

Promoting Safeguarding in Church of Imbisha Region



Sr Alice Mputsoe

In September 2021, the Leadership Conference of Consecrated Life in **Lesotho** sent a delegation of three Sisters to the **Republic of South Africa** to participate in a workshop at the Padre Pio Centre in Pretoria. There, Sr. Monica Moeketsi SCIM, Secretary of the conference, Sr. Fransisca Khoa of the Holy Names, and Sr. Alice Mputsoe, SCO, met with their counterparts of other surrounding countries. The Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA) Secretariat had organized this activity.

Wanting to improve protection interventions among IMBISA religious women, and empowering the Southern African regional Church to protect and effectively respond to the needs of children and vulnerable people, during and after the ongoing

pandemic, were the main objectives of the workshop.

Protection of the vulnerable: children, women, the elderly, etc. has been a concern for some time. The Council of Europe met in Mozambique in June 2019 in response to Pope Francis' concern about escalating reports of abuse, even among religious. He had mandated each diocese to enforce a policy and protocols for the protection of vulnerable people. The region consists of nine countries (Lesotho, South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini (Swaziland), Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe).



In light of the growing number of abuses, the 2019 IMBISA Plenary Assembly had adopted the theme, "The Earth, Our Common Home.", thus hoping to *'reinforce communion in IMBISA for effective collegiality to respond better to the protection of children and vulnerable persons as well as the preservation of 'our common home, the earth.'*

A complex web of factors exposes children and vulnerable people to violence. Common causes include lack of power, gender inequality, inability to defend oneself, inadequate protection systems, and social norms that allow such acts to occur without consequence. The effects of violence can be devastating. Entire families and communities are affected and these negative impacts can have both long-term and generational outcomes. For the first time in its history, IMBISA calls on religious women with the aim to help the Church in southern Africa come to a deeper understanding of safeguarding issues. This initiative rekindles the hope that is at the very heart of the religious vocation.

Women religious in the nine countries are indeed very socially active in the areas of health, education, social welfare, and parish activities. They already provide tangible solutions to the protection of children and vulnerable people, guided by their national policies. Through well-coordinated initiatives, this project brings them together and invites them to share their knowledge and skills, thus equipping them with some more precious tools.

After returning from the workshop, the Lesotho delegation reported to the Consecrated Life Leadership Conference. They discussed the issues raised, questioned the means of protection, the rights of the neediest, and the women religious implication in different apostolates and in the Church. We hope that the Conference of the leaders of our Congregations will open a way for sharing further in the wider audience of the religious men and women and reinforce, in us religious, the passion for safeguarding the vulnerable. May we become true defenders of rights and the voice of all those who cannot speak as did our Mother Élisabeth Bruyère in her time. And may God protect us!