CARING SAFELY FOR OTHERS



PASTORAL STANDARDS
AND
SAFE CONDUCT IN MINISTRY

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The image shown on the front cover is the depiction of Christ the Good Shepherd from the Crypt of Lucina within the Catacombs of San Callisto, Rome

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FOREWORD

Since its first publication in 2020, this document has been an excellent resource for the promotion of the Pastoral Standards for ministry, assisting bishops, priests, and deacons in ensuring best practice.

The publication of this new edition is most welcome. Having such a clear and concise resource is more than a testimony to the work that has been done in this sensitive and vital aspect of ministry. It is a call to ever-deepening understanding and to continuing best practice in the daily exercise of pastoral care. It is a document that is rooted in the Gospel and in the teaching of the Church, enabling us to recognise that our responsibilities in safeguarding are intrinsic to our vocation as disciples of Christ and as those called to ordained ministry in the Church.

I commend to you this new edition of "Caring Safely for Others." It is published with the authority of the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales and is applicable to all clergy, religious and diocesan, working in any of the parishes, ecclesiastical institutions, and chaplaincies within the territory of this Conference.



Most Reverend Richard Moth, Archbishop of Westminster
President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

CARING SAFELY FOR OTHERS

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SECTION I: Introduction

"By virtue of our sharing in Christ's royal mission ...we must be inspired and distinguished by a specific attitude: we must care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible ...for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to show care for all life and for the life of everyone."[1]

To 'care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible' is at the heart of the Church's responsibility to safeguard all the people she encounters in the exercise of her mission, particularly those who are most at risk of abuse[2] or exploitation in any form.

In the life of the Church in England and Wales, we now use the vocabulary of 'protecting' and 'safeguarding' others to identify an integral part of what it means to exercise care for others in pastoral ministry. It is a moral imperative, a command of God, which is found throughout both the Old and New Testaments, and is at the heart of the ethical and social teaching of the Church. The mandate is given to us to protect, care for, and safeguard others and, as a priority, the most vulnerable people; it is given, particularly, to those appointed by God to be the shepherds and leaders of his people.

The Lord Jesus gave us his firm command and a severe warning to those who transgress it: *"And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea'".*[3]

Our Lord declares that one of the gravest sins is to cause harm to a 'little one' through sin, and to cause them to lose faith. The sexual abuse of a child or an adult at risk constitutes this gravest of sins[4]. It is a sin which destroys the trust and innocence of a child and betrays the trust and faith of an adult who has placed their trust in another person by virtue of that person's office, position of power or their relationship with them. The mandate to protect and 'care for

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[1] *Evangelium Vitae* §87, Encyclical Letter: *To the Bishops Priests and Deacons Men and Women religious lay Faithful and all People of Good Will on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life*, Pope John Paul II, 1995.

[2] For the purposes of this document, 'abuse' should be understood as defined by civil law in England and Wales.

[3] Matthew 18:2-6. The common interpretation of Matthew 18:1-14 in modern scholarship contends that this passage is a warning to the disciples to prevent them from leading a fellow disciple or new convert away from the faith. Although this may well be one interpretation, there is also scholarly reason to believe that Jesus is presenting eschatological warnings of divine retribution against any disciple who scandalized children through sexual abuse or exposure, rather than welcoming them and providing for their needs. (Cf. Lorne Zelyck, *Matthew 18,1-14 and the Exposure and Sexual Abuse of Children in the Roman World*, Biblica 98, Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, 2017).

[4] *Vos estis Lux Mundi,* Art.1, §1, a, Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis, 2019 (updated 2023).

the other' is also given in Christ's commission to St Peter, and through him to the Apostles and their successors, to *"Look after my sheep"*[5]*;* that is, to exercise the office of shepherd and to safeguard the members of the Lord's flock.

Christ our Lord expressed to his disciples the paramount importance of protecting and safeguarding 'these little ones.' This duty to protect and safeguard though, does not refer just to Christ's followers, nor is it restricted to children and adults at risk; it applies to all those who are entrusted to our ministry and with whom we come into contact. The Church recognises therefore, that for those who exercise ordained ministry (or who exercise other works with the mandate of the Church), there is a specific duty for them to safeguard their ministry and the work they undertake from any abuse of the sacred power [6] or the position of trust [7] they hold by virtue of their ordained ministry, status or office.[8]

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[5] John 21:16.

[6] 'Sacred power' (*sacra potestas*) is conferred on those who, through the Sacrament of Holy Orders are ordained for sacred ministry as bishops, priests and deacons, Cf. Canon 323 § 1 & the Catechism of the Catholic Church §1538 & §1592. The Sacrament of Holy Orders confers the power of order (*potestas ordinis*), Cf. Canon 274 §1, and the power of governance (*potestas iurisdictionis*), Cf. Canon 129 §1. The abuse of power by ordained ministers is explicitly addressed in the Code of Canon Law under Canon 1378, which covers the general abuse of ecclesiastical authority, and Canon 1395, which penalizes sexual misconduct and abuse via force or threats. The abuse of power includes 'spiritual abuse', and the 'abuse of conscience'. Spiritual abuse is the coercion and control of one individual by another in a spiritual context, and when committed by clergy is generally within a sacramental and hierarchical setting. Abuse of conscience *"…is a kind of abuse of juridical or spiritual power that controls the victim's conscience to the point that the abuser, taking the place of God, obstructs or nullifies the victim's freedom of judgment and prevents him or her from being alone with God in his or her conscience. This type of abuse is perpetrated by a representative of the Church - one who is endorsed by the Church as trustworthy. Hence, abuse of conscience always has an institutional dimension. This kind of abuse harms human dignity and often damages the person at the spiritual, psychological, and physical levels."* (Samuel Fernández, Gregorianum 102, 3 (2021), p. 570).

[7] In June 2022, the 'Position of Trust' laws were expanded and now include clergy and others in the Church (such as catechists, diocesan youth officers, parish youth leaders, etc) whose role places them a position of influence or power over 16- and 17-year-olds. Specifically, a new Section 22A was inserted into the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to expand the legal definition of a 'position of trust' to include adults aged 18 or over who regularly coach, teach, train, supervise, or instruct 16- and 17-year-olds in a sport or a religion. The Act makes it a criminal offence for those in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with 16- and 17-year-olds under their pastoral care (the statutory age of consent being 16 years old for those not covered by this definition).

The wider 'abuse of trust' by clergy can be expressed in actions, words and attitudes which betray and abuse the trust placed in them by those they are called to serve. This requires of clergy an awareness of, and sensitivity to, the dynamics of 'power' within the Church which can be abusive and sometimes referred to as 'clericalism'. Cf. *Letter to the People of God,* Pope Francis, 20th August 2018: *"To say 'no' to abuse is to say an emphatic 'no' to all forms of clericalism."*

[8] The Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency ('CSSA'), 'Management of Concerns and Allegations policy' Section 5.3.6 states that: *"In addition to recognising the statutory threshold for determining that an individual is considered to be an 'adult at risk', the Church recognises that at different times and in different contexts, adults can be vulnerable because of the conduct of individuals working in the name of the Church."* This recognises that clergy hold a position of trust, not only in terms of the civil law (see footnote 7 above) but also by virtue of the teaching and spiritual authority they hold as ordained ministers. Section B, paragraph 2 of the Charity Commission's 'Charity Sector Risk Assessment 2026' states also that, *"Compliance casework over the last year has identified the need for particular care and attention by trustees and charity leaders in handling allegations related to individuals in positions of power or influence, including spiritual influence. Trustees should be aware of the risks of individuals abusing positions of trust they hold within a charity - as reflected in the Commission's safeguarding guidance - including by virtue of holding a religious leadership position."*

For the purpose of this document, a '**child**' is defined as *"a person under the age of 18".*[9] Throughout this document therefore, 'child' means 'child and young person' and 'children' means 'children and young people'. An **'adult at risk'** is defined as any person aged 18 years or over who: *"is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect; has needs for care and support, and as a result of those needs is unable to protect himself or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it".*[10]

Although our duty to care for others and to safeguard from abuse is directed with particular attentiveness towards children and adults at risk, it extends also to every person[11]: *"The Church is our spiritual home, as such every parish and pastoral activity is meant to be a space in which we glorify God and care for others, especially children and the vulnerable. In this regard, I renew my appeal that there can be no tolerance for any form of abuse in the Church."*[12]

The call to safeguard the lives of others is then the vocation of all members of the Church: *"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."*[13]

At the same time, the responsibility to follow closely the command of Christ to look after his sheep and to safeguard all the other people we encounter in our lives must be observed in particular by those who are, *"... chosen by God to be pastoral leaders of his People, and ... all those who, in various ways, assume ministries in the Church."*[14] Bishops and those who through sacramental ordination share in the ministry of the bishop, that is, priests and deacons, have a responsibility to imitate the Good Shepherd and exercise their ministry in a way which protects,

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[9] As defined by the law in England (Children Acts 1989 and 2004) and Wales (Section 3 of the Social Services and Well-being [Wales] Act 2014). The universal law of the Church also defines a child ('minor') as: *"any person under the age of 18, or who is considered by law to be the equivalent"* (*Vos estis Lux Mundi*, Art.1, §2).

[10] As defined by the law in the Care Act 2014 (England) and Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 (Wales). The universal law of the Church also defines an adult at risk of abuse ('vulnerable person') 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.

[11] This includes ordained ministers (as well as consecrated men and women religious), who can experience severe emotional, verbal, psychological and other forms of abuse from members of their own congregations and from other members of the Church. In such circumstances, ordained ministers (and consecrated religious) often feel they are expected to endure this abuse and mistreatment silently; they too though have the right to be cared for safely by others.

[12] Pope Leo XIV, *Message to the National Safeguarding Conference*, Clark-Angeles, Philippines, 20-24 October 2025.

[13] *Vos estis Lux Mundi* (Introduction).

[14] Ibid.

safeguards and cares for all the members of his flock and especially to, *"… prevent and combat those crimes that betray the trust of the faithful."*[15]

In addition to the Church's requirements for its ordained ministers to care safely for others, in England and Wales there is also statutory guidance which regulates the charitable status of the Church's dioceses, eparchies, ordinariates, institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, and all those who govern, exercise roles or hold offices within or for those charities. This guidance states that *"protecting people and safeguarding responsibilities should be a governance priority for all charities"* and that *"you must take reasonable steps to protect from harm people who come into contact with your charity."*[16]

The wording of the guidance strongly implies that 'protecting people' and 'safeguarding responsibilities' are not identical matters. The UK government guidance lists examples of 'types of risk and harm', including: 'sexual harassment and abuse' and 'physical or emotional abuse', all of which clearly fall within the competence of diocesan safeguarding offices/teams/departments. It also mentions 'health and safety', 'bullying or harassment', 'data breaches' and 'discrimination on any of the grounds in the Equality Act 2010'; all of which are addressed by other diocesan curial departments.

'Safeguarding children or adults at risk' has its own subsection in this UK government advice, alongside other categories such as 'policies, procedures and practices you need to have', 'working overseas', 'terrorism and the Prevent duty' and so on. The subsection on '*Safeguarding children or adults at risk*' details the additional responsibilities to be fulfilled in this specific area of protecting people from harm.

It is evident from this that the duty on charities (and consequently on dioceses because of their charitable status) to protect people from harm clearly includes the safeguarding of children and adults at risk, but is a broader duty which is fulfilled by different diocesan curial departments depending on the nature of the harm from which those who come into contact with the charity are being protected, i.e., Health and Safety, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Human Resources, etc.

This view is reinforced by the safeguarding policies of government agencies such as His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, which makes it clear that their duty of safeguarding is towards children and adults at risk.[17] It for this reason that the 'safeguarding children or adults at risk' is the specific focus of a diocesan 'safeguarding office/team' or 'safeguarding department', as opposed to the more general duty of 'protecting from harm', and it is why each diocese must adopt appropriate policies and procedures specific to the safeguarding of children and adults at risk.

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[15] Vos estis Lux Mundi (Introduction).

[16] '*Safeguarding and Protecting People for Charities and Trustees*': https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-duties-for-charity-trustees, updated, 1st June 2022.

[17] Cf. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-in-hmcts/hmcts-safeguarding-policy.

It is important to note that diocesan trustees have a collective responsibility to protect from harm and safeguard, and whilst they can delegate protection and safeguarding actions to diocesan offices/teams or departments, they retain overall responsibility for ensuring the safety and protection of individuals in their care through their strategic oversight of the diocese's fiduciary obligations and duties, by the adoption of appropriate policies and procedures, and in ensuring that these are implemented, reviewed, and updated in accordance with statutory guidance and legislation.

It is also the responsibility of office holders, parish priests, parochial administrators and parochial vicars, and all employees of a charity (diocese), to ensure that they comply with all the adopted policies and procedures of the charity to care for and protect all those who are the beneficiaries of the charity and for whom they exercise their ministry.

All these crucial elements assist us in our ministry within the Church to care safely for others.

II: Aim and Objective

In 2007 the Cumberlege Commission Report, 'Safeguarding with Confidence – Keeping Children and Vulnerable Adults Safe in the Catholic Church', had recommended Codes of Conduct for all clergy, non-clergy religious and lay people working within the Church. Codes of Conduct have been provided for non-clergy religious and lay people who work in the service of the Church, including volunteers.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales recognised that the 'code' which governs the conduct and all aspects of the life and ministry of each member of the clergy[18] is the Code of Canon Law. The Code provides the *"positive and holistic context for a set of behaviours"*[19] which support the conduct, standards, and spiritual growth in the ministry of each bishop, priest and deacon; it also provides the juridic context for holding members of the clergy to account for their conduct.

Rooted in the Code of Canon Law and the teaching of the Church, the Church's 'Directories'[20] for each degree of the Sacrament of Holy Orders also set out the principal doctrinal, disciplinary, and pastoral expectations for the ministry of clergy.

Although the Code of Canon Law and the Directories provide the principles which govern the conduct of clergy, there remains a need for further guidance, training, and ongoing formation[21] concerning the conduct of clergy specifically in relation to their ministry of safeguarding.

The aim of this document is to ensure that, in the exercise of their 'care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible' and the responsibility to safeguard Christ's 'little ones', all clergy who exercise ministry in England and Wales are familiar with the best safe pastoral standards and practices, and that these are conducted within appropriate boundaries, often referred to as 'professional boundaries.'

This document does not attempt to address all of the pastoral standards and practices that need to be understood and followed in all circumstances of the ordained ministry, i.e. prayer, liturgy, administration, etc. Rather, it presents a concise framework for the principles of safe conduct, rooted in the Code of Canon Law and the magisterium, which foster and promote integrity specifically in the ministry of safeguarding exercised by clergy. From these principles,

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[18] For the purpose of this document, 'clergy' includes all secular (diocesan) clergy, clerical members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and clergy from abroad or other jurisdictions working in England and Wales.

[19] *Safeguarding with Confidence – Keeping Children and Vulnerable Adults Safe in the Catholic Church* §2.35, The Cumberlege Commission Report, 2007.

[20] Cf. *Apostolorum Successores (Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops)*, Congregation for Bishops, 2004; *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, Congregation for Clergy, 2013; and, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons,* Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998.

[21] Cf. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*: *"…each priest must feel encouraged to assume responsibility for his own formation,"* he is the *"first agent of his own formation"* (§80); *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*, §§63-82; *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*, §49.

it enunciates some of the pastoral standards which ensure that the conduct and behaviour of clergy, both in public and private life, safeguards others, particularly children and adults at risk; it is not a *"list of forbidden behaviours but an aid to enable them to preserve their dignity whilst respecting the dignity of those with whom they work and serve."*[22]

For the majority of deacons, priests and bishops, these principles will not be new or unfamiliar but will give an explicit expression to the ministry of safeguarding they seek to exercise already. The objective of this document is, therefore, to assist all clergy in ensuring that the pastoral ministry they provide is being conducted safely and responsibly; it should assure them that they can exercise their ministry with *"freedom and energy… It is about ways in which they preserve their dignity whilst respecting the dignity of those with whom they work and serve."*[23]

[22] *Safeguarding with Confidence,* §2.34.

[23] Ibid.

III: The Ministry of Safeguarding and the Safeguarding of Ministry

By virtue of the pastoral office held as servants and shepherds within Christ's Church, those who are ordained as deacons, priests and bishops are given immense trust by many people; they are given also a unique welcome and a privileged access into the lives of children, adults, families and institutions.

With this trust, welcome and access, comes the corresponding principle for each ordained minister to:

1. Respect Human Dignity – respect the dignity of each person as someone who is created *"in the image and likeness of God;"*[24]
2. Defend, Protect and Safeguard - to defend, protect and safeguard the sacred value of all *"human life from its very beginning until its end"*[25], particularly the lives of those who are vulnerable and at risk.
3. Communicate with Care - to communicate and model all thoughts, words, and actions on the person of Jesus Christ [26] and exercise the sacred ministry faithfully [27], responsibly[28] and sensitively.[29]

These principles form not only the basis for the conduct by which all clergy must exercise their ministry of safeguarding but also the pastoral standards which form the foundation for the safeguarding of their ministry. The cultivation and practice of pastoral standards safeguard the ministry of the ordained; these standards generate trust and make safe the welcome and access given to clergy by those they serve.

Because the ordained ministry is itself the fruit of sacramental grace given in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, every aspect of the exercise of ministry should be understood as a response to the *"call to ministry and priestly life as a continuous configuration to Christ"*[30] and all its actions *"expressed in fervent prayer, in integrity of life, in the pastoral charity of a ministry tirelessly spending itself for the salvation of the faithful."*[31]

The ministry exercised by deacons, priests and bishops is, therefore, a sacramental vocation and not a professional career; it cannot be fulfilled by the observance and application of a

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[24] Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 768, §2; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1701 to 1709.

[25] Cf. *Evangelium Vitae* §2.

[26] Cf. *Apostolorum Successores* §2, §33, §43 & §97, Congregation for Bishops, 2004; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §15, Pope St Paul VI, 1965; *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* §12, Congregation for Clergy, 2002; *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* §8, §38, §45, §47, §49, & §69, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998.

[27] *Code of Canon Law,* Canon 276, §2, 1°.

[28] Ibid. Canons 285, §1 & §2.

[29] Ibid. Canon 287, §1.

[30] *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis: The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, Introduction §3, Congregation for the Clergy, 2016.

[31] *Homily Solemn at the conclusion of the World 'Retreat' for Priests*, Pope John Paul II, Rome, 9th October 1984.

specific set of knowledge and skills alone. Nevertheless, within the wider community and in public society, there is the expectation that clergy conduct themselves 'professionally' in the exercise of their ministry[32]; that is, act and live in a way which correlates to the responsibilities and characteristics of their vocation.

Similarly, although bishops, priests and deacons do not hold public office, they do hold ecclesiastical offices and exercise pastoral ministries which are public in nature.[33] Holders of public office are *"accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office".*[34] In the same way, clergy must be prepared to be held accountable for their conduct and aspire to observe the highest standards of behaviour in the exercise of their ministry.

The reason for this aspiration is that the standards for the exercise of the ordained ministry are derived from the divine law of love,[35] from the mandate for ministry received from Christ at ordination[36], and from a vocation which places *"a special obligation to seek holiness"*[37] on those who have received the Sacrament of Holy Orders to live in a way which is conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ.[38] Moreover, the efficacy of their ministry is *"possible only with the grace of the Holy Spirit."*[39]

The ministry of safeguarding must therefore, like all pastoral ministry, be rooted in prayer.[40] Together with this prayer comes the need to make an honest examination of the way ordained ministry is conducted. Making an examination of conscience on personal conduct in the daily course of ministry should be already a regular feature in the spiritual life of each member of the clergy.[41] To ensure that care for others in pastoral ministry is conducted safely and is observed in accordance with safeguarding norms, the following section 'Pastoral Standards and Safe Practices in the Conduct of Ministry' is presented as a guide and framework to assist bishops, priests and deacons to exercise ministry in a way which always safeguards others and safeguards the integrity of the ordained ministry.

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[32] Cf. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* §96.

[33] Cf. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* §62 & §66, Congregation for Clergy, 2013.

[34] *The Seven Principles of Public Life*, Committee on Standards in Public Life, UK Government, 1995 (The 2013 report of the Committee states that *"The principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services"*).

[35] Matthew 22:37-40.

[36] Cf. *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* §336, Pope Benedict XVI, 1995.

[37] *Code of Canon Law,* Canon 276 §1.

[38] Cf. *Apostolorum Successores* §2, §33, §43 & §97; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §15, Pope St Paul VI, 1965; *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community* §12*,* Congregation for Clergy, 2002; *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* §8, §38, §45, §47, §49, & §69*,* Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998.

[39] *Vos estis Lux Mundi* (Introduction).

[40] Cf. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* §49 to §53.

[41] Cf. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* §50 & §94; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §18, Pope St Paul VI, 1965; *Pastores dabo vobis* §6, Pope St John Paul II, 1992.

IV: Pastoral Standards and Safe Practices in the Conduct of Ministry

With the trust we receive as ordained ministers, as well as the welcome and access we are given into the lives of those we serve, comes the overall responsibility to conduct our ministry in a way that is always faithful to Christ.[42] This means that the pastoral standards and the safe practices integral to our ministry must be known and understood, as well as adhered to and modelled in our behaviour. The following are not exhaustive but are among the most important:

1. RESPECT HUMAN DIGNITY

With the immense trust we receive, comes the duty to respect the dignity of each person as someone who is created in the image and likeness of God. This principle entails that we adhere to specific pastoral standards and safe practices in the conduct of our safeguarding ministry, namely to:

1.1 Exercise a particular care and concern for others and for those we encounter in our ministry whose lives are affected by any form of abuse. This requires that we:

a. Promote and uphold the dignity, safety, health, and wellbeing of others.

b. Try to see, and conduct, all of our safeguarding ministry with the heart of Christ and through the eyes of victims and survivors of abuse, and the experience of their families.

c. Pray for the victims and survivors of abuse, and for their families.

1.2 Observe and comply with the safeguarding principles and standards, policies and procedures adopted for use by the Catholic Church in England and Wales. This requires that we:

a. Fulfil our personal responsibility to complete and understand the mandatory safeguarding training[43] provided by the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

b. Maintain our knowledge and competence of good safeguarding practice through participation in the ongoing formation and training[44] provided by the Church and, where necessary or appropriate[45], by other safeguarding agencies.

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[42] Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* §§12-14, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 1965.

[43] Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 279 §2. As part of the one Church strategic approach to safeguarding, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has agreed that all clergy must complete a national safeguarding training program. In accordance with the Church's national safeguarding standards, safeguarding training is mandatory for all clergy, and each bishop, priest and deacon must have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check which must be refreshed every 3 years, and complete safeguarding training/refresher modules every 2 years.

[44] *Pastores Dabo Vobis*: *"…the proper foundation and original motivation for ongoing formation is contained in the dynamism of the sacrament of holy orders"* (§70); *"…it is the priest himself, the individual priest, who is the person primarily responsible in the Church for ongoing formation. Truly each priest has the duty, rooted in the sacrament of holy orders, to be faithful to the gift God has given him and to respond to the call for daily conversion which comes with the gift itself"* (§79).

[45] Additional safeguarding training may be required in the exercise of particular ministries or chaplaincies, e.g. universities, schools, hospitals, prisons, etc.

c. Become cognisant of the causes and signs of child abuse[46] and the abuse of adults at risk[47], and the steps to be taken for their protection.

d. Immediately follow the applicable reporting procedures if abuse or neglect is suspected, observed, or alleged.

1.3 Acknowledge and be mindful of the position of trust which we hold, the 'power'[48] which many people attach to our status as clergy, and the authority which we exercise as an ordained minister [49]. This requires that we:

a. Never abuse the immense trust[50] that is placed in us.

b. Never abuse our authority or status as clergy but always *"strive not to be served but to serve."*[51]

c. Demonstrate an exemplary respect for everyone we encounter.

1.4 Recognise that in our relationships with others, the position of trust which we hold in statutory terms and in the authority which we exercise as an ordained minister requires us to be especially diligent in safeguarding their care and welfare. This requires that we:

a. Act with cognisance of the inequalities, the imbalance of 'power', and the risks that can accompany our relationship as a member of the clergy with any person but particularly in our relationships with children and adults at risk and ensure that all our actions safeguard and serve their wellbeing.

1.5 Respect and maintain the boundaries appropriate to our relationships with every person in pastoral ministry, irrespective of their age or condition in life. This requires that we:

a. Observe proper spiritual, physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological boundaries[52] in every aspect of our conduct and in the exercise of our ministry.

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[46] Child abuse includes physical, emotional, and sexual criminal offences, as well as neglect, of a child.

[47] Abuse of adults at risk includes physical abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, financial or material abuse, modern slavery, discriminatory abuse, organisational or institutional abuse, neglect or acts of omission, and self-neglect. As well as grave moral offenses, many of these types of abuse are also criminal offences and should be treated as such. Clergy, in the course of their ministry, often come into contact with people with care and support needs; it is important that they are able to identify abuse and recognise possible indicators of abuse.

[48] Cf. Footnote 6 above, Page 3

[49] *"Living out justice in the Church means purifying ecclesial relationships and structures from distortions that give rise to inequality, lack of transparency and abuse of power … Every power is at the service of communion and mission. All authority is at the service of the People of God." Magnifica Humanitas* §89, Pope Leo XIV, 15th May 2026.

[50] Cf. Footnote 7 above, Page 3.

[51] Mark 10:45.

[52] These 'boundaries' promote the well-being of the people to whom a member of the clergy ministers as well as of the member of the clergy himself. Boundaries create a safe, transparent, accountable, and predictable environment; they help to establish clear roles and expectations, and they serve to protect and preserve the integrity of relationships in ministry.

b. Act only in those ways which are within our competence as clergy and any professional qualifications we hold which relate to the exercise of our ministry.

c. Make sure that our natural response to want to reach out and comfort those who are suffering or in distress is not repressed but in considering an appropriate and compassionate response to individuals, consider their needs and the consent to reach out and provide comfort.

d. Avoid in our words and actions any suggestion that we are seeking or initiating emotional or sexual intimacy, coercing affection or manifesting personal favouritism.

e. Observe the boundaries between a pastoral relationship and friendship.[53]

1.6 Respect our own dignity and needs, attend to the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral aspects of our need for ongoing formation in ministry, cultivate our spiritual and intellectual life, and have care for our physical health and emotional well-being with the conviction that the more effectively we live a mature human life, the more fully enriched will our pastoral ministry to God's people. This requires that we:

a. Maintain our closeness and friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ.[54]

b. Maintain the relational and social dimension of our lives with family[55] and friends.[56]

c. Avoid becoming isolated in our ministry by maintaining and fostering the bonds of fraternity with other clergy in our deanery, diocese, and the wider Church.[57]

d. Ensure we take sufficient relaxation and rest.[58]

e. Continue to nourish our intellectual life through further study.[59]

f. Collaborate with other clergy[60] and the laity[61] in the exercise of our ministry.

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[53] In therapeutic settings (e.g. counselling, medicine, etc.), the professional boundaries make clear that the nature of the relationship between the professional and client is *not* friendship. The boundaries between clergy and those to whom they minister though are not as clear as the strict professional boundaries that exist for those working in professional therapeutic roles. Nevertheless, experience within the Church has shown that dual relationships which combine spiritual or pastoral care and close friendship can increase the risk of actual or perceived abuse of power. In our pastoral ministry therefore, we must bear full responsibility for establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries in the development of our relationships with those for whom we are called to serve, particularly with children and adults at risk.

[54] Cf. *Code of Canon Law,* Canon 276.

[55] Cf. *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* §148.

[56] Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* §44.

[57] Cf. *Code of Canon Law,* Canon 278 §1 & §2.

[58] Ibid. Canon 283 §2.

[59] Ibid. Canon 279 §1 to §3.

[60] Ibid. Canon 275 §1.

[61] Ibid. Canon 275 §2.

1.7 Understand, respect, and try to ensure that the individual needs of children and adults at risk are being met within the context and circumstances of the sacramental or pastoral ministry being provided. This requires that we:

a. Actively promote, and model for others to follow, the practice of good safeguarding ministry in all aspects of our relationships with children and adults at risk.

b. Show respect for, and demonstrate inclusivity to, children and adults with special needs and disabilities.

1.8 Always give witness in our use of information and communication technology to a way of life that respects the dignity and value of the human person.[62] This requires that we:

a. Always act chastely.[63]

b. Never deliberately access any websites, artificial intelligence (AI)[64] technology or social media platforms that contain unchaste or sexually provocative imagery[65] and which may incorporate illegal images of children or adults.[66]

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[62] Cf. *Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter*, Message of Pope Francis for the 50th World Day of Social Communications, 2016: *"Access to digital networks entails a responsibility for our neighbour whom we do not see but who is nonetheless real and has a dignity which must be respected"*.

[63] Cf. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, §60.

[64] Cf. *Magnifica Humanitas,* 'On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence', Pope Leo XIV, 15th May 2026. Paragraph 141, makes clear that AI is not a harmless technology. Users can misuse it to create illegal content and manipulate images and videos. One major concern is a significant increase in the creation and dissemination of AI-generated child sexual abuse material.

[65] Cf. *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media: A Pastoral Response*, Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 7th May 1989; Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication §11, a, Congregation for Catholic Education, 19th March 1986.

[66] Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 1398 §1 3° and Cf. *Vos estis Lux Mundi*, Art.1, §2, c: *"any representation of a minor, regardless of the means used, involved in explicit sexual activities, whether real or simulated, and any representation of sexual organs of minors for lewd purposes or for profit."*. As well as being a criminal offence, the *"immoral acquisition, possession, exhibition or distribution, in any way or by any means, of pornographic images of minors or of persons who habitually have imperfect use of reason; the recruitment or inducement of a minor or of a person who habitually has imperfect use of reason or of a vulnerable adult to pose in a pornographic manner or to participate in real or simulated pornographic exhibitions."* (*Vos estis Lux Mundi*, Art.1, §1, a, iii and iv) is a delict against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue and subject to a canonical penalty which may include dismissal from the clerical state. Because of the seriousness of the crime, jurisdiction is reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cf. *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*, Apostolic Letter motu proprio promulgated by John Paul II, 30th April 2001 (Revised by Benedict XVI, 21st May 2010). The much wider protections afforded all persons by civil legislation in force in England and Wales concerning the making, possession, and distribution of indecent images of children and adults is governed by the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Online Safety Act.

The normal position for civil legislation existing in England and Wales is that it will only apply to offences occurring in England and Wales. However, the provisions under s1 of the *Protection of Children Act 1978* and s160 of *Criminal Justice Act 1988* now have extra-territorial protection due to s72 of the *Sexual Offences Act 2003* and the *Online Safety Act 2023*. Accordingly, any act carried out by a person in a country or territory outside the United Kingdom shall constitute a sexual offence under United Kingdom law if it would constitute an offence under the laws of that territory and it would also constitute a sexual offence under the civil laws of England and Wales.

1.9 Seek reconciliation and resolve as far as possible any disagreements we have with those to whom we minister. This requires that we:

a. Always act fairly and without prejudice or unjust discrimination.

b. Seek mediation when appropriate or needed to assist in resolving disputes or a breakdown in pastoral relationships.

2. DEFEND, PROTECT AND SAFEGUARD

With the unique welcome we receive, comes the duty to defend, protect and safeguard the sacred value of all human life from its very beginning until its end, particularly the lives of those who are vulnerable and at risk. This principle entails that we adhere to specific pastoral standards and safe practices in the conduct of our safeguarding ministry, namely to:

2.1 Provide, with the proper and appropriate assistance, a physically safe environment in our churches, parish halls, and other parish facilities. This requires that we:

a. Ensure that we exercise the responsibility expected of us by the diocesan bishop for the day-to-day oversight, physical maintenance, and care for all the temporal goods of the Church entrusted to our ministry and canonical administration.[67]

b. Ensure our places of worship and the facilities for which we hold responsibility are maintained and comply with the requirements of statutory health and safety legislation and ensure that all relevant civil law is complied with in relation to parish property.[68]

2.2 Provide personal pastoral or sacramental ministry only in places and at times of the day which offer a sufficiently open environment, and in an accountable manner. This requires that we:

a. Ensure that our pastoral ministry to children is conducted in an open environment where we are in view of other adults, or within their hearing.

b. Ensure that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is celebrated with children in an open yet confidential setting or in a confessional where there is a physical separation between the child and confessor.

c. Ensure that prudence and discretion are used, taking into account the condition and the age of the penitent, should there ever be a need for questions to be asked of the penitent during the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.[69]

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[67] Cf. *Code of Canon Law,* Canon 1284.

[68] Ibid., Canon 1284, §2, 2° & 3°.

[69] Ibid., Canon 979. It is not appropriate for a priest to ask questions unrelated to the sins a penitent is confessing. The advice given in this Canon is clear, "In asking questions the priest is to act with prudence and discretion, taking into account the condition and the age of the penitent." This is particularly pertinent when hearing the confessions of those under eighteen years of age. If a sexual act has been confessed there is no need to ask further questions. To do so only causes the penitent embarrassment and may make them averse to seeking the Sacrament of Penance again. Any questioning perceived as intrusive, grooming behaviour, or inappropriate inquiry into matters unmentioned by a child penitent violates proper pastoral boundaries.

d. Always ensure that when we are leading or participating in pre-organised pastoral or social activities for children or adults at risk, there is at least one, and whenever possible two or more, other adults present.[70]

e. Maintain a written record of the persons present as well as the date and time of the visits we make to the sick and housebound for whom we hold pastoral responsibility.[71]

2.3 Assume the full burden of responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries with children and adults at risk. This requires that we:

a. Do not be alone with a child or an adult at risk without the support and assistance of at least one other adult.

b. Never permit a child that is unaccompanied by their parent or legal guardian, or an adult at risk who is unaccompanied by their carer, to visit or to stay overnight in the presbytery or any other residence we use.[72]

c. Never take a child or an adult at risk on a trip or vacation alone.[73]

d. Never give or provide alcohol (unless administering the chalice during Holy Communion), tobacco or other drugs to children.

e. Never give any gifts to children without the knowledge of their parents or to adults at risk without the knowledge of their carers or relatives.

2.4 Seek the assistance of, and work in close partnership with, our lay collaborators[74] (e.g. Diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator, parish Safeguarding Representative(s), parishioners exercising specific roles and responsibilities within the parish) and other agencies in the exercise of our safeguarding ministry. This requires that we:

a. Ensure our lay collaborators, with the help that they provide us in the exercise of pastoral or sacramental ministry to children and adults at risk: undergo the appropriate training[75]; observe and comply with the safeguarding principles and standards, policies and procedures adopted for use by the Catholic Church in England and Wales; work in an open and accountable manner; and, where they do

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[70] Cf. CSSA practice guidance 'Organising and running church events involving children, young people and adults at risk': https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/resources/parish-resources/.

[71] To safeguard our own ministry, whenever possible we should consider seeking support from another when visiting a sick person who may be at risk and who will not have carers or family present with them.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 275 §2.

[75] In accordance with the Church's national safeguarding standards, safeguarding training for lay employees and volunteers (over 18 years of age) in Catholic communities across England and Wales, is tiered into different levels based on the employee's or volunteer's role and level of regulated activity, and it must be renewed every 3 years. It is the responsibility of the parish priest or parochial administrator of each parish, working in collaboration with their Parish Safeguarding Representative (PSR) to ensure that all parish staff and volunteers have undergone the appropriate tier of safeguarding training.

not, ensure they are held to account.

b. Refer to other agencies for help where appropriate or when advised to by the Church's professional safeguarding staff or by the statutory authorities.

2.5 Stand ready to be held to account and hold to account [76] those with whom we collaborate, for the way we exercise our safeguarding ministry. This requires that we:

a. Be willing to accept questions or criticism regarding the good practice of our safeguarding ministry.

b. Be willing to question or challenge other clergy[77] and our lay[78] collaborators regarding their good practice in the work of safeguarding children and adults at risk.

3. COMMUNICATE WITH CARE

With the 'privileged access' we receive as ordained ministers, comes the duty to model all communication in thoughts, words, and actions on the person of Jesus Christ and exercise the sacred ministry entrusted to us faithfully, responsibly, and sensitively; to safeguard ourselves and to safeguard others. This principle entails that we adhere to specific pastoral standards and safe practices in the conduct of our safeguarding ministry, namely to:

3.1 Communicate with other people in a way that mirrors the humility, patience, gentleness, and compassion of Christ[79]. This requires that we:

a. Ensure that we use only appropriate and respectful forms of interaction in the presence of other people.

b. Exercise care and prudence when conversing with a penitent during confession in the Sacrament of Penance[80].

c. Exercise care and prudence when using social media.

d. Exercise care and prudence when preaching or giving talks on sensitive issues.

e. Acknowledge the position of authority we hold and never speak to other people in a sarcastic, derogatory, or offensive manner.

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[76] Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1311.

[77] Ibid., Canon 275 §1.

[78] Ibid., Canon 275 §2.

[79] Ibid., Canon 287 §1 and Cf. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, §62.

[80] The Sacrament of Penance is where a penitent encounters the loving forgiveness of Christ. However, a penitent's meeting with a priest is one-to-one; it is private and there is a power imbalance. The advice given in Canon 979 of the Code of Canon Law is invaluable, *"In asking questions the priest is to act with prudence and discretion, taking into account the condition and the age of the penitent"*.

f. Be mindful of, and seek to understand, the cultural differences of other people and their families, who are migrants or from ethnic minority backgrounds.

3.2 Maintain clear and appropriate boundaries with those for whom we provide pastoral care. This requires that we:

a. Avoid any behaviour that could reasonably be interpreted as coercive or controlling (coercive or controlling behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a person), harassment or bullying (harassment or bullying can occur as a result of a single incident or a pattern of behaviour where the purpose or effect is to create a hostile, offensive humiliating or intimidating environment).[81]

b. Refrain from using any physical contact[82] that is not integral to the administration of a sacrament or the imparting of a prayer of blessing (nor use any physical contact with a child that is not in the presence and sight of a child's parent, legal guardian, teachers or other responsible adult, nor use any physical contact with an adult at risk unless another responsible adult is present).

c. Ensure that all our expressions of physical contact with others should be given only with the prior consent of the other person.[83]

3.3 Communicate and behave in a manner which is modelled always on the life of Christ. This requires that we:

a. Never take any illegal drugs.[84]

b. Refrain from exercising ministry when under the influence of any prescription medication that may adversely affect our capacity to safeguard others.

c. Be moderate in our use of alcohol and never exercise ministry when under the influence of alcohol.[85]

d. Never use profane language or make indecent, vulgar, or sexual comments; nor make jests or pranks that could be reasonably perceived as suggestive by others.

e. Never make disparaging remarks about other people, neither in private conversation, public discourse nor on social media.

3.4 Demonstrate prudence and self-awareness in the choices and decisions we take. This requires that we:

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[81] Cf. Footnote 73 above, Page 15.

[82] Other than physical contact associated with formal or friendly gestures, e.g. handshakes or limited, appropriate contact such as touching hands, shoulders or arms when showing affirmation or comfort for someone grieving.

[83] Cf. Note [64] above. To safeguard ministry, the requirement for consent includes also the physical contact initiated by others with ordained ministers.

[84] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2291.

[85] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2290.

a. Be vigilant in the awareness and consideration of how our actions, even performed with good intentions, can be misinterpreted or seem intrusive and intimidating by other people.

3.5 Never use our status to solicit or obtain any personal benefit or financial advantage. This requires that we:

a. Refrain from managing the finances and goods of any lay person, especially an adult at risk, without the permission of the Ordinary.[86]

b. Exercise prudent judgement in giving gifts to, and receiving gifts from, other people (including groups of people), especially those who are entrusted to our spiritual and pastoral care in the offices we hold as ordained ministers.

c. Refrain from accepting personal gifts of high value or money offered by others (again, especially the people entrusted to our spiritual and pastoral care in the offices we hold as ordained ministers), yet endeavour to demonstrate with sensitivity our gratitude for their generosity.

3.6 Use electronic forms of communication and other media[87], respectfully, responsibly, and transparently.[88] This requires that we:

a. Never invite children or adults at risk, or accept invitations from them, to be 'friends' or contacts on any personal social media sites[89] we use or otherwise interact with them on those sites.[90]

b. Never communicate with a child on a one-to-one basis via technology or social media[91] (including text messages or email).

c. Ensure that any media we use to communicate with children is supervised by their parents or legal guardians, enables a copy of the communication to be sent simultaneously to the children's parents or legal guardians, and provides our identity (full name, as well as the pastoral office we hold).

d. Identify ourselves clearly by name, as well as the pastoral office we hold, in all forms of written communication with children and adults.

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[86] Cf. *Code of Canon Law,* Canon 285 §4.

[87] Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canon 822 on the general use of social communications and Canon 823 on the duty and right of bishops "to ensure that in writings or in the use of the means of social communication there should be no ill effect on the faith and morals of Christ's faithful."

[88] *Ethics in Communications*, Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 4 June 2000. In the United Kingdom, the use of social media is regulated by a number of civil laws such as the Malicious Communications Act 1988, the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 (section 43), the Communications Act 2003, the Defamation Act 2013, and the Online Safety Act 2023.

[89] E.g. As 'friends' on a personal *Facebook* profile or contacts on other social media platforms.

[90] Many parishes now have social media platforms which are transparent and are monitored by delegated people.

[91] 'Social media' refers to web-based external, commercial, or media websites and applications used to connect with other people and maintain relationships and communities.

e. Notify immediately the Safeguarding Coordinator and Vicar General of any inappropriate forms of comments, images, or behaviour that we receive from other people.

3.7 Respect the vulnerability and right to privacy of the people to whom we provide pastoral and sacramental care. This requires that we:

a. Refrain from making any kind of video or audio recording of the pastoral or sacramental care given to children or adults at risk without the prior written permission of the parent (or the legal guardian) of each child or the permission of each adult at risk (or their official carer).[92]

b. Obtain the written permission of a child's parent or legal guardian before using a child's name or image in any newsletter, website, or other publication.[93]

3.8 Ensure that the personal data and confidentiality of those who seek and receive our pastoral ministry is respected and maintained. This requires that we:

a. Never provide information to others about the pastoral ministry being provided to children or adults at risk without the prior written permission of the parent (or the legal guardian) of each child or the permission of each adult at risk (or their official carer).

[92] Cf. CSSA practice guidance 'Organising and running church events involving children, young people and adults at risk' and 'Videoconferencing': https://catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/resources/parish-resources/.

[93] Ibid.

PRAYERS FOR THE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

(Prayers promoted by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors)

Heavenly Father,
who loves and cares for all of your children,
especially the smallest and most vulnerable,
we entrust to you the lives of the many children and vulnerable adults,
who have been sexually abused, and whose trust and innocence have been destroyed.
Help us to hear their cries of pain and to take responsibility for so many broken lives.
We pray that within their communities and families.
they may find understanding and support so that.
with the help of your grace their wounds may be healed,
and they may again know peace.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who shared our weakness in all things but sin,
and lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever.
Amen.

Heavenly Father,
Since your mercy has been revealed in the tenderness of your Son Jesus Christ,
who said to his disciples: “Let the little children come to me”,
we pray that your Church may be a secure home
where all children and vulnerable adults are brought closer to your Beloved Son.
May all those who have been abused physically,
emotionally and sexually by your ministers,
be respected and accompanied by tangible gestures of justice and reparation
so that they may feel healed with the balm of your compassion.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.