

## Excerpts from some recent Magisterial texts and others on the Protection of Minors in chronological order

Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, *Apostolorum Successores*,  
Congregation for Bishops, 22 February 2004

This document is an updated and revised Directory of a previous one issued in 1973 by the Congregation for Bishops. It is meant to help bishops *“exercise more fruitfully every aspect of their complex and difficult pastoral ministry in the Church and in the modern world. It is intended to help the Bishops to address, with humble trust in God and with constant courage, the challenges and new problems of the present day, amid the great progress and the rapid changes that mark the beginning of this third millennium”* (Introduction).

*Art. 209*

*“The modern world manifests grave forms of injustice caused by an ever increasing disparity between rich and poor; by an unjust economic system through which, in many parts of the world, people suffer from hunger and growing numbers become marginalized, while in other parts there is great wealth; by the horrors of war which continually threaten the peace and stability of the international community; by the discrimination which men suffer at the hands of other men; and by the degradation of women, on the one hand by a hedonistic and materialistic culture and on the other by the refusal to recognize their fundamental rights as persons.*

*“In the face of these challenges, the Bishop is called to be a prophet of justice and peace, a defender of the inalienable rights of the human person. He does this by proclaiming the Church’s teaching, especially in defence of the right to life from conception to natural death; in defence of human dignity; and, taking to heart the defence of the weak, he lends his voice to those who have no voice of their own, to assert their rights. In the same way, the Bishop needs to condemn vigorously all forms of violence and to raise his voice in favour of those who are unemployed, oppressed, persecuted or humiliated, and in favour of children who suffer grave abuse.”*

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*Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland*

Pope Benedict, 19 March 2010

6. *“To the victims of abuse and their families. You have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry. I know that nothing can undo the wrong you have endured. Your trust has been betrayed and your dignity has been violated. Many of you found that, when you were courageous enough to speak of what happened to you, no one would listen. Those of you who were abused in residential institutions must have felt that there was no escape from your sufferings. It is understandable that you find it hard to forgive or be reconciled with the Church. In her name, I openly express the shame and remorse that we all feel. At the same time, I ask you not to lose hope.”*

7. *"To priests and religious who have abused children: You betrayed the trust that was placed in you by innocent young people and their parents, and you must answer for it before Almighty God and before properly constituted tribunals. You have forfeited the esteem of the people of Ireland and brought shame and dishonour upon your confreres. Those of you who are priests violated the sanctity of the sacrament of Holy Orders in which Christ makes himself present in us and in our actions. Together with the immense harm done to victims, great damage has been done to the Church and to the public perception of the priesthood and religious life.*

*"I urge you to examine your conscience, take responsibility for the sins you have committed, and humbly express your sorrow. Sincere repentance opens the door to God's forgiveness and the grace of true amendment. By offering prayers and penances for those you have wronged, you should seek to atone personally for your actions. Christ's redeeming sacrifice has the power to forgive even the gravest of sins, and to bring forth good from even the most terrible evil. At the same time, God's justice summons us to give an account of our actions and to conceal nothing. Openly acknowledge your guilt, submit yourselves to the demands of justice, but do not despair of God's mercy."*

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### *Address - Meeting with victims of sexual abuse*

Pope Francis, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Philadelphia, 27 September 2015

*"Words cannot fully express my sorrow for the abuse you suffered. You are precious children of God who should always expect our protection, our care and our love. I am profoundly sorry that your innocence was violated by those who you trusted. In some cases the trust was betrayed by members of your own family, in other cases by priests who carry a sacred responsibility for the care of soul. In all circumstances, the betrayal was a terrible violation of human dignity.*

*For those who were abused by a member of the clergy, I am deeply sorry for the times when you or your family spoke out, to report the abuse, but you were not heard or believed. Please know that the Holy Father hears you and believes you. I deeply regret that some bishops failed in their responsibility to protect children. It is very disturbing to know that in some cases bishops even were abusers. I pledge to you that we will follow the path of truth wherever it may lead. Clergy and bishops will be held accountable when they abuse or fail to protect children.*

*We are gathered here in Philadelphia to celebrate God's gift of family life. Within our family of faith and our human families, the sins and crimes of sexual abuse of children must no longer be held in secret and in shame. As we anticipate the Jubilee Year of Mercy, your presence, so generously given despite the anger and pain you have experienced, reveals the merciful heart of Christ. Your stories of survival, each unique and compelling, are powerful signs of the hope that comes from the Lord's promise to be with us always.*

*It is good to know that you have brought family members and friends with you today. I am grateful for their compassionate support and pray that many people of the Church will respond to the call to accompany those who have suffered abuse. May the Door of Mercy be opened wide in our dioceses, our parishes, our homes and our hearts, to receive those who were abused and to seek the path to forgiveness by trusting in the Lord. We promise to support your continued healing and to always be vigilant to protect the children of today and tomorrow.*

*When the disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus recognized that He was the Risen Lord, they asked Jesus to stay with them. Like those disciples, I humbly beg you and all survivors of abuse to stay with us, to stay with the Church, and that together, as pilgrims on the journey of faith, we might find our way to the Father.”*

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### *Apostolic Letter issued *motu proprio* - As a Loving Mother*

Pope Francis, 4 June 2016

*“The Church loves all her children like a loving mother, but cares for all and protects with a special affection those who are smallest and defenseless. This is the duty that Christ himself entrusted to the entire Christian community as a whole. Aware of this, the Church is especially vigilant in protecting children and vulnerable adults.*

*This duty of care and protection devolves upon the whole Church, yet it is especially through her Pastors that it must be exercised. Therefore, diocesan Bishops, Eparchs and those who have the responsibility for a Particular Church must pay vigilant attention to protecting the weakest of those entrusted to her care.”*

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### *Letter written after the release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report *Letter to the People of God**

Pope Francis, 20 August 2018

*“The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults.”*

*“In recent days, a report was made public which detailed the experiences of at least a thousand survivors, victims of sexual abuse, the abuse of power and of conscience at the hands of priests over a period of approximately seventy years. Even though it can be said that most of these cases belong to the past, nonetheless as time goes on we have come to know the pain of many of the victims. We have realized that these wounds never disappear and that they require us forcefully to condemn these atrocities and join forces in uprooting this culture of death; these wounds never go away.”*

*“I am conscious of the effort and work being carried out in various parts of the world to come up with the necessary means to ensure the safety and protection of the integrity of children and of vulnerable adults, as well as implementing zero tolerance and ways of making all those who perpetrate or cover up these crimes accountable. We have delayed in applying these actions and sanctions that are so necessary, yet I am confident that they will help to guarantee a greater culture of care in the present and future.”*

*“It is essential that we, as a Church, be able to acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable.”*

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## Letter to the Bishops of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Pope Francis, on the occasion of a week-long retreat made by the Bishops of the United States, 1 January 2019

*“The Church’s credibility has been seriously undercut and diminished by these sins and crimes, but even more by the efforts made to deny or conceal them. This has led to a growing sense of uncertainty, distrust and vulnerability among the faithful. As we know, the mentality that would cover things up, far from helping to resolve conflicts, enabled them to fester and cause even greater harm to the network of relationships that today we are called to heal and restore.*

*“We know that the sins and crimes that were committed, and their repercussions on the ecclesial, social and cultural levels, have deeply affected the faithful. They have caused great perplexity, upset and confusion; and this can often serve as an excuse for some to discredit and call into question the selfless lives of all those many Christians who show “an immense love for humanity inspired by the God who became man” (cf. [Evangelii Gaudium](#), 76). Whenever the Gospel message proves inconvenient or disturbing, many voices are raised in an attempt to silence that message by pointing to the sins and inconsistencies of the members of the Church and, even more, of her pastors.*

*“The hurt caused by these sins and crimes has also deeply affected the communion of bishops, and generated not the sort of healthy and necessary disagreements and tensions found in any living body, but rather division and dispersion (cf. Mt 26:31).”*

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## Address - Meeting *The protection of minors in the church*

Pope Francis, at the end of the Eucharistic concelebration, 24 February 2019

*“We are thus facing a universal problem, tragically present almost everywhere and affecting everyone. Yet we need to be clear, that while gravely affecting our societies as a whole, this evil is in no way less monstrous when it takes place within the Church.*

*“The brutality of this worldwide phenomenon becomes all the more grave and scandalous in the Church, for it is utterly incompatible with her moral authority and ethical credibility. Consecrated persons, chosen by God to guide souls to salvation, let themselves be dominated by their human frailty or sickness and thus become tools of Satan. In abuse, we see the hand of the evil that does not spare even the innocence of children. No explanations suffice for these abuses involving children. We need to recognize with humility and courage that we stand face to face with the mystery of evil, which strikes most violently against the most vulnerable, for they are an image of Jesus. For this reason, the Church has now become increasingly aware of the need not only to curb the gravest cases of abuse by disciplinary measures and civil and canonical processes, but also to decisively confront the phenomenon both inside and outside the Church. She feels called to combat this evil that strikes at the very heart of her mission, which is to preach the Gospel to the little ones and to protect them from ravenous wolves.*

*“Here again I would state clearly: if in the Church there should emerge even a single case of abuse – which already in itself represents an atrocity – that case will be faced with the utmost seriousness. Brothers and*

*Sisters: in people's justified anger, the Church sees the reflection of the wrath of God, betrayed and insulted by these deceitful consecrated persons. The echo of the silent cry of the little ones who, instead of finding in them fathers and spiritual guides encountered tormentors, will shake hearts dulled by hypocrisy and by power. It is our duty to pay close heed to this silent, choked cry."*

*"Brothers and sisters, today we find ourselves before a manifestation of brazen, aggressive and destructive evil. Behind and within, there is the spirit of evil, which in its pride and in its arrogance considers itself the Lord of the world and thinks that it has triumphed. I would like to say this to you with the authority of a brother and a father, certainly a small one and a sinner, but who is the pastor of the Church that presides in charity: in these painful cases, I see the hand of evil that does not spare even the innocence of the little ones. And this leads me to think of the example of Herod who, driven by fear of losing his power, ordered the slaughter of all the children of Bethlehem. Behind this there is satan.*

*"Just as we must take every practical measure that common sense, the sciences and society offer us, neither must we lose sight of this reality; we need to take up the spiritual means that the Lord himself teaches us: humiliation, self-accusation, prayer and penance. This is the only way to overcome the spirit of evil. It is how Jesus himself overcame it.*

*"The Church's aim will thus be to hear, watch over, protect and care for abused, exploited and forgotten children, wherever they are. To achieve that goal, the Church must rise above the ideological disputes and journalistic practices that often exploit, for various interests, the very tragedy experienced by the little ones.*

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## Apostolic letter issued *motu proprio* on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons

Pope Francis, 26 March 2019

### *Introduction:*

*"The protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message that the Church and all its members are called to proclaim throughout the world. Christ himself, in fact, has entrusted us with the care and protection of the weakest and defenceless: "whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me" (Mt 18:5). Therefore, we all have the duty to welcome openheartedly minors and vulnerable persons and to create a safe environment for them, with their interests as a priority. This requires a continuous and profound conversion, in which personal holiness and moral commitment come together to promote the credibility of the Gospel proclamation and to renew the educational mission of the Church."*

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## Apostolic Letter issued *motu proprio* - *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*

Pope Francis, 7 May 2019

*"Our Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to be a shining example of virtue, integrity and holiness. All of us, in fact, are called to give concrete witness of faith in Christ in our lives and, in particular, in our relationship with others.*

*The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful. In order that these phenomena, in all their forms, never happen again, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church, so that personal sanctity and moral commitment can contribute to promoting the full credibility of the Gospel message and the effectiveness of the Church's mission. This becomes possible only with the grace of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts, as we must always keep in mind the words of Jesus: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Even if so much has already been accomplished, we must continue to learn from the bitter lessons of the past, looking with hope towards the future."*