



TRAINING REFLECTION  
July - August 2025

## Protection of minors and vulnerable people AIC calls for action to be taken at all levels

### Introduction

The historical problem of abuse of minors and vulnerable people within the Church has been a cause of scandal and enormous suffering for those affected and a cause for moral dilemma for the entire people of God.

In recent years, important measures have been taken within the Church to fight for the eradication of this serious problem and to accompany victims in their healing process.

**The objective** of this training reflection is to **raise awareness** among all members of the AIC network about **our active responsibility in defending the dignity and integrity of minors and vulnerable people** wherever we are, in our environment and in carrying out our mission, and to **share some guidelines for creating protocols** designed to guarantee the protection of minors and vulnerable people.

### 1. Measures taken by the Church

During his pontificate, Pope Francis placed the protection of minors and vulnerable people at the heart of the Church's mission. To this end, in 2014 he established the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM), *"to promote the protection of the dignity of minors and vulnerable adults, using the forms and methods, consonant with the nature of the Church, which they consider most appropriate, as well as through their cooperation with individuals and groups pursuing these same objectives"*<sup>1</sup>. The PCPM proposes initiatives for the protection of all minors and vulnerable adults while promoting local responsibility in particular churches.

In May 2018, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life (LFL), which actively supports the life and development of international associations of lay faithful such as AIC, drew up general guidelines to help these associations draft protocols for the protection of minors and vulnerable people with two main objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> "Chirograph of His Holiness Pope Francis for the institution of a Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors" (22 March 2014): [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140322\\_chirografo-pontificia-commissione-tutela-minori.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140322_chirografo-pontificia-commissione-tutela-minori.html)

- To provide criteria and principles of judgement for creating protocols to be followed in cases of sexual abuse or other forms of exploitation.
- To develop training tools for members of associations, concerning education and assistance to minors and vulnerable people.

A month later, the LFL Dicastery invited all international associations of the faithful to draw up protocols with rules and procedures to help ensure the protection of minors and vulnerable people both in the internal life of their association and in the fulfilment of their mission.

These protocols have been implemented progressively. In 2019, Pope Francis convened a summit at the Vatican with representatives of all the Episcopal Conferences to reinforce the norms and guidelines on this issue, establishing a global commitment to the protection of minors.

In addition, the Church has created structures within the Roman Curia, in particular the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, to supervise and coordinate the implementation of these protocols in all dioceses worldwide.

Pope Francis was well aware that the entire people of God must be involved in this mission to protect minors and vulnerable people: *“Without the **active participation of all the Church’s members**, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be successful in generating the necessary dynamics for sound and realistic change.”*<sup>2</sup>

**Committed lay people** play an essential role in this mission and, as such, **AIC members** must join forces with the entire Catholic Church to ensure the protection of minors and vulnerable people.

## 2. Summary of the Church’s guidelines for creating these protocols<sup>3</sup>

The most important points of the protocols adopted by the Church are summarised below:

- **Commitment to protection:** The Church establishes the protection of minors and vulnerable people as a priority. This includes creating safe environments within religious institutions, ministries, and all lay organisations working with minors or vulnerable people.
- **Clear standards and procedures:** Specific guidelines have been implemented to identify, prevent, and respond to abuse. This includes the obligation to report any suspected abuse to the appropriate civil authorities, in addition to conducting internal investigations.
- **Training and awareness-raising:** Members of the clergy and other workers, volunteers and employees within the Church receive ongoing training on how to recognise and

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<sup>2</sup> Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the People of God, 20 August 2018:

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/08/20/180820a.html>

<sup>3</sup> Summary of the Church’s guidelines for the care and protection of minors and vulnerable persons, prepared by the Vincentian Family Office (VFO).

prevent abuse. This training also covers appropriate behaviour when dealing with minors and vulnerable people.

- **Prevention policies:** Policies are in place to regulate access to church environments by people who work with minors, with measures to ensure that only those who have undergone a verification process (such as criminal background checks) can interact directly with children or vulnerable people.
- **Support and reparation:** The Church has established protocols to support victims of abuse, offering psychological and spiritual support. It also seeks to repair the material and emotional damage caused to victims of abuse.
- **Responsibility and accountability:** Protocols include mechanisms to ensure that those responsible for abuse are punished appropriately. This involves both a response at the ecclesiastical level and collaboration with civil authorities for criminal justice.
- **Trust in transparency:** Greater transparency is promoted in the investigation process and accountability to society and the authorities, fostering public trust in the measures taken by the Church.

### 3. How has AIC responded to this call to action?

At the international level:

- AIC became involved in this **reflection** as soon as it was invited to do so by the LFL Dicastery, integrating this issue into the agendas of its Permanent Committee and Executive Board.
- In February-March 2019, a **training reflection** on the protection of minors was shared with the whole network.<sup>4</sup> In addition, at the end of 2019, it promptly forwarded to the LFL Dicastery information on the initiatives launched in response to its letter of June 2018.
- At the **International Assembly of Delegates in Bogotá** in 2020, Monsignor Luis Manuel Alí Herrera, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Bogotá and member of the PCPM, was meant to give a presentation on “*The 7 lines of action of the Latin American Church*”. Unfortunately, as you will recall, this assembly had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the dissemination and implementation of more concrete measures on this issue were delayed.
- AIC is currently developing the necessary **protocols** for the international level. These will be shared with you as soon as possible.

At the national level:

- Some national associations have already taken concrete action to better protect minors and vulnerable people, with the development of protocols and commitments signed by volunteers.

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<sup>4</sup> Training reflection “Protection of Minors”: <https://www.aic-international.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/02/Training-Reflection-Protection-of-Minors-Feb-Mar-2019-EN.pdf>

#### **4. What remains to be done today at AIC level?**

In order to continue making progress in ensuring the protection of minors and vulnerable people, **all AIC national boards should:**

- **Develop a protocol** to ensure the protection, well-being and dignity of all minors and vulnerable people who benefit from their activities and programmes, always adapting it to their own context (civil laws and regulations of each country, guidelines from the respective episcopal conferences and dioceses, etc.).
- **Inform, raise awareness and train** all volunteers in their association on this issue.

#### **Questions to discuss in your groups**

1. What concrete actions are being taken in your country to protect minors and vulnerable people?
  - a) At the state level (national and local government measures)
  - b) At the ecclesial level (Bishops' Conference, diocese, etc.)
  - c) In your association (national, local group).
2. What actions can your AIC group take to educate and raise awareness on this issue in your environment?

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*Reflection compiled by: Milagros Galisteo, June 2025*