. Throughout this process - and, indeed, above all else—the well-being of the minor remains the primary priority.

m. During the preliminary investigation, the accusation and the evidence must be made known to the accused religious, and he must be given the opportunity to defend himself (can. 1620, 7°). It should be noted that even a decree of dismissal issued via an administrative procedure (cann. 696–697) would be rendered null and void if the right to defence had been denied or restricted.

n. It is for the prudent judgment of the Superior General - in consultation with the person appointed for the task, if one has been designated - to decide on the conclusion of the preliminary investigation. The evidence gathered must be deemed sufficient, and any reasonable doubt regarding the truth must be ruled out.

o. Information concerning facts and individuals subject to preliminary investigations and criminal proceedings is protected by the secrecy of the investigation (*segreto istruttorio*) and, where applicable, by the pontifical secret (*segreto pontificio*). Throughout all stages of the proceedings, the Superior General may never seek the assistance of his Council, given that Article 30, §1 of the *Normae* stipulates that the matter is to be considered *sub secreto pontificio* (under the pontifical secret).

Conclusion of preliminary investigation

39. If a preliminary investigation concerning a cleric indicates that an accusation is plausible, it shall be concluded by sending a written communication to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, with a copy retained in the General Archive of the Congregation. The process shall then await a response from the aforementioned Dicastery, which will provide guidance on the subsequent course of action regarding the individual in question. Even in the absence of an explicit legal obligation, the ecclesiastical authority should report the matter to the competent civil authorities whenever it deems this essential to protect the victim or other minors from the risk of further criminal acts.

40. The Superior General shall transmit the acts of the preliminary investigation to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, together with his own opinion and that of his Council regarding the merits of the case; the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith shall indicate how to proceed further (by way of a judicial process, an extrajudicial decree, or dismissal *ex officio* by the Holy Father).

41. The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, having examined the case, will send instructions to the Superior General on how to proceed - ensuring both a fair process for the accused cleric, in respect of his fundamental right to a defence, and the protection of the good of the Church, including the

well-being of the victims[12]. In the case of an extrajudicial process, the Superior General may reserve the conduct of this administrative procedure to himself or entrust it to a Delegate, in which case he shall establish the appropriate provisions regarding the Delegate, the two assessors, and the notary. For non-clerical religious, the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life is the competent authority.

42. The Congregation will provide full cooperation to the civil authorities in cases where there is proven evidence of a crime; however, the Doctrinarian priests are bound not to violate the sacramental seal[13].

43. Collaboration with civil authorities is not limited to cases of sexual abuse committed by members of the Congregation; it also extends to situations involving personnel who, in various capacities, work within the Congregation's facilities or in facilities entrusted to it. In such instances, procedures are followed in accordance with the relevant civil laws.

44. In the event that, at the conclusion of the preliminary investigation or the penal process, the accusation proves to be unfounded, it is the duty of the Superior General to restore the accused religious to his offices and to make every effort to rehabilitate the good name of the person who was unjustly accused. It may also be appropriate to initiate canonical and/or civil proceedings against the false accuser for defamation and calumny (cf. can. 1390, §§2-3).

45. If a member of the Congregation - whether cleric or lay - admits to or is found guilty of sexual abuse, the Congregation will provide spiritual and psychological accompaniment and offer fraternal support, regardless of any canonical or legal penalties imposed upon him.

46. The Congregation initiates a "personalized protection pathway" for individuals in cases where a crime has been established; this pathway includes the following points:

a. that it be put in writing and signed by the person concerned, the Superior General, and at least one person directly involved in the supervision of the religious;

b. that he undergoes a psychodiagnostics evaluation to outline his personality profile and provide a clear picture of his abusive behaviour, with the aim of determining whether a disorder is present and assessing the risk of the abuse being repeated. In the event of a mental disorder, this risk should be considered higher;

c. it is important to consider how motivated this person is to want to undergo a treatment program (pharmacological, psychotherapeutic) to process deep affective dynamics (especially traumatic), deal with distorted sexual impulses and above all avoid recurrence by regaining control over behaviour;

d. The Congregation should place the confrere in a protected community setting (which may also be outside the Congregation) - a community, ideally specialized in this type of care, where the religious resides under specific conditions. This is beneficial for two reasons: in such an environment, where contact with minors is not possible, the likelihood of deviant sexual behaviour is reduced; furthermore, the rules and daily structure imposed by the community help prevent relapses by providing external constraints - physical and social limitations that, while not amounting to detention,

[12] Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Circular letter: Among the important responsibilities*, in AAS 103 [2011], 409.
[13] Cf. FRANCESCO, *Apostolic letter issued motu proprio. Vos estis lux mundi*, art. 19.

still allow the religious to lead his customary life alongside other confreres, thereby preserving his sense of identity and belonging;

e. The Congregation shall oversee the convicted person's compliance with the Dicastery's decisions regarding the exercise of ordained ministry;

f. The Congregation shall implement methods for monitoring the religious' use of digital communication tools and social media, as well as their access to the internet in general;

g. The Congregation shall prevent the individual from meeting their victims again in any way, unless explicitly requested by the victims themselves and in the presence of witnesses chosen by the Superior General personally;

h. The Congregation should establish rules for interactions with family members and friends, so as to prevent any contact with minors without adequate supervision;

i. The Congregation should establish rules regarding the management of money and financial transparency;

j. the Congregation should provide for disciplinary sanctions in the event of non-compliance with this "personalized protection plan";

k. The Superior General shall inform the local ecclesiastical authorities regarding the disciplinary provisions.

47. The Superior General shall engage in a transparent dialogue with the accused religious, treating him with evangelical mercy and legal firmness, and shall take the necessary measures to address and resolve the accusations in accordance with justice and truth.

48. While investigations or a canonical trial are underway, the Superior General shall propose and arrange for the accused religious a form of community life that is suited to the situation and appropriate for his human and spiritual support; he shall ensure that the means for a decent livelihood are provided and shall discuss with the accused the fact that, should the accusations be found well-founded, the penalty imposed for the offenses could include dismissal from the clerical state and, consequently, from the Congregation.

49. The Superior General may also invite the religious to undergo psychological therapy. While always safeguarding the individual's good reputation and privacy, the Superior General must ensure that the religious provides consent for periodic evaluations to be shared with the Superior himself. This is necessary, especially in cases where a gradual reintegration into ministry and pastoral activity is possible.

G. Final instructions

50. These Guidelines mostly contain the canonical laws already promulgated and entered into force regarding the abuse of minors and vulnerable people. For the Congregation they constitute a clarification of the universal provisions already existing and specify the procedures for their execution.

51. These Guidelines are published on the Congregation's official website and are sent to each confrere.

52. The Superior General identifies the most appropriate way to make these Guidelines known to the religious communities and to those - diocesan priests, religious men and women from other Institutes,

and lay people - who collaborate, in various capacities, in the religious houses and works of the Congregation or entrusted to it.

53. The prevention and protection of minors and vulnerable persons is a matter that deserves the utmost attention. Therefore, the Congregation, represented by the current Superior General, requests that:

a. to be familiar with and to share these Guidelines;

b. sign the acknowledgment of receipt of the Guidelines in the designated space;

c. to keep in the archive of the General Curia the confirmation of receipt, duly signed by the confrere.

Conclusion

54. Given the sensitivity and importance of the subject matter, ongoing training is essential. It is therefore necessary to periodically provide meetings and/or tailored training programs, aimed not only at keeping all involved parties updated on regulatory developments and processes underway within the Church and civil society, but also at fostering the continuous affective and relational growth of each individual - thereby contributing significantly to the creation of a safe and healthy educational environment. The principle of prevention should be consistently upheld as a model to be pursued in how we conceive and organize the pastoral and educational activities of our religious, ministerial, and formative communities.

Approval

These Guidelines were approved by the Definitory of the Congregation of the Fathers of Christian Doctrine (Doctrinarians) on October 19, 2026, and shall enter into force on January 1, 2027.

Statement of Commitment/Code of Conduct

All religious and lay collaborators of the Congregation must be clearly informed about the aspects set out in the Guidelines on prevention. They must apply the content of the Guidelines to the extent appropriate to their role and sign a declaration of commitment to do so.

Code of Conduct for Doctrinarian priests and religious, to be signed and submitted to the Superior General

I, (Name) . . . . . , as a doctrinaire priest/religious, commit myself in my service to act in accordance with the Congregation's Guidelines and to apply and respect them in my field of work.

In particular, I will pay attention to the following:

- that my work with individuals across all sectors of the Church and society be grounded in respect and appreciation;
- that I observe and respect each person's individual sense of personal boundaries;
- that I interact responsibly with those I work with, and that I do not exploit existing relationships of authority or trust;
- that, in my service, I remain guided by the Congregation's Code of Conduct and act in accordance with it;
- that, should I suspect any form of psychological, physical, spiritual, or sexual abuse, I will contact the Superior General or the diocesan support center for victims - in the diocese where I reside - to discuss the appropriate course of action;
- to take advantage of available training and professional development opportunities focused on the subject of safeguarding.

Signature

Full Name:

Date of birth:

Signature of the Superior General:

Date:

A copy of the signed declaration of commitment must be submitted to the Congregation's archives.

For a more in-depth discussion of the subject, please refer to the following documents and legislative acts

Code of Canon Law (1983);

Apostolic Letter issued "Motu proprio" by Pope John Paul II, on the norms concerning the more serious crimes reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*, April 30, 2001;

Substantial norms regarding the most serious crimes reserved to the exclusive competence of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pope Benedict XVI, 05.21.2010;

CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Circular Letter to assist Episcopal Conferences in the preparation of guidelines for handling cases of sexual abuse of minors by clerics* - 03.05.2011;

Apostolic Letter issued "Motu proprio" by Pope Francis, *Come una madre amorevole* [As a Loving Mother], 04.06.2016;

Letter from the Holy Father Francis to the People of God, 20 August 2018;

Apostolic Letter issued "Motu proprio" by Pope Francis, On the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons, 26.03.2019;

CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Guidelines, The Gift of Fidelity, the Joy of Perseverance*, February 2, 2020.

CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Vademecum on certain points of procedure in the handling of cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics* (ver. 1.0,), 16.07.2020.

Apostolic Constitution *Pascite Gregem Dei*, 23.05.2021;

Norms Regarding Delicts Reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 11.10.2021;

Vademecum, on certain procedural points regarding the handling of cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics, drafted by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, 05.06.2022;

Apostolic Letter issued "Motu proprio" by Pope Francis, *Vos estis lux mundi*, 07.05.2019, updated on 25.03.2023;

Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, drafted by the Italian Episcopal Conference and the Italian Conference of Major Superiors, June 24, 2019, updated in November 2023.