

A Small Wellspring of Life



During this year 2019, the Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd will release a significant policy document on Child Protection and Safeguarding. The document will be helpful for all units as we work towards an environment that is safe for children and vulnerable adults. The Congregation has engaged the services of Maryam Ehsani, a Consultant and Child Safeguarding specialist, to formulate the Child Safeguarding Policy.

The way Jesus spoke of children is clear from the following Gospel verses:

“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the reign of God.” Mark 10,14

“If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.” Mark 9,42

The way we are called to be with children and adults at risk needs to follow the Gospels, and needs to be aligned with the Congregation’s Policy on Child Protection and Safeguarding, and with the policies and laws of our respective countries. We are also called through the words of St Mary Euphrasia Pelletier (see below).

In September 2019 the Asia Pacific region of the Congregation will hold a Capacity Building and Training Workshop on Child Protection in Thailand. This will bring together people from across the region who are directly involved with children in residential and non-residential programs.

We know that the protection and care of children should be at the very heart of our communities and societies. Yet, so many children are NOT treated with respect and care: children and their families in bonded labour, children in slavery, girls and boys forced into marriage, children living in situations of war, conflict, family violence; children not allowed to attend school, especially girls; children subjected to cultural practices that cause them physical and emotional damage...

The way children grow and mature can depend to a great extent on the adults who are in their lives: parents, relatives, teachers, mentors, sports coaches, older siblings... you can name others...

In her Conferences, St Mary Euphrasia Pelletier gives us some good leads. And so too does the contemporary spiritual guide, Jean Vanier, a man of action who was profoundly contemplative.

You are invited to use these words for your prayer:

“Now you can see what to do for our young people, for the children God has entrusted to you. Watch over them carefully, noticing their needs of mind and body and prudently leading them to spiritual pastures suitable to each one’s state.” St. Mary Euphrasia, Conferences, pg. 62

“Take care not to scold too much; be serious but full of kindness, especially to new arrivals, because no matter the colour of their tears, they are always bitter, and if you are not good and compassionate to them they could succumb to despair.” St. Mary Euphrasia, Conferences, p. 438

“We have no rights over those we serve. We can neither ill-treat them nor shut them up.... harshness is no more our spirit than it is the Spirit of God.” St. Mary Euphrasia, Conferences, p.437

Jean Vanier, the founder of the worldwide L’Arche community, died on 7 May 2019 in Paris, aged 90. He had lived and worked with vulnerable people, particularly those with mental disabilities for over 50 years. In his book *Community and Growth*, he wrote: *“We must help each person to live more and more clearly and deeply from an inner confidence of being loved by God just as they are”*. He also wrote: *“For many to be good is to obey parents, teachers, religious structures and so on. In fact, goodness is lived in little ways, loving those around us daringly and with compassion. To be good is to be a small wellspring of life.”* (From his book, *Life’s Great Questions*.)

Take some time to consider these questions in the light of the quotes above, and your own experience:

Recall the last interaction you had with a child or children?

What touched you about that experience?

Was there a way you could have improved the experience for the child?

As you reflect on your responses to these questions, what may you need to do to be more aware of and committed to a culture of safeguarding and protection of children? And what may the organisation that you work within need to do?

Knowing that we are all loved as children of God, let us pray:

Prayer:

O God of Life and Love,
Each child and vulnerable adult is deeply precious to you.
Each one of us is precious to you.
May we, who are called to work with children and vulnerable adults,
Be open to listen to them, to learn from them, and be in communion with them.
We are all called to be your community on this Earth.
Help us to work towards a community of love and compassion for each other and for our Planet.
Amen.



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