

# PRO MINORIBUS

PREVENTION | INTERVENTION | EDUCATION

## Prevention

« In addition to the above-mentioned "systematic verification of the criminal record of any person (cleric, religious or lay person) whom the Church mandates or habitually assigns to work with minors or vulnerable persons. »

(Recommendation 1, CIASE report, 5 October 2021).

## Intervention

« Recognise the systemic responsibility of the Church. As such, examine the factors that have contributed to its institutional failure. Recognise that the social and spiritual role of the Church places a particular responsibility on it within the society of which it is a part. »

(Recommendation 24).

## Education

« In all types of formation and catechesis, teach that the Gospels give the example of a word as a dynamic, not of power over the other, but of the will to make him grow and become, reminding us that, as in a human exchange based on healthy foundations, the word must be taken only to be given. »

(Recommendation 7).



## When reality exceeds nightmare...

On 5 October last, in France, the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church (CIASE) delivered its report after three years of work. This commission, also called "Sauvé" after its president, was composed of some twenty experts from different disciplines: anthropology, sociology, criminal and canon law, psychology, psychiatry, and even theology. The commission, mandated by the French Bishops' Conference (CEF) and the Conference of Religious Men and Women in France (CORREF), collected the words of thousands of victims of sexual assaults suffered within the Church over a period of 70 years (from the 1950s to the present day). The commission travelled across France and collected as many stories of shattered lives. They explored the archives of dioceses, religious congregations and institutes of apostolic life (including our own). The members of this commission also interviewed a hundred experts and people involved in the fight against these crimes.

## A lot will be asked of you...

(Accountability according to the Gospel)

Gospel according to Luke (12, 42-48)

The Lord said to his disciples:

« Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy steward whom the master will place over his household to give them at the proper time their allowance of food?

Blessed that servant if his master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. I tell you truly, he will put him in charge of everything that he owns.

But if the servant says to himself, "My master is taking his time coming," and sets about beating the menservants and the servant-girls, and eating and drinking and getting drunk, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the unfaithful.

The servant who knows what his master wants, but has got nothing ready and done nothing in accord with those wishes, will be given a great many strokes of the lash.

The one who did not know, but has acted in such a way that he deserves a beating, will be given fewer strokes. When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected. »

The results of their research can be summarised in two terrible figures: 330,000 victims (216,000 of whom were assaulted by clerics and consecrated persons, the others by lay volunteers or employees in the Church and Catholic movements or schools). The number of priests and consecrated persons who have offended is estimated to be above a minimum number of between 2,800 and 3,200.

### *A painful and disturbing truth*

Very quickly, controversy arose over these figures, which fell like lightning on the heads of Catholics in France. The study carried out used statistical methods that are customary for opinion polls, but not very common for the Catholic population, which is more used to secrets. These studies are carried out using tried and tested methodologies validated by research. In addition, the representative sample of the general population was much larger (28010 people over 18 years of age) than the usual samples used in this kind of research (approx. 1000). This method had also been used previously in the Netherlands on the same subject, and showed the same results. The reliability rate is 95%, which gives a margin of error of +/- 50,000 people. This means that even taking the lowest figure, the total number of victims is estimated to 280,000.

### *45 recommendations to journey forward together*

The CIASE has proposed a set of 45 recommendations to assist the CEF and CORREF. Some of the recommendations are rather theological and speculative and depend more on the will of the universal Church (recommendations 8-11). On the other hand, the rest of the recommendations are more practical and can be implemented more quickly. These recommendations concern, in particular, the reception to be offered to victims, the support to be given to them, but also the vocational recruitment and the evaluations of personnel working with children. The supervision of the Church's pastoral activity with children, the implementation of prevention protocols and audit and accountability tools. A large place is also given to the training of personnel, both those who are in direct contact with children, but also those who exercise governance (bishops, major superiors).

*Stéphane Joulain, M.Afr.*

## What news from the research side

Engaging community voices to assess Kenya's strengths and limitations to support a child maltreatment prevention program. J. R. Shanley, L. P. Armistead, C. Musyimi, D. Nyamai, M. Ishiekwene, V. Mutiso, et al. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 2021 Vol. 111 Pages 104772. DOI: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104772 (*Disponible auprès du CIM*).

### *Their findings in the review of the scientific literature*

One in two children around the world (1 billion children) is currently being physically, psychologically and sexually abused.

Risk factors include: lack of appropriate parent-child relationships; inappropriate parenting strategies; confusion and misunderstanding of children's developmental stages; parental stress; domestic conflict and violence; lack of support and resources.

Family neglect and abuse have a serious impact on the mental health of children and young adults. The consequences are also serious in terms of physical health and behaviour.

This is a global problem, affecting all countries. But for example in Kenya, researchers have found that 70% of adults have experienced violence in childhood. 59% neglect, 29% emotional abuse, mostly by parents.

### *Objective of this study*

- To assess how a country such as Kenya implements abuse prevention programmes based on sound empirical research. To do this, this study used a mixed method research design. The participants were parents and professionals in the field of prevention and care. Several questions were asked mainly to find out what exists, and how to support the efforts of government agencies to help parents who need support.

## Results

1. Several risk factors have been identified: Poverty, workplace demands, substance abuse, lack of parental role models, marital conflict, lack of parenting skills, bureaucracy.
2. Several protective factors were identified: Village elders, local leaders, community health workers.
3. Institutions are also identified as being able to help: schools, churches, health care centres and some associations.
4. Kenya is rated as 42.85% ready to assist its citizens in parenting. The government's strengths are legislation and knowledge of child abuse prevention. Weaknesses include: limited technological and human resources; lack of training institutions on prevention issues; often insufficient motivation of authorities and the population to address these issues.

### *Implications for our mission:*

The role of churches and non-governmental organisations is clearly highlighted. In our missions we should therefore encourage initiatives to support parents in their educational and parenting role. Physically and psychologically healthy parents are the best prevention against abuse and neglect.

## *A General Audit*

Between May and June this year, provincials, section superiors, provincial delegates, child protection delegates, formators and other confreres involved in youth work were asked to participate in an audit of our abuse prevention policy. 150 confreres responded, giving us an excellent turnout for the target audience. Thank you to all of them.

Initially, this audit was to be carried out on site, but the Covid pandemic prevented this. So we had to turn to an online auditing tool.

We used the audit method developed by the Church in Ireland organised around seven assessment standards:

1. Creating and maintaining safe environments
2. Having procedures to respond to suspected disclosures or allegations of abuse
3. Care and support for complainants
4. Care and support for respondents
5. Training and support to protect children
6. Communication on the Society's message on these issues
7. Evaluation of the quality of the implementation of our policy.

The analysis of the data collected will take some time, as it involves analysing 200 pages of data for each province and section, i.e. over 2000 pages of data.

## *What for?*

- ◆ The analysis will allow us to assess the progress made since our first policy of 2008 to 2021.
- ◆ The analysis will enable us to offer new tools: rewriting and simplifying our policy; drafting protocol sheets for the governance vademecum.
- ◆ The analysis will also help us to consider appropriate training for our students and confreres in our different provinces and sections.
- ◆ Finally the analysis will show where our strengths and weaknesses lie.

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## **Evaluating for progress and accountability.**

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We are committed as a Missionary Society to making our mission communities and centres safe for children and vulnerable people. Unfortunately, we all know that some of us have used authority to sexually abuse "the Lord's little ones". The vast majority of our confreres are men of integrity and have genuine concern for the weakest, but it only takes a few to harm the most vulnerable, and the mission of Christ. Therefore, it is our common mission to make our church and our mission places safe environments for children and vulnerable people. Everyone should be received as one of "the Lord's little ones".

*Together we bear witness, together we serve, together we protect the most vulnerable.*