

## **Speech by the Representative of the Bishop of Gozo, Mons. Anton Teuma**

### **National Conference on the Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Persons – 2025**

**Good morning to everyone,**

It is a great honour and a significant responsibility for me to be here today as the representative of the Bishop of Gozo, His Excellency Monsignor Anton Teuma, who is abroad and unfortunately could not be with us today. The Bishop sends his greetings to each and every one of you, along with his sincere appreciation for the work you are doing to ensure that our Church and society remain places that are safe, welcoming, and protective of minors and vulnerable persons.

#### **1. The importance of the subject**

Today we are discussing a subject that affects not only the Church but our entire community. Safeguarding is not just a technical or legal matter—it is a moral, spiritual, and pastoral mission. It is our duty to ensure that every boy, girl, or vulnerable person has a space where they feel respected, safe, and loved.

As Jesus Himself said: **“Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”** (Mark 10:14)

These words hold power that transcends time and culture. They are a clear reminder that the most vulnerable among us have a right to our full attention and protection.

As Pope Francis has reminded us, *“Wherever a child or vulnerable person is safe, there you serve and honour Christ.”*<sup>1</sup> This underlines how central safeguarding is—not peripheral—to the Church’s identity.

#### **2. The Church’s commitment in Gozo and Malta**

The Diocese of Gozo, like the Church in Malta, has always held close to its heart the protection and care of the vulnerable. Not just in words, but through concrete action.

In 2022, the Gozo Safeguarding Commission was established, working hand-in-hand with the Commission in Malta. This was a very important step, as it demonstrates that the Church in Gozo wants to be proactive, not reactive.

Last year, the Commissions of Malta and Gozo issued a joint policy—a clear, comprehensive, and practical document that strengthens protection mechanisms, supports parishes and religious organizations, and ensures that anyone working or volunteering in pastoral activities understands their responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> [Pope Francis Underlines the Importance of Protecting Minors in the Church - FULL TEXT](#)

### 3. Safeguarding in the Diocese of Gozo — Key Responsibilities & Practices

#### 1. Policy Framework

- In **November 2024**, the Church in Malta and Gozo published a new *Safeguarding Policy* to raise standards in the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.
- This policy replaces the earlier one from 2015, and broadens the scope of safeguarding beyond just sexual abuse to include emotional, spiritual, physical, and online harm.
- The policy emphasizes *victims' well-being as central*, improved recruitment and screening, codes of conduct for behaviour, and clearer procedures for investigations and risk assessments.

#### 2. Prevention & Training

- Church in Malta and Gozo carries out background checks / vetting of personnel working with minors / vulnerable adults.
- Regular training sessions are held for Church personnel, catechists, volunteers etc.
- There is also a requirement for each Church entity (parish, religious order, etc.) to have a *Designated Safeguarding Officer*.

#### 3. Handling Allegations & Investigations

- When safeguarding concerns are raised, risk assessments and/or preliminary investigations are carried out.
- The Church is committed to cooperating with civil authorities — e.g. the Police and Child Protection services.
- The policy seeks impartiality in investigations, ensures that alleged victims are cared for, and that the accused are treated fairly.

#### 4. Separation of Jurisdictions

- Since **2022**, the Diocese of Gozo has its **own Safeguarding Commission**, separate from the Safeguarding Commission for Malta. Allegations and safeguarding matters in Gozo are now handled under Gozo's Commission, referring to the Bishop of Gozo or his delegate.

### 4. Structure of the Safeguarding Commission for the Diocese of Gozo

The structure in Gozo involves:

## 1. Safeguarding Office

This is the operational unit where the day-to-day work of receiving reports, investigations, assessments, and victim-care are done. In Gozo this includes:

- **Head of Safeguarding** – the person who oversees the Office.
- **Safeguarding Officer – Investigation and Assessment Team** – handling investigations or risk assessments.

## 2. Advisory Board

Gozo has an Advisory Board of specialists who provide independent oversight, expert input, and review. Members include:

- A clinical psychologist who is Chair
- A consultant paediatrician
- A teacher and other education professionals
- Consulted psychiatrists / mental health professionals
- A legal advisor

## 3. Functions of Gozo Safeguarding Commission

Among the functions listed are:

- Advising the Bishop (Ordinary) on safeguarding.
- Developing and reviewing safeguarding policies and procedures.
- Liaising with Church entity leaders (e.g. parishes) concerning safeguarding matters.
- Providing training in safeguarding prevention.
- Conducting preliminary investigations / risk assessments upon request.
- Oversight and support for the Designated Safeguarding Officers in Church entities.
- Care and advocacy for complainants, victims, and secondary victims.
- Collaboration with civil/statutory authorities: police, child protection directorate etc.

## 4. Oversight

- There is a publicly available organisational chart for Gozo's Safeguarding Commission.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [Safeguarding Commission Gozo - Il-Knisja f'Ghawdex](#)

- The Advisory Board is independent in its expertise; there is separation between Investigative / Assessment functions and Advisory / Review functions.

## 5. From policy to culture

However, the true step toward a secure future is never accomplished solely through policies or documents. What we aim for is to build a **culture of safeguarding**—a culture of respect, sensitivity, and shared responsibility.

Safeguarding is not “someone else’s job” or the responsibility of just one commission. It is everyone’s work—clergy, religious, laity, parents, teachers, catechists, volunteers.

Each and every one of us has a role to play in creating an environment where no one is afraid to speak out, and where everyone feels they can be safe.

Our Church in Gozo is working to ensure this is not just talk, but a concrete reality: a reality that begins with **prevention** and continues with **serious response** when necessary.

## 6. Prevention: education and responsibility

In recent years, the Gozo Commission has done a great deal of work to reach and train those who have contact with minors or vulnerable persons.

Regular training has been held so that responsible adults know what is appropriate and what is not; how to respond in cases of concern; and how they can contribute to a safe environment.

Background checks are also in place, and a consent form system has been introduced for pastoral and educational activities, ensuring that every step is marked by prudence and respect for the rights of minors.

All of this is not bureaucracy—it is an act of **love for the truth** and for **the dignity of the human person**.

When we take these measures, we are saying: “Yes, our children deserve the very best.”

Pope Francis has said that “*Abuse prevention ... is one of the foundations on which to build communities faithful to the Gospel.*”<sup>3</sup> This shows that prevention is not merely procedural, but foundational to Christian life.

## 7. Listening and healing

Naturally, in our journey we must not forget those who have suffered. There are people who have endured great pain due to a lack of safeguarding in the past.

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<sup>3</sup> [Pope: Protecting minors in the Church involves more than protocols - Vatican News](#)

As a Church, we must listen with humility and an open heart. Our Bishop often reminds us that the first step to healing is **to listen without judgement**, and to recognise the truth—whether it is comfortable or not.

Safeguarding can never be complete without space for **healing**. Therefore, there must be structures that offer **psychological, spiritual, and human support** to those who have suffered. This is also a way the Church puts the Gospel into practice.

In his address to the Pontifical Commission, the Pope said: *“Many of you have dedicated your lives to caring for victims of abuse, a courageous vocation which comes from the heart of the Church and helps her to be purified and to grow.”*<sup>4</sup> Healing and listening are thus part of the journey of the Church’s renewal.

## **8. A culture of openness and transparency**

Today, the Church in Gozo and in Malta is no longer afraid to speak about these subjects. Through conferences like this one, the publication of policies and reports, and cooperation with civil authorities, we are building a **new culture**: one of openness, accountability, and trust.

This is a positive sign—but we must continue building it together. Every catechist, group leader, parish priest, and member of a religious order must recognise that the trust people have in the Church is not automatic—it must be maintained and built through our consistency, professionalism, and humanity.

We follow the Pope’s call that *“Our commitment must not wane ... We cannot help others to bear their burdens unless we shoulder them ourselves, unless we show genuine closeness and compassion.”*<sup>5</sup> Let this be our guiding principle.

## **9. The spiritual perspective**

Sometimes we talk about safeguarding as if it’s only a legal issue. But at its core, safeguarding is a matter of **Christian spirituality**.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we read: **“Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.”** (Matthew 25:40)

When we work to protect the vulnerable, we are protecting **Christ Himself**.

Every step we take to create a safe environment, every training delivered, every report written—these are all **acts of faith and love**.

Our goal is not to avoid problems, but to **build a culture of life and respect**.

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<sup>4</sup> [To the members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors \(7 March 2024\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Pope: Church’s efforts to safeguard minors must not wane - Vatican News](#)

A culture where every person feels that they have value, that they have a voice, and that someone sees them through the eyes of Christ.

## 10. For a future of hope

As we look forward, there is much to learn—but also much to be thankful for.

I feel grateful to all those who, whether voluntarily or professionally, contribute to the field of safeguarding—from the members of the Commission, to those who lead children and youth groups in our parishes.

I also believe the future can be one of **hope and growth**, if we continue to strengthen formation, increase cooperation between the Gozo and Malta Commissions, and maintain strong communication with public and educational authorities.

The safety and dignity of the human person is not a one-time issue—it is a **continuous call to conversion**.

Safeguarding is a **pilgrimage that never ends**, but it helps us become a Church that is more transparent, more humble, and more Christ-like.

## 11. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with three words that capture the essence of why we are here today: **listening, prevention, and hope**.

- **Listening:** because real change begins when we truly listen to those who have suffered.
- **Prevention:** because it is always better to prevent than to cure.
- **Hope:** because at the heart of every safeguarding process lies our faith in a God who heals, renews, and gives new life.

Let us continue walking this journey together—with unity, responsibility, and love.

Let us continue working so that our Church and our society are truly places that welcome, support, and protect every person, especially those who are the most voiceless among us.

**“Protect the least among you, because in those who seem the least important, there is the face of Christ.”**

As stated in *Laudato Si'* and other documents, “*The protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message...*” reminds us that safeguarding is not optional—it flows directly from our faith.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190326\\_latutela-deiminori.pdf](#)

Thank you from the bottom of my heart to all of you—for your work, your sense of responsibility, and your love for the human person.

I wish you a conference that bears fruit, and work filled with a spirit of service and fidelity to the Gospel.

**Thank you.**