



# TUTELA MINORUM

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE  
PROTECTION OF MINORS

**Opening Address of Cardinal Sean O'Malley**

**Plenary Assembly**

**Wednesday March 6, 2024**

*Palazzo Maffei Marescotti*

Our Plenary Assembly---the fourth of the current Commission---coincides with the tenth anniversary since the Commission was established, on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. The subject of our work and its unresolved nature in our Church makes this 10-year anniversary different from most. While not a moment of celebration, it is a moment to pause and to assess the contribution of the Commission. Indeed, I hope that in time, we can create a narrative record of the life of the Commission in these past ten years. The goal will be to make our efforts more insightful and impactful in the work of protection and prevention in our Church.

I begin by acknowledging and thanking all of those Members who first joined us in forming the Pontifical Commission, as one of the first major decisions following Pope Francis's election. The Members from the Commission's first iteration were witnesses to courage

and faith - stepping into an advisory role, in a Commission with no precedent.

Their closeness to victims and survivors immediately pointed to the absence of spaces for those impacted by abuse to tell their story and to seek redress. Members bravely emphasized the need for better structural channels for disclosure and assistance services. They worked to ensure that the Commission would be a welcoming platform for these victims to speak out. One of the key achievements of this first Commission was the establishment of the Victims and Survivors' Protocols, which allowed the Commission to establish appropriate and safe processes by which to offer assistance.

Then, in its second iteration, the Commission began introducing Survivor Advisory Panels (SAPs) and fostering their establishment within each local church, where they were not currently present. These SAPs represented a powerful platform for the integration of victims'/survivors' recommendations into the

Commission's work. Over a period of four years – from 2018 to 2022 - and with a global pandemic in between, the Commission piloted specific SAPs in Brazil, Zambia, the Philippines and a Virtual SAP online.

In 2021 the SAP panels organized a global seminar to gather and evaluate the learnings gained over four years, across the global Church. Victims and survivors determined the program, that was entitled “A Culture of Healing: Promoting a Culturally Sensitive Approach for Listening and Responding to Those Who Have Been Abused”, the seminar was offered online in five languages with around 700 attendees, from five continents. Shortly thereafter, in the Summer of 2021, as the Commission approached its third iteration, I asked Fr. Andrew to come and help the Commission review its work thus far in dialogue with current and previous members and other key stakeholders and plan for Commission's future.

That review revealed meaningful achievements - many of which I have already summarized for you, today. However, it highlighted a renewed sense of importance, for the Commission to accompany the local Church towards a victim-centered approach to safeguarding.

As the review was concluding and the former Commission was approaching the end of its one-year extension in March 2022, the Holy Father promulgated the Apostolic Constitution, *Praedicate Evangelium*, on the reform of the Roman Curia. The Commission found itself inserted formally into the Curia, housed within the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

This significant document (and decision about the Commission's status) has fundamental bearing on the mandate and orientation of the Commission.

As some of our longer-serving Members will recall, we had an audience with the Holy Father in April 2022, where he first asked us for an Annual Report. Immediately, the Commission began exploring how the

Holy Father's request for an Annual Report could promote that conversion, to a victim-centered approach. In addition to the Annual Report, the Apostolic Constitution assigned the Commission with the responsibility for ensuring the place of Guidelines would be guaranteed for every instance of the Church's life and ministry.

All of this reflected the thrust of the Pope appeal in the new Constitution to help the Holy Father in his ministry of service to the local church. Indeed, in his address to us last May, Pope Francis lifted up the Church at the local level for specific attention. He said "From the ordinary life of a diocese in its parishes and seminary, to the training of catechists, teachers and other pastoral workers, the importance of safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons must be the rule for everyone. In this regard, in religious and apostolic life, even cloistered novices must adhere to the same ministerial standards as

their elderly brothers and sisters who spent a lifetime teaching the young.”

This sentiment echoes the constant theme throughout the many years of drafting the new Constitution that reoriented the work of the Roman Curia towards service of the local church. And the Commission has imprinted that focus on the local and regional church into its structure and its DNA. Indeed, I was very encouraging of the current structure whereby members from a certain region would focus on their key relationships from that region. We have always had a diverse Commission with people from around the world. But with the Holy Father’s direction to the Curia to focus its service on the needs of the local church, the Commission aligned its global membership according to the needs of the regional church. Indeed, many of the new members of our Commission have a great deal of experience at the level of the diocese or the national church structures, making our work very practical.

2022 bolstered this vision and saw a lot of activity around building up the resources of the Commission, in terms of its budget, personnel and location. We received an increase in our budget from the Secretariat of the Economy and welcomed a very fruitful relationship with GHR Foundation and their willingness to provide qualified consultancy to help the Commission carry out its work. Increased staffing resources had been a pressing request of the Commission for many years. I remember how for many years when it was just Emer, Stefano and Anna in the office. The work was immense, with only such a small number of hands to help. Now, if we look around the room, we have grown capacity, in a very important way.

And we requested and secured from the Holy Father this new building for our work.

There was also a new pillar of the Commission's workplan that followed naturally from its focus on the local church: building local safeguarding structures. For a



long time, the Commission had been aware of the poor state of safeguarding resources in the Global South. While there had been training, publications and seminars, enduring sustainable personnel and structures in the fast growing part of the Church remained a *terra incognita* for the Commission. With assistance from traditional Church donors, the Commission gradually launched the idea that its accompaniment of the local and regional church would be both affective and effective: we would offer not only words of advice but practical means to turn that advice into action. Many members have been guiding this initiative through workshops and personal visits. Indeed, the Holy Father encouraged this work in his address to us last year where he said: “I am encouraged by your plans for addressing inequalities within the Church through training programmes and assistance to victims, in Africa, Asia and Latin America.” Closeness to the local church through our regional groups is vital to all three elements of the Commission’s

mandate. I look forward to a fuller presentation of the Memorare Initiative in the coming days.

On September 30, 2022, the Holy Father appointed the latest Commission, its third iteration. In our first Plenary Assembly - of October 2022 – we certainly hit the ground running, with plans to start a formal review of the universal guidelines and to start reaching out to national churches through the regional groups. The increased role of the Commission in the *ad limina* process also helped this process of regional engagement. We set ourselves a workplan for the Annual Report, requested by the Holy Father in April 2022. Efforts at gauging how we might tackle that mammoth project started in earnest, and we shall hear more about this process and its results tomorrow. I applaud those who have worked so hard and all of you for offering key insights and feedback.

During this Commission's first Plenary Assembly the proposed outline and methodology was affirmed. The Holy Father reiterated the importance of

reporting in his audience with us in May of last year. After consensus was reached on the methodological approach, the Annual Report team began collecting data.

This brought us to our last Plenary Assembly in September 2023, when the team presented (1) a Blueprint of the Report for the public, and (2) a draft of the Pilot Annual Report, itself, that became known as the *Instrumentum Laboris*. The Blueprint was presented and approved during that Plenary. It was subsequently published on the PCPM website. As for the *Instrumentum Laboris*, that Plenary also gave members the opportunity, to provide direct feedback and edits, in a working session, organized by the Regional Groups. It was sent to the Holy Father for his review in October of last year. The document has also served as the basis for the dialogue between the Annual Report team and the various stakeholders referenced therein marking the beginning of a 5-month synodal process, led by the Annual Report team.

Over these past 5 months, the team has systematically engaged 12 national Church entities, in formal dialogue, regarding the contents in this Pilot Annual Report.

Additionally, in Section 1, the Annual Report team added the Commission's comprehensive findings of the other 13 episcopal conferences, that had their *ad limina* visits in 2023. In Section 2, the team gave the Regional Groups the opportunity to deepen their contributions and analysis by offering their own evaluations and insights from their expert viewpoint and based on their proximity with key church entities in the region. In Section 3, the team met with various stakeholders in the Roman Curia, to expand contributions on the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for the Clergy. The current Report's findings on the Dicastery for the Clergy is one of the visible fruits of our Memorandum of Understanding that we signed with

that Dicastery in 2023. In Section 4, the Annual Report team added coverage of Caritas entities, at each level of the organization: universal, regional, national, and diocesan.

The team's frequent rounds of edits and amendments brought the total number of Church stakeholders covered in this Pilot Annual Report to 25. In the end, this document consisted of over 200 pages.

A major point for discussion today will be the role and contribution of the victim/survivor community. This very important group of collaborators has been in the frame of the Annual Report team from the beginning. Several methodological questions arose during the Team's discovery of the ability to elicit meaningful data from church entities and to present them in a way that would offer avenues for change according to the Commission's recommendations. I know we will be hearing more about this crucial aspect of the Annual Report shortly.

Exactly 3 weeks ago, that amended Pilot Annual Report was shared with you, inviting Members to contribute direct edits, once again. Over the past 3 weeks, the Annual Report team has been integrating and consolidating that feedback which has been generously offered by half the members.

That process culminated this past Saturday, when Fr. Andrew shared the newly edited document. This latest version is responsive to members' most consistent feedback that the comprehensive Pilot Annual Report was too long and needed work in the areas of formatting and syntax.

Today, we review a document of some 70 pages, accompanied by an Appendix with the Commission's additional observations. This new structure allows the body of the Annual Report to remain concise and direct, in presenting the Commission's critical analysis and recommendations. Yet, the Appendix allows the

Commission to still present important analysis for readers, who wish to deepen their study.

As many of you know, Maud has been leading this effort as Chair of the Annual Report Committee. Her article on the challenges we have faced in drafting this first Pilot Annual Report was published in February and it highlighted some of the features of the report and its methodology. It also fixed our eyes on a possible publication date, this summer. It is important to keep this goal in mind. This 70-page document is a tool for us to discuss in Plenary and depending on the indications offered by the Holy Father, to achieve that important publication.

It is important for you to know that the Holy Father is well informed about our continued work with this Pilot Annual Report. I have spoken about it on multiple occasions, with the Council of Cardinals. And, during last month's meeting of the Council of Cardinals, Fr. Andrew and I presented a comprehensive update of

our progress to all those present. That meeting lasted over 55 minutes, with close engagement of those present.

This latest draft before us represents a significant achievement involving of many hundreds of hours of work. In some way, I believe it represents the culmination of our 10 years together. And I hope it will become a touchstone in the Commission's annual contribution to making our Church a safer place.

Together the three pillars of our mandate interlock: sound policy development in the Guidelines; building capacity where there are weaknesses through *Memorare* and telling the truth about the Church efforts---the good and the bad---in our Annual Report. That's our theory of change, as a development of the past 10 years, and one that has already seen significant engagement with the church on the ground, with church leaders in their various settings. I thank you for your response to the Holy Father's call. Your commitment and perseverance in bringing this mandate to fulfilment will stand the test of



time. May our contribution lead to the improvements in our Church that are needed to keep children safe and redress to those people and communities that have been harmed.

ENDS