

Blueprint for an Annual Report

(Approved by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, September 2023)

Purpose

In his address to the Plenary in April 2022, the Holy Father asked the Commission “on an annual basis to prepare for me a report on the Church’s initiatives for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults. This might be difficult at the beginning,” he said, “but I ask you to begin where necessary, in order to furnish a reliable account on what is presently being done and what needs to change, so that the competent authorities can act. This report will be a factor of transparency and accountability and – I hope – will provide a clear audit of our progress in this effort. Without that progress, the faithful will continue to lose trust in their pastors, and preaching and witnessing to the Gospel will become increasingly difficult.”

The Holy Father reiterated this request in May 2023, asking that the Commission “offer an annual report on what you consider to be working well or otherwise, so that appropriate changes can be made.”

The goal of the Annual Report is to provide an assessment of the nature and effectiveness of safeguarding policies and procedures in the Church and how the Commission serves to review these practices, to assist church leaders in improving them, in a way that leads to an increase in measurable protection of children and vulnerable persons.

The Annual Report informs the Holy Father, as requested, but also informs the universal Church, the public, and the Commission’s partners. It provides transparency into the work of the Commission as it fulfils its mandate, building a public record of engagement and evaluation on the effectiveness of the Church’s efforts in safeguarding children and vulnerable persons.

The Annual Report reports on events in the reporting period and presents its advice for actions to be taken by the respective church entity. The Report will also highlight any emerging trends or patterns, and what action needs to be taken. The report will serve as a working document for dialogue between the Commission and key entities within the Church, responsible for establishing sound safeguarding practices e.g., bishops, religious superiors, Roman Curia.

The Commission is conscious of the vast reach of the Church’s ministries and the myriad ways in which safeguarding activities are practiced or need to be implemented. The Commission aims to strike the right balance between providing an overall sense of the Church’s efforts in safeguarding on a global scale, while at the same time providing the necessary close examination and evaluation, proper to its mission of assisting local churches in protecting children.

An Annual Report and the *Ad Limina*: A Cumulative Approach

The Commission has adopted a cumulative approach in its reporting on safeguarding policies and procedures in the Church. Particularly in its accompaniment of the local churches - where key decisions are made by church leadership (especially bishops and religious superiors) - the Commission will avail itself of the opportunities for dialogue provided by the *ad limina* process. The *ad limina* process consists of a periodic review and in-person meetings between the bishops of a given country and officials of the Roman Curia, including the Holy Father. It provides, among other things, an opportunity for comprehensive reporting to the Holy Father of the Church's life and ministry in a particular episcopal conference (with 114 episcopal conferences, some conferences encompass more than one country). Conceived to take place every five years, the *ad limina* cycle coincides with the duration of Commission Members' mandate. Within the life of the Commission, therefore, the entire Church should come under examination, at least ideally.

In this way the Annual Report adopts a methodology that encompasses all key areas where the Church is present and active. It starts with specific national churches, through the *ad limina* process, and then covers the regional level. The Commission then examines the impact that the Roman Curia has on the life of the local church through its various interventions and engagements. Finally, the Commission has included an evaluation of the impact the Church's pastoral ministry has in protecting children in broader society.

To ensure both close examination and evaluation of a local church as well as providing a general overview of the Church's activities in each region and society more generally, the Annual Report is divided into the following four sections, which are described more fully below:

1. The Church in Focus
2. The Church in the Regions
3. The Impact of the Roman Curia on Safeguarding
4. The Church in the World

The Universal Guidelines Framework (UGF)

A key tool employed by the Commission to evaluate these areas of Church life and ministry is found in the mandate given to the Commission in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, article 72.2, at the request of the Holy Father:

The Pontifical Commission assists diocesan/eparchial Bishops, Episcopal Conferences and the hierarchical structures of the Eastern Churches, and the Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and their Conferences, in developing guidelines that propose suitable strategies and procedures for protecting minors and

vulnerable persons from sexual abuse and provide an appropriate response to such conduct on the part of the clergy and members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, in accordance with canonical norms and in due consideration of the requirements of civil law.

The Commission's role in overseeing the nature and application of sound policies lies at the heart of its mission. To further this, the Commission has developed the *Universal Guidelines Framework* on safeguarding policies and procedures in May 2023, aimed at supplementing and updating the 2011 Circular Letter issued by the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith - which marked the first systematic initiative requiring safeguarding policies and procedures among bishops' conferences, dioceses and those in religious and consecrated life.

The UGF was submitted for worldwide consultation, in a spirit of synodality, in June 2023, and a revised framework was considered, and approved for publication by the Commission in September 2023. Further adjustments are planned, based on further feedback from interested parties through March 2024.

In September 2023, the Commission will issue a second level of detail on how the UGF might be implemented at each level of the Church, in an ever more verifiable way. This second level contains a series of *criteria* or *capabilities* that provide greater specificity and guidance on how those general principles contained in the UGF might be implemented. In a third iteration and after further consultation, the Commission will provide a series of key *indicators* that can be identified and evaluated for the overall effectiveness of safeguarding policies and procedures. This three-step approach to safeguarding policy and practice---Principles, Criteria and Indicators---will serve as the overall standards against which the work of local church will be evaluated by the Commission, on a regular basis. Such an evaluation will be carried out, ideally, by competent and professional third parties.

Structure of the Annual Report

The Commission will divide its examination of the Church's activities into the following four areas:

Section 1: The Church in Focus

There are 114 associations of national bishops' conferences around the world. As a core unit of ecclesial governance, the bishops' conference represents a vital link in the development and operation of safeguarding guidelines in a particular church.

How does the Commission monitor and promote safeguarding activities in the local churches? The Commission has adopted a two-pronged approach. First, it has prioritized the *ad limina* visits of episcopal conferences, as a key moment of dialogue and engagement with leadership of the local church. Second, the Commission’s evaluative instrument for assessing the adequacy of local church efforts in regard to safeguarding is the *Universal Guidelines Framework* that includes the audit tool.

This Section will therefore provide a detailed analysis of the Commission’s engagement with all the previous year’s episcopal conferences prior to, during, and after their respective *ad limina* visits. The Section will conclude with a list of Key Findings / Lessons Learned / Recommendations and Objectives for the next twelve months, for each *ad limina* participant.

The Appendix contains the list of safeguarding questions submitted by the Commission, for inclusion in the preparatory questionnaire distributed by the Dicasteries for Bishops, Eastern Churches and Evangelization.

Section 2: The Church in the Regions

This Section will focus on the safeguarding mission of the Church in the continental regions. The Commission divides its ordinary work into four Regional Groups expressing the intention of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* for the Roman Curia to be at the service of the local church. The Regional Groups, through regular contact with church leadership and other important audiences in the region, such as groups of victims and survivors, will present its analysis of the current state of safeguarding efforts in the region, identify trends and realities that require attention. The Section will conclude with a list of Key Findings / Lessons Learned / Recommendations and Objectives for the next twelve months. It might be appropriate in an Appendix to list any major events, conferences, etc., organized on a regional level.

Section 3: The Impact of the Roman Curia on Safeguarding

This Section focuses on the functions of key dicasteries of the Roman Curia, as they promote safeguarding throughout the Church. In the first draft, the Annual Report will explain the position of the Commission within the Curia, its mandate and jurisdiction from within the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. This Section will highlight the safeguarding activities within the Curia, with a focus on those areas of Curial activity described in the *Memoranda of Information Exchange* between the Commission and

various entities within the Curia. The Commission is determined to ensure the collection of specific and anonymous data on the number and nature of cases, with the support of its key partners in the Roman Curia. The Section will conclude with a list of Key Findings / Lessons Learned / Recommendations and Objectives for the next twelve months.

Section 4: The Church in the World

This Section focuses on the Church's presence in the world and its safeguarding role, in broader society - including advocacy in favor of children in various situations of risk. It will focus on the Church's advocacy and activities in international organizations which have a global presence. Among others, these include the work of *Caritas Internationalis* and the Church's vast social, educational and healthcare footprint. The Section will conclude with a list of Key Findings / Lessons Learned / Recommendations and Objectives for the next twelve months.

Structure of the individual sections of the Annual Report

It is good practice to have the same structure in each Section of the Report. Furthermore, it is good to have a balanced report, in which due attention and focus is given to the major issues. A synthetic approach will be adopted to the Commission's consideration of the data under consideration, with the goal of providing advice to the Holy Father, considering prior consultation with key stakeholders. The Commission's primary role is to provide the Holy Father with advice on what it sees that is positive, what it sees that should be reinforced, and where there are failures, weaknesses or gaps that need to be addressed. The structure of each section will include:

Introduction: what is the purpose and focus of this Section?

Methodology: what and how was data collected, and why is such data relevant?

Analysis: what did the analysis of the data reveal?

Key findings / Lessons Learned / Recommendations: what are the main conclusions?

Objectives: what are the objectives proposed for implementation in the short to medium term, and how will progress be monitored? What does the Commission advise be done, either locally or at the level of the Roman Curia? What actions should be taken and by whom?

Transitional Justice

The Annual Report seeks to achieve the promotion of human rights, reconciliation and institutional change. The Commission has noted the synergy between several principles of the concept of transitional justice and some of the fundamental moral principles found in Catholic teaching. These principles, namely, truth-seeking, prosecution, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence, may

offer expertise on how to develop a comprehensive response to the realities of sexual abuse in the Church - in both reckoning with past abuse and building a culture of prevention. Further study and evaluation of the usefulness of this important work of social analysis and social change for the Church's context will be undertaken by the Commission, and in dialogue with key partners.

Conclusions

The final Section of the Annual Report should include concluding remarks from the Secretary.

Other matters for consideration

The Annual Report is not principally designed as an informational document on the activities of the Commission itself. Such information should be available on a regular basis and published on its website. However, the Annual Report will provide highlights of the Commission's life and activity, including summaries of discussion and decisions of the Commission in its Plenary Assemblies, and other associated events. It will also include a section on administrative matters e.g., fundraising, staffing, capacity building initiatives, budget etc.