

## **FOCOLARE MOVEMENT**

### **GUIDELINES ON PROTECTION OF MINORS AND VULNERABLE PERSONS**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Focolare Movement (Work of Mary) is an international organization, a private association of pontifical right with legal status. At its core is a Gospel-centered spirituality, Christian love as a way of life, and has unity and universal brotherhood as its goals. In all of its youth sections (in particular Gen 3, Gen 4, Gen 5, Teens for unity) through the various activities available for minors, the Focolare Movement promotes the formation of the whole person, recognized in his/her unique and unreproducible identity. The Focolare Movement recognizes the dignity and respect of every child and young person in line with the Gospel vision, helping to develop their human and spiritual capabilities and bring out the best in each individual.

Adopting the principles established by International Law regarding the protection of minors, the Focolare Movement is committed to prevent and avoid any type of violence, abuse, maltreatment and bullying of minors which is free of harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination during any activities.

All the members of the Focolare Movement are required to comply with this document.

The Focolare Movement aims to resolve any issue promptly, as and when it arises, and to resolve complaints in a fair and timely manner and at all times in accordance with applicable law.

## 2. Eligibility/Scope

The Focolare Movement will not tolerate harassment or discrimination in any form, whether deliberate or unintentional, obvious or subtle, initiated by or directed toward anyone within the Focolare Movement, including all members, participants or visitors or guests. The Focolare Movement values the health, safety, and wellbeing of its people, and is committed to preventing and avoiding any type of violence, abuse, maltreatment so that participants are free from harassment and discrimination in all its activities. These guidelines apply to all activities between the members including but not limited to after-activities social events, social media, emails, texting and phone calls.

For the purposes of these guidelines, 'vulnerable persons' are considered equivalent to 'minors', the former being understood to mean any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency or deprivation of personal freedom, that effectively, and even occasionally, limits the ability to understand, desire, or in any event, resist the offence.

## 3. Meaning of Harassment and Discrimination

Harassment means bullying, belittling, or threatening behaviour directed at an individual or group. This may include, but may not be limited to, acts of verbal, emotional, or physical abuse directed at any individual or group by an individual or a group. Harassment can be either direct or indirect (i.e. directed toward a specific individual or group or simply the creation of an environment in which harassment persists). Such behaviour may be considered harassment regardless of whether it is an isolated incident, a series of incidents, or an ongoing pattern of behaviour. It may be overt or subtle, deliberate or unintentional, and often happens when power is used wrongly. Harassment can include, but is not limited to:

Comment(s) or conduct that is known to be, or ought reasonably to be known to be, unwelcome, intimidating and/or humiliating, or where such behaviour would likely be characterized as harassing by an objective individual.

Distressing behaviour, in the form of repeated, hostile or unwanted conduct such as unwanted physical contact or threatening gestures, aggressive yelling; verbal comments, actions, or gestures, or demonstration of inappropriate images. Abusive or unacceptable comments such as aggressive and/or derogatory comments, or jokes, offensive languages which results in a feeling of being humiliated.

Sexual harassment, a form of harassment, is defined as any unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature in any place or occasion whether by a leader, team leader, peer, member or visitor, including unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual contact, and verbal, written, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment can be either intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect i.e. directed toward a specific individual or group or simply the creation of an environment in which sexual harassment persists.

Discrimination is defined as the less favourable treatment of a person or group on the basis of a specific status (e.g. race, religion, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex, etc.), or on the perceived basis that individuals of that status would either possess certain undesirable characteristics or not possess certain desirable characteristics. As with harassment, discrimination can be deliberate or unintentional, direct or indirect (i.e., directed toward a specific individual or group or simply the creation of an environment in which discrimination persists).

#### 4. Anti-harassment and Discrimination Policy

First of all, the Focolare Movement adopts the following precautionary measures:

- a) Entrusting minors to people who are fully responsible for their actions and behaviour, committed to living the Gospel in line with the Focolare Movement's Spirituality of Communion, and are trained to be with children and young people (as specified in the criteria for the promotion and protection of the wellbeing of minors in the first part of this guidelines);
- b) Providing and ensuring safe environments for children and young people, in which they can engage in age-appropriate recreational and educational activities without psychological pressure, where their dignity is respected and safeguarded, and their development is fostered and encouraged;
- c) Cultivating a culture of respect and esteem for others, safeguarding the freedom, altruism, and the equality, dignity, autonomy of each individual and standards of behaviour expected, so as to prevent any form of peer-on-peer abuse;
- d) Responding effectively and promptly to any report of abuse against a member of the Focolare Movement in accordance with the provisions of these guidelines; committing to reconstruct, as far as possible, the facts of the reported allegation;
- e) Informing the relevant legal authority, where the country's laws and the local Bishops' Conference / Diocese require mandatory reporting;
- f) Guaranteeing the Focolare Movement's unlimited support to those who have suffered abuse and their families;
- g) Offering psychological and spiritual support to any member of the Focolare Movement who has committed an offence against a child, a young person, or a vulnerable person, in order to guarantee increased protection and safeguarding for children.

## 5. Conduct and Responsibilities of the Members

- (a) Setting an example by demonstrating appropriate behaviour at all times;
- (b) Taking an active role in preventing harassment or discrimination by the following ways:-
  - (i) Any leader, volunteer or Member (“Helper”) assigned on a stable or long-term basis to work with minors is required to sign a declaration which states that he/she has no criminal record including sexual abuse. The conduct of each Helper should be reviewed from time to time, i.e. at least annually;
  - (ii) More than one Helper should be assigned to look after minors taking part in outdoor camps and trips;
  - (iii) When an individual youth Helper is conducting a function or providing service for minors in any room, it is recommended that the door should be kept open if there is no transparent window from which all activities inside the room are visible;
  - (iv) the Helper should avoid all unnecessary physical and body contact with minors as well as making any inappropriate remarks or gestures which, according to common ethical values, are likely to arouse the discomfort or unpleasantness of minors;
  - (v) For all functions or activities, the Helper should avoid being put in a one-to-one situation;
  - (vi) The Helper should never supply or serve alcohol or any kind of illegal drugs to minors;
  - (vii) The Helper should be prudent in the bestowal of gifts or any kind of benefits to minors, lest this be construed as enticement.
- (c) Taking immediate action to address the matter when a complaint is received including complying with actions as described in paragraph 6 below;

(d) Being alert to incidents that may constitute harassment or discrimination and acting to prevent such conduct;

(e) All Members are required to draw attention to these guidelines.

## 6. Handling of complaints of bullying behaviour, harassment or discrimination

The Focolare Movement does not tolerate bullying, harassment or discrimination in any occasions, the victim can email\* to report the incident(s), complaints/reports of any incidents are taken seriously and will be dealt with promptly and carry out the investigation in the following manner: -

### (A) For bullying behaviour or discrimination

1. The Leader should prevent the suspect from joining any activities with the victim and also monitor the suspect when he/she join any activities;
2. The Leader should provide assistance to the victim and the suspect to assess whether any destructive behaviour;
3. Inform parents/guardians/anyone of the victim and the suspect for emotional support and advice;
4. Provide advice, information, support and assistance trying to resolve the conflict;
5. Monitoring reviews on the suspect from time to time to ensure such behaviour has been stopped;
6. If the behaviour persists, the Leader should stop the suspect from attending further activities.

(B) For sexual harassment

For the Victim

- (a) When the victim is sexually harassed, he/she should tell the harassers that his/her act is unwelcome and should be stopped immediately;
- (b) Keep a written record including the date, time, location, witness(es) and nature;
- (c) Lodge a formal or informal complaint to the complaint committee of the Focolare Movement, which is a committee consists of independent professionals designated or appointed to handle the complaints and to ensure protection against any kind of harassment or discrimination (“Complaint Committee”);
- (d) Inform parents/guardians/anyone who he/she trusts for emotional support and advice;
- (e) The Victim should note that there is a time bar for lodging a complaint as any delay may cause difficulty in the investigation and collection of evidence. As a reference, legal proceedings involving the District Court should be made within 24 months after the incident occurred.

For the Focolare Movement

- (f) Providing various channels, both written or verbal, for minors to lodge or report their complaints of harassment or discrimination;
- (g) Creating a supportive environment for minors to feel comfortable to report incidents of harassment or discrimination;
- (h) Seeking assistance, information, and advice from the relevant external specialist and/or the ethics team as required;

- (i) If a complaint has been lodged or reported, the recipient should immediately bring it to the attention of the Complaint Committee, who is appointed by the Focolare Movement from time to time to handle the complaint;
- (j) Any leader or individual who believes that a minor has experienced or witnessed any form of harassment or discrimination should take the following action as soon as possible - Document the date(s), time(s), location(s), potential witnesses, and nature of the incident(s) as well as gather all kinds of evidence in relation to the complaint;
- (k) The Complaint Committee should explain to the Victim his/her right to report to the police;
- (l) The Complaint Committee should inform the Victim and his/her parents/guardian of their rights and options;
- (m) The Complaint Committee should look for any other relevant witnesses and record all details of their statements;
- (n) The Complaint Committee should follow each step of the complaint handling procedure and explain clearly to the Victim;
- (o) All the information and records in relation to the complaint should be kept confidential and only be disclosed to relevant persons on a need-to-know basis;
- (p) The Focolare Movement should strive to assist in the psychological and spiritual healing of the Victim;
- (q) Where necessary, the Focolare Movement should have recourse to reliable agencies/professionals to provide clinical treatment and counselling services to the Victim.



For the Suspect

- (r) The person being complained against should be prohibited immediately from taking part in any activities of the Focolare Movement;
- (s) Under the principle of natural justice, the suspect should be informed about the details of the allegation against him/her;
- (t) The Complaint Committee should explain to the Suspect his/her right to remain silent;
- (u) The Suspect should be allowed to consult his/her lawyer before responding;
- (v) The Complaint Committee should document the responses of the Suspect to the complaint which should be checked and confirmed as accurate by the Suspect.

\* Email address of the Complaint Committee: [pomfocolarehkmc@gmail.com](mailto:pomfocolarehkmc@gmail.com)