
Child protection. Msgr. Ghizzoni: "A new network in Italy for a crucial mentality shift"

Work in progress with the objective of having a competent contact person in each diocese tasked with assisting the bishop in the activities of listening, training and prevention, in addition to a helpdesk for anyone who wants to get in touch. Less than a year has gone by - it was June 2019 - since the approval of the new "Guidelines for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons", and the activity of the National Service for the Protection of Minors in the past few months remained uninterrupted. The President of the CEI Service, the Archbishop of Ravenna-Cervia, Msgr. **Lorenzo Ghizzoni**, provided SIR with an overview of the progress made to far, ahead of the opening of a two-day seminar in Rome with the coordinators of the Regional Services and the Regional Bishops' delegates.

Your Excellency, at what stage is the creation of the "network" of referent persons?

First of all, it should be said that all the Regions have appointed a bishop, a regional coordinator, the Regional Service started to be formed and more than half of all dioceses have already appointed their diocesan referent who will become operative in the next few days, also thanks to this meeting.

How are you planning to support the creation of this "network" from Rome?

Next week, at the Permanent Council, we will release to the public the protocols drawn up by our National Service that will be used for the formation of all pastoral workers, from priests to deacons to catechists. All those involved in activities regarding our parishes.

These 4 protocols also feature a set of good practices to be implemented in the parish. They represent the most significant operational tool, and also the most difficult to implement. But we have years of work ahead of us.

We don't need to do everything at once. It's better to do things right step by step. However, I think it is important to focus first on the training of those in charge and gradually make the environment safe, reaching out to young people and families. These are all progressive and planned steps.

The final goal is to provide every diocese with a "helpdesk"...

before the end of May, as requested by the Holy See in the latest document "Vos estis lux mundi". There is an obligation on the part of the dioceses to provide a place - also through a telephone number, an email, a personal contact - in which to launch a process, submit complaints, or even to request information or create a prevention program.

According to which criteria will the diocesan referent be selected?

He will not be regarded as "an expert", although I have seen that the people appointed have specific skills.

Psychologists, family counsellors, psychiatrists, lawyers.

The diocesan referent is in any case a pastoral figure and the service of child protection must remain a pastoral service.

What is meant by "pastoral service"?

It is an office like other pastoral offices which, however, has a very specific and equally important task which is to raise awareness and sensitivity in all pastoral realities regarding the protection of minors. A service of education and formation above all.

In fact, very often there is a lack of awareness of the severity of the perpetrated crime. We saw this in the recent trial of Bernard Preynat who told the judges: "I didn't realise what I was doing".

In trials statements are often dictated by lawyers and I do not know to what extent they may be considered true. We drew up a document, that we will publish in the next few days, also with a view to better identifying the figure of the abuser, the dynamics that lead to abuse, the places where the abuse occurs, and

to identify the consequences on the victims of abuse because, while on the one hand they survive, on the other they bear permanent wounds.

People look at the Church and are under the impression that nothing is being done about this scourge. How do you respond?

I believe, however, that this is also your duty, as journalists, to spread the news that we are working on this and that a new network is being created in Italy. For example, during the seminar we will also be organizing three meetings to be held next March in the North, Centre and South of Italy, with the new diocesan referents to set in motion their engagement with preliminary training and to launch the process ahead.

What do you expect from the dioceses?

As written in the opening paragraphs of the Guidelines, a fundamental mentality shift: i.e.

Henceforth we shall no longer side with the institution, with the image of the Church, we must stand on the side of the children.

This also means - as we wrote in the Guidelines - that we have a moral obligation to report all those who commit these types of crimes and collaborate with law-enforcement authorities.

Do you know that people in Italy are still convinced that for the Church, the bishop has no obligation to report abuse?

On the contrary, it's very clear. It's clearly written in the Guidelines that although Italian law does not provide for this form of obligation, we take it on as an obligation. In some world countries there is an obligation for everyone to report, but not in Italy. However we have decided to comply with this commitment and we have also put in writing the specific procedures.

This responsibility must not be shunned and those who do so are violating a serious commitment assumed by the Italian bishops gathered in the Assembly. It's a small and great revolution voted by the Italian bishops by a very large majority.

What is your message to Italians that are looking up at you?

Whereas until now we responded to potential crimes and very serious sins that were committed with measures that were only internal but too often - as we have unfortunately seen in history - ineffective,

from now on we will act strongly and decisively, cooperating with public authorities.

People need to know this and I must add that the prevention efforts that will be carried out in the near future will benefit everyone, the Christian community and, hopefully, society as a whole.

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