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Message of Pope Francis to the Latin American Conference on the prevention of abuse:

“Atender, Informar e Comunicar: Claves por una gestion eficaz en los casos de abuso sexual”

Asuncion, Paraguay, March 14-16

I send my warmest greetings to you all, Apostles of Prevention, as you meet in Paraguay for the II Latin American Congress sponsored jointly by the Episcopal Conference of Paraguay, the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and CEPROME, entitled ““Attending, Informing and Communicating: Keys for Effective Sexual Abuse Case Management.” In a special way I applaud the inauguration in Asuncion of the new *Centro de Estudios sobre la Dignidad Humana y Prevencion del Abuso* which will be a national focal point dedicated for this purpose. I send a greeting of special affection to Cardinal Adalberto Martinez and all those who have gathered from across the region in Asuncion during these days. Your work in favor of protection of the most vulnerable is urgent and essential.

This occasion provides me an opportunity to highlight the importance of such developments at the level of the local church. It is almost one year since I promulgated the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* in which I asked the Roman Curia to be of ever greater service to the local churches. The work of establishing clear procedures for the protection of minors in the Church needs to become a priority in every local church. I have asked the Pontifical Commission to supervise the adequate implementation of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* so that those who are abused have clear and accessible pathways for seeking justice. Those parts of the Church where efforts at promoting adequate prevention measures are still in the early stages because of a lack of resources need special attention. The cruel inequalities that plague our societies must not be allowed to plague our Church!

Four years ago, bishops and religious superiors and from around the world gathered in the Vatican with members of the Roman Curia to address the growing problem of the mishandling of child sexual abuse by the church hierarchy. Both a violation and betrayal, sexual abuse by

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clergy and its cover up by bishops and religious superiors has left an indelible wound on the body of Christ, the Church, because of the harm done to so many people. Anyone who lessens the impact of this history or minimizes the current danger dishonors those who have suffered so much and deceives those they claim to serve. Sexual abuse by anyone in the Church, whenever it took place, is a clear and present danger to the well-being of God's people and its mishandling will continue to debase the Gospel of the Lord in the eyes of everyone.

Yes, much has been done by Church leaders to confront this evil and to prevent it from recurring. The Conference in Paraguay is a further expression of this desire for change in our Church. It is also an expression of the synodal process of encounter, listening, reflecting and helping each other as we seek to implement and measure our commitment to preventing abuse in our Church. I encourage more such events! Adelante! But we must be able to see the results that children are safer in our Church. I have asked the Pontifical Commission to oversee and verify the adequacy of sound policies and practices throughout the Church and to compile a report pointing to where improvements are still needed.

I commend all these efforts to the intercession of Our Lady of Asuncion, patron of Paraguay, who we know never fails to come to the aid of those who are abandoned and who seek her assistance. May she be a model for this new phase in the life of the Church in Latin America and a source of strength for all those committed to this necessary yet painful aspect of the Church's ministry.

May the Lord bless you and may the Blessed Virgin protect you; and please, don't forget to pray for me!

Fraternally,

Francis.