

## **The Missionaries' Stance on the Sexual Abuse Crisis**

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood have taken important steps to protect children and adults from clergy sex abuse—and it starts with the Missionaries themselves.

The Congregation—its priests, religious brothers and candidates (seminarians)—have participated in training provided by Praesidium, an organization that accredits child-serving organizations. The Missionaries recently reviewed, updated and strengthened their sexual abuse policies, which were also reviewed by Praesidium. For many years, it has required potential candidates to undergo psychological testing and a behavioral assessment interview. The results of this testing are reviewed by a panel of Missionaries and lay people before a potential candidate is admitted to formation as a priest or a brother.

Members of the Congregation also participate in Virtus, a national Catholic program that educates lay people and religious on the risks and signs of abuse.

Because of these efforts and more, the Missionaries meets the Conference of Major Superiors of Men standards for accreditation related to sexual abuse.

The Congregation is paying close attention to this issue because it's the right thing to do, said Fr. Jeffrey Kirch, C.P.P.S., provincial director. "Each and every one of the clergy abuse cases is a cause for sadness on the part of the Church and the Church's ministers," he said. "The manner in which the institutional Church dealt with many of these cases throughout the last half-century also is a source of sadness, frustration, and anger."

Fr. Stephen Dos Santos, C.P.P.S., serves as the victims' assistance coordinator. He is responsible for following up with any victims of abuse at the hands of the Missionaries who may come forward. He can be reached at 937-228-9263.

But all of the Missionaries must be part of the work that's needed to protect children and adults from abuse. "We have sexual abuse policies in place and every member is expected to abide by those policies," Fr. Kirch said. Partnering with organizations like Praesidium and Virtus ensures that there are outside reviews to help the Missionaries follow the best practices.

"We've been far from perfect. We're a congregation made up of humans, and humans make errors, sometimes grave ones," Fr. Kirch said. "But we want people to know that we are vigilant and we continue to evolve our policies and plans in this regard."

Treating victims with compassion and helping them toward healing is important for the Missionaries and the entire Church. It's in keeping with Precious Blood spirituality, said Fr. Kirch. "Precious Blood spirituality calls us to be acutely aware of the suffering in our world. We should be especially attentive to those who continue to suffer due to sexual abuse. We must respond to those in need of healing with our ministry of reconciliation. We work to ensure that all of our ministry sites are safe places where people can go when they need help or comfort or healing."

The Congregation continues to pray for all victims of abuse, especially those who have suffered due to sexual abuse perpetrated by priests and other religious. "We also pray for all members of the Church who have had their trust in the Church's leadership broken. It is important as well to keep in our prayers those who minister faithfully in the Church and who are adversely affected by this ongoing scandal."

And, finally, the Congregation prays for its own members as well as other clergy and religious who have been the subject of allegations. "They, like us, are children of God. God, who is all-knowing, can lead us all back to the right path," Fr. Kirch said. "We believe in a God of justice and a God of healing. We do the best we can to do right by the people we serve. And we put all of this into God's hands as together we all work to restore the Church."