



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO MEMBERS OF THE "METER" ASSOCIATION**

*Clementine Hall  
Saturday, 15 May 2021*

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### **[Multimedia]**

I am pleased to meet you, representatives of the “Meter” Association, which since 1989 — when few spoke of this scourge — has been engaged in the fight against paedophilia in Italy and in other countries. I greet and thank Bishop Antonio Staglianò and Fr Fortunato Di Noto, who founded this important organization. And I greet and thank Cardinal Paolo Lojudice, and those who in various ways support the Association, for the protection and defence of abused and mistreated children.

Throughout these years, with your generous work, you have contributed to making visible the Church’s love for the smallest and most helpless. How often, like the Good Samaritan of the Gospel, you have drawn near with respect and compassion to welcome, console and protect! Closeness, compassion and tenderness: it is the style of God. How many spiritual wounds you have bound! The ecclesial community is grateful to you for all this.

We can compare your Association to a home. When we say “home”, we think of a place of welcome, of shelter, of safekeeping. The word “home” has a typically familial flavour that evokes the warmth, affection, and tenderness that can be experienced precisely in a family, especially in moments of anguish and pain. And you have been and are a “home” for many children whose innocence has been violated or who have been enslaved by the selfishness of adults. You have been and are a house of hope, fostering in many victims a path of liberation and redemption. I therefore encourage you to continue in this worthy social and human activity, continuing to offer your valuable contribution at the service of the protection of childhood.

Your work is more necessary than ever since, unfortunately, the abuse of children continues. I am

referring in particular to the solicitation that takes place through the internet and the various social media, with pages and portals dedicated to child pornography. This is a scourge that, on the one hand, needs to be tackled with renewed determination by public institutions and authorities, and on the other, requires an even greater awareness on the part of families and the various educational agencies. Even today we see how often in families the first reaction is to cover everything up; a first reaction that is still present in other institutions, and in the Church too. We must fight against this old habit of covering up. I know that you are always vigilant in protecting children even in the context of the most modern means of communication.

Child abuse is a kind of “psychological murder” and in many cases an erasure of childhood. Therefore, the protection of children against sexual exploitation is a duty of all States, who are called to identify both traffickers and abusers. At the same time, it is all the more a duty to denounce and prevent child abuse in the various spheres of society: school, sports, recreational and cultural institutions, religious communities and individuals. In addition, in the field of the protection of minors and in the fight against paedophilia, specific interventions must be organized to provide effective assistance to victims.

On all these fronts, the Meter Association actively cooperates with institutional bodies and with various sectors of civil society, also through appropriate memoranda of understanding. Continue your work without hesitation, paying particular attention to the educational aspect, so as to form an unwavering conscience in people and eradicate the culture of abuse and exploitation.

The logo of your Association is made up of a large letter “M” which evokes the idea of a womb, welcome, protection and an embrace for the littlest ones. Inside the ‘M’ are twelve stars, the symbol of the crown of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus and mother of all children. She, a caring mother, committed to loving her Son Jesus, is a model and guide for the whole Association, encouraging us to love with evangelical charity children who are victims of slavery and violence. Love for our neighbour is inseparable from the love that God has for us and that we have for him. For this reason I urge you always to root your daily activity in your daily relationship with God: in personal and community prayer, in listening to his Word and above all in the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and bond of love.

Dear brothers and sisters, I renew my appreciation and gratitude to the leaders, members, volunteers and those who cooperate with your Association. Do not be afraid in the face of misunderstandings and difficulties; there are many, but do not be afraid. Go forth with courage and perseverance. I accompany you with my prayer and also with my blessing. And you too, please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

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