



The fight against child sexual abuse

The 11 resolutions voted by French bishops

March 25, 2021

THE SOLUTIONS VOTED BY FRENCH BISHOPS

Responsibility

- Resolution 1 | Levels of responsibility

This resolution expresses different levels of responsibility recognised by the bishops. Responsibility has been identified for offenders, those who failed to act, and the bishops in general, in the past, present, and future. The French bishops also recognised the responsibility of the entire Church, because of and considering its holy nature, for the crimes and abuse of power and conscience committed by its ministers in their practice.

We, the assembly of bishops of France, are grateful to the victims who revealed what they suffered, enabling light to be shed on this abuse, and we express our appreciation to those who testified and shared their experience with us. As a result, we are now aware of what happened. We are more lucid about how we function, and are able to make decisions necessary to make the Church a safe place. We are committed to pursuing this consultation with victims and to fighting sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience:

- We recognise that children and young people have been abused by priests and other officials of the Church. They took advantage of their authority, their clerical status, sometimes even their role as minister, and the trust shown by individuals and their families ;

- We recognise that in the past, ecclesiastical authorities have not seen or heard, and in some cases have not wanted to see or hear, and have even hidden offending acts, without addressing the trauma suffered by victims. Through this blindness and deafness, bishops and other ecclesiastical leaders have not been heedful of these people, seriously failing in the truth of the Gospel. They also failed to report, and even concealed from the justice system, facts they had in their possession, and were negligent in the management of archives. When nominating priests, for example, certain Church leaders underestimated the potential for repeat offences, committing serious errors of ordination to the Holy Order, and making inappropriate decisions when receiving seminarians ;

- It is our moral duty to acknowledge these situations with our conscience and take action to expose the truth ;

- It is our duty to promote psychological, philosophical, and theological work to improve how we perceive and combat social, psychological, and spiritual mechanisms that drive abusive behaviour ;

- It is our imperative obligation to report to the civil legal system (like any other citizen) and to the canonical legal system, taking into account laws in force, anyone likely to have exploited minors or exploited their spiritual power, and also to sanction them by applying the prescribed penalties, and to support them with perseverance and humility on a path of repentance and truth ;

- We have a compelling duty to encourage victims to seek justice in the civil and canonical legal systems by facilitating their access to canon law ;

- It is our duty to support victims with humility, perseverance, and respect on the path to appeasement with psychological and spiritual recovery, with financial compensation if necessary, even partially, and with the means for recovery adapted to each individual situation ;

- It is our mission to help the whole Church to shed light on the facts revealed by refusing naivety about relations of power, even spiritual power. We must help our baptised community to be more lucid and attentive of relations in education and the sacrament ;

- We are responsible for applying measures to care for all the faithful, clergy, and lay people who are deeply disturbed by the revelation of these crimes and events, who feel ashamed, angry, or confused, whose trust in the Church has been undermined, and who expect their pastors to inform them, to listen to them, and to dialogue with them, to enable them to understand these events and to participate fully in dealing with victims in the Church ;

- Taking into account the report by the independent commission on sex abuse in the church (CIASE), we must apply concrete and sustainable measures to continue to raise awareness and take action against sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience, both in the Church and in the community.

Contemplating Christ, our Lord, we recognise that the Church, as the Body of which Christ is the Head, must answer before God, in its entirety and each of its members, for the harm done to those who have been sexually assaulted or spiritually abused and for the loneliness they have suffered, for the contempt or indifference they have endured, and the crimes and abuses of power and conscience committed by certain Church ministers and the neglectful handling of the facts by some of our own. In this context, the Church assumes its responsibility before the community by asking forgiveness for these crimes and this neglect, by doing whatever is necessary to ensure that the message of the Gospel is not disfigured, and by ensuring fraternal and trusting relationships that Christ makes possible through his grace.

Nationwide

- **Resolution 2 | Council for the Prevention and Fight against Child Sexual Abuse**

This resolution creates the organisation that will work with the bishops concerned to enable our Conference to deal effectively with child sexual abuse in the future and to ensure the long-term application of selected measures. The existing ongoing service will be transformed into a council and a service responsible for protecting minors, fighting against child sexual abuse, and for ensuring caution and training in pastoral relations will be created. This service endorses and consolidates the work carried out by Ségolaine Moog, delegate for the prevention and fight against child sexual abuse.

Temporarily entitled the CPLP, the council for the prevention and fight against child sexual abuse, is in compliance with the statutes of the Conference of French Bishops and is chaired by a bishop elected by the plenary assembly. It is composed of bishops appointed by the Permanent Council (Conseil Permanent) and people chosen by this new council who are competent in the fight against sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience. The secretariat is provided by a member of the CEF General Secretariat.

The council will :

- work closely with representatives of victims, with priority for those appointed by representative associations ;

- receive assistance from a service responsible for the protection of minors, for the fight against child sexual abuse, and for ensuring caution and training in pastoral relations.

- use the results from the four working groups to define the guidelines necessary for the functions of this new service ;

- work with the Doctrinal Commission, the episcopal commission for ordained ministers and laypeople with an ecclesiastical role (CEMOLEME), the national council of grand seminaries (CNGS), the national service for youth evangelism and vocations and the national catechism and catechumen service on the quality of statements about the calling and practice of priesthood in order to encourage authentic pastoral chastity; create a unit for monitoring and supporting sex offenders governed by one of its members who will work with the Christnacht Commission, and include several competent people approved by the permanent council (Conseil permanent) of the CEF ;

- prepares and maintains the memorial site provided for in Resolution J and assists with the development of other necessary memorial sites.

Working with the communications department, the council will establish the communication policy and appropriate means to ensure prevention and training.

The chairman of the council will meet with the permanent council regularly: at least once a year. This procedure must be integrated into any organisational reform of the Conference of French Bishops.

- **Resolution 3 | New National Service**

The assembly of bishops decided to create a national service responsible for the protection of minors, for the fight against child sexual abuse, for ensuring caution and training in pastoral relations which will report to the new council for the prevention and fight against child sexual abuse.

In particular, this national service will :

- organise the national team of counsellors and the network of counselling units, advisers to commissions, councils, and services of the bishops' conference ;

- draw on the conclusions of the CEF-CORREF working groups to ensure their application;

- organise the training necessary for diocese counsellors responsible for prevention, following up on offenders, and ensuring quality pastoral relationships.

- undertake quantitative and qualitative evaluations of its action and prepare an annual report under the council's supervision. CEF governance will be responsible for the publication of the annual report.

- **Resolution 4 | Counsellor for the Protection of Minors**

The aim of this resolution is to ensure that precautions will be taken in all the commissions, councils, and services of the Conference of French Bishops.

The assembly of bishops, aware of their responsibility to do their utmost to prevent further sexual abuse and abuse of power or conscience, decided that, governed by the chair and general secretary, each commission, council, or service concerned shall appoint a counsellor for the protection of minors from among their members, particularly the CEMOLEME, the national service for catechism and catechumen, the national service for evangelism of youth and vocations, the direction of Catholic education, etc. These counsellors respond to requests from the new national service (provided for in Resolution C) and ensure that they are taken into account by their commission, council, or service.

- **Resolution 5 | National Counselling Team**

The objective is to ensure that victims continue to be heard. They have not yet all spoken up. Some of them will speak up in the future. Yet diocesan counselling units are likely to be dismantled and see their responsibilities undermined. Furthermore, some victims will not dare to directly contact a diocese or religious congregation. The Conference of French Bishops and the conference of French clergy are responsible for ensuring that victims will be heard in the long term, after the CIASE's mission is completed. Hence the suggestion to create an association for counsellors. It may be useful for this association to join France-Victimes to benefit from the association of associations' ethics and training and improve their capacity for response via a wider network.

The assembly of bishops, anxious to pursue their commitment to consulting with victims and to the fight against sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience, decided to create a national team of counsellors with the CORREF that will have a national telephone number. This association, founded by the CEF and CORREF, will be a member of the France Victimes association to benefit from their training. However, the email address: parolesdevictimes@cef.fr will be preserved and attributed to the national service responsible for the protection of minors, for the fight against child sexual abuse, and for ensuring caution and training in pastoral relations.

- **Resolution 6 | Creation of an interdiocese canonical criminal tribunal for France**

This resolution is motivated by the intention to give greater clarity to canon law procedures and by the realisation that investigation into crimes and determining sentences requires specialised expertise. It is also motivated by difficulties in replacing official staff.

The assembly of bishops decided to set up a national interdiocese criminal court with two bodies and instructed the council for canon affairs to prepare the statutes and propose a list of potential members, complying with norms of criminal procedure in the code of canon law and following instructions from Rome on the subject. These statutes and the schedule for the establishment of the court will be submitted to the permanent council which will inform the bishops of France at the plenary assembly as soon as possible.

Memorial aspects

- **Resolution 7 | National Memorial Site**

A memorial site will collect victims' contributions about their whole life, not only the violence and aggression they experienced, to draw an educational message from these events about quality pastoral relations and to help future generations to avoid being naive about links between power relations and sexuality. Lourdes has been chosen as the geographical location for the memorial site, as it is already visited by many dioceses and foreigners. People visiting the memorial may be reminded of the tragedies of their lives, even if they have nothing to do with the Church, and if asked to, the national team of counsellors may put them in contact with the most qualified counsellors via the France-Victimes network. The following resolution reminds each diocese of the potential for creating a memorial site depending on their needs.

The assembly of bishops, anxious to pursue their commitment to consulting with victims and to the fight against sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience, decided to pursue the project of creating a memorial site, if possible in Lourdes which is an existing national sanctuary for pilgrims from all over the world and from French dioceses. The creation of this site is the responsibility of the council for the prevention and fight against child sexual abuse, working closely with the orientation council of the sanctuary, the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, and the rector of the sanctuary.

- **Resolution 8 | A day of prayer for victims of sexual abuse and abuse of power and conscience in the Church**

The Pope asked the Conference of French Bishops to set a date dedicated to victims of sexual abuse and abuse of power and conscience. The advantage of the date suggested here is that it is not already on the liturgical calendar. It can be announced the Sunday before. The theme may vary from year to year.

The assembly of bishops, anxious to pursue their commitment to consulting with victims and to the fight against sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience, and to care for all the baptised members of the Church who have suffered from these crimes, decided that the day of prayer for the victims of sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience in the Church, desired by the Holy Father, will be celebrated in the dioceses of France every year on the third Friday of Lent. This shall be featured in all diocesan liturgical calendars. Among other initiatives, a mass will be celebrated in the cathedral or in a sanctuary in the diocese for living and deceased victims. The new council for the prevention and combat of child sexual abuse will propose the theme for the day each year.

Financial compensation

Resolution 9 | Payment of financial compensation

DMuch reflection, based on contributions from victims and some experts, added to by contributions from the financial commission and the council for canon affairs, lead to the proposal of financial compensation for victims who express the need to rebuild their lives. This contribution would be based on expressed needs or a fixed amount, and within a limit to be determined by the independent compensation body which will be responsible for examining applications and deciding on amounts within fund limits.

Victims may submit their request to the bishop, who informs them of all the aspects of the overall process, or directly to the independent compensation body. The body shall ensure that the person has reported the events to the diocese and that the diocese recognises the person to be a victim.

The guiding principle for the application of this scheme is the communion of the whole Church. It calls for a gesture of brotherhood to help victims recover from their ordeal.

The assembly of bishops, on behalf of the Church, aware of the communion of the whole Church when a member suffers (cf. 1 Co 12:26), having adopted in November 2019 the principle of compensation to victims, feels responsible for contributing to the appeasement and recovery of victims abused by ministers of the Church, within the Church, and thereby adopt the following scheme :

- financial compensation will be paid to each victim who makes a request to meet costs for their recovery. The amount will be calculated according to individual needs expressed by the person concerned, or a fixed amount if this person does not wish to or cannot detail their needs. This will be limited to an amount yet to be established ;

- This compensation will be accessible to each victim who has already contacted a diocese and is recognised as a victim by the bishop and the counselling unit; when civil and canon procedures are complete ;

- allocation and the amount of compensation will be decided, within the determined limit, by the independent national compensation body chaired by a qualified person appointed by CEF governance. This person will form a team with victim representative(s) assigned by their associations ;

- This compensation will be financed by and within the limits of an ad hoc endowment fund set up to cover all the expenses for application of the entire recognition process. To this end, the fund will collect all voluntary contributions from bishops, priests, deacons, the congregation, and all those who wish to join in the recognition process through solidarity and fraternity towards the victims of the Church.

- **Resolution 10 | Endowment Fund**

An endowment fund must be established to ensure the resolutions are applicable. The fund will collect donations from bishops, priests, the congregation, and any other voluntary participants. The bishops are aware that they cannot use donations by the congregation for purposes they have not chosen. They are creating an endowment fund to which they will make their personal contribution to enable all the baptised to show their fraternity and solidarity for the victims in the Church. This endowment will fund support for victims and other work necessary to make the church a safe place.

The assembly of bishops, to undertake necessary measures in concrete terms and particularly to contribute to victims' recovery, decided to launch and support the creation of an autonomous endowment fund to collect donations to finance all the adopted measures. They instruct the permanent council of the CEF with the finance commission, to complete the constitution of this fund to which they will contribute voluntarily and personally. In addition to donations from the bishops, this fund will collect donations from priests, deacons, the congregation, and any other voluntary participants. Administered by the founding board, the endowment fund will act in direct relation with the independent compensation body.

Support for offenders

- **Resolution 11 | Support for offenders**

This resolution addresses the follow-up and support of priests who are accused or found guilty. Support for the bishops and dioceses concerned is essential, with help from a unit reporting to the council for the prevention and fight against child sexual abuse.

In addition to the national commission of independent expertise, the assembly of bishops asked the council for the prevention and fight against child sexual abuse to set up a watchdog and support unit for those who sexually abuse minors. This unit, reporting to the council, will include competent members whose names will be submitted to the permanent council. This unit will make annual reports.

The assembly of bishops decided to support the creation of support centres for accused ministers of the Church.

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