



CURIA GENERALIZIA DELLA COMPAGNIA DI GESÙ

**To share the suffering of victims of abuse
and foster a culture of protection**

2018/13

TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY AND COMPANIONS IN MISSION

Dear Friends,

Pope Francis has addressed to the entire People of God, in whose mission we are collaborators, an invitation to share the suffering of many minors and vulnerable persons who are victims of sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons, among whom there are – we recognize with sorrow and shame – members of the Society.

The content of the letter from Pope Francis to the People of God, dated 20 August 2018, confirms for us the mandate of General Congregation 36 to continue working, at all levels of the Society, to promote *a consistent culture of protection and safety for minors* and for adults in situations of vulnerability. In addition to confirming this mandate, the Holy Father, recognizing that whatever we do to ask pardon will always be little, invites us to go beyond what has already been learned in these years, beyond policies of zero tolerance, protocols for responding to cases, efforts for reparation and programs of prevention. He invites us to look to the future and to deepen our understanding of the causes of these wounds, to recognize our participation by action or omission in causing them, and to find ways to bring about changes in the social structures that provoke them. He invites us to personal, communal, and institutional conversion, to attend to the coherence and integrity of our lives, and to orient our apostolic action toward bringing about a culture, within and outside the Church, capable of ensuring that situations of abuse are not repeated and that a healthy life is guaranteed to all human beings.

As a starting point for launching a process of profound change to foster a culture of protection, the Pope draws inspiration from the warning of Jesus: *This class of demons can only be expelled with prayer and fasting* (Mt 17,21). The confusion, the disappointment, the anger, the feeling of impotence and the spiritual desolation that this situation is provoking in many members of the People of God, and in others throughout the world, require a courageous renewal of our faith that opens space for what today seems to us impossible. We must therefore follow the advice of the sixth rule for the discernment of spirits of the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises*: *it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation, insisting more on prayer, on meditation, and on examination, and in a suitable way to do penance* [319]. Let us begin to walk this road with the attitudes of the first week of the Exercises in which



prayer and penance bring us to the question of what we can do for Christ [53], for his body wounded again in so many victims of abuse.

I call the whole Society and the men and women with whom we partner in mission to join with the entire People of God in desiring to respond to the cry of Pope Francis. *Our way of proceeding* links us in a special way with the Holy Father for the greater service of the Church. For our part, let us do everything possible to collaborate in healing this situation in the Church. The Pope reminds us in his letter: *The penitential dimension of fasting and prayer will help us as God's People to come before the Lord and our wounded brothers and sisters as sinners imploring forgiveness and the grace of shame and conversion. In this way, we will come up with actions that can generate dynamics attuned to the Gospel.*

Let us embrace with openness and creativity the invitation to prayer and penance given us as members of the People of God: *that fasting and prayer may open our ears to the hushed pain felt by children, young people and the disabled. A fasting that makes us hunger and thirst for justice and impels us to walk in the truth, supporting all the judicial measures that may be necessary. A fasting that shakes us up and leads us to be committed in truth and charity with all men and women of good will, and with society in general, to combatting all forms of the abuse of power, sexual abuse and the abuse of conscience.*

I ask Major Superiors, Community Superiors and Directors of Apostolic Works to promote initiatives that bring about, in the diversity of situations and contexts in which we live, this prayerful and penitential way to open the doors of our hearts and our apostolic commitments to creative ways to promote, in all of its complex dimensions, a culture of protection of minors and vulnerable persons, as Father Adolfo Nicolás already asked of us in his letter of 18 May 2015. I encourage you to share initiatives and actions within the apostolic body of the Society, with other groups of the People of God, and with other persons of good will committed to the eradication of this evil. In this way we will learn from others and make more efficacious the process of cultural change to which we desire to contribute.

Through the intercession of Our Lady of the Way, we ask the Lord for “growing sorrow and shame” in the face of the suffering caused by so many abuses. We ask the Lord to accompany us in a real process of personal and institutional conversion. We ask that he help us not to flag in our efforts to promote a new culture of life in which all human beings find protection, justice, and dignity.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

Arturo Sosa, S.I.
Superior General

Rome, 24 August 2018
(Original : Spanish)