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**For immediate release**

## Press Release of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

The Independent Commission for the Study of Sexual Abuse of Children in the Catholic Church in Portugal, released its final report this week. Established by the Portuguese Episcopal Conference in November 2021, the Independent Commission carried out a study on sexual abuse committed against children and adolescents within the Portuguese Catholic Church between 1950 and 2022. Its findings pointed to an estimated number of 4815 victims of child sexual abuse over the past 70 years.

Cardinal Sean O’ Malley OFM Cap., President of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors said:

“I join with the Church in Portugal in thanking the Independent Commission for its important work which points to the urgent need to combat whatever fosters silence from those who have been impacted by abuse, a silence which impedes effective prevention and the administration of justice. The Church in Portugal has taken important steps towards addressing this through the work of the Independent Commission.

Our concern should first and foremost be with the victims, whose right to justice and to adequate care needs to be a common priority. On behalf of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, I thank the men and women who have given voice to decades of silence and have paved the way for a new moment in our Church and in our Society. We join in expressing sorrow to all those harmed by such a violation of human dignity and encourage anyone who has experienced similar crimes not to hesitate to report them to the competent authorities.

The work of the Pontifical Commission, recently renewed by our Holy Father Pope Francis, aims at reinforcing the Church’s commitment to victims and survivors in their search for justice and, ultimately, the search for healing. Ensuring that robust policies are

implemented throughout the Church and that we can verify good practice and adequate codes of conduct for every bishop, priest, religious sister or brother, or catechist will provide a more secure environment for children and a more credible witness to the Gospel. We must be committed to vigorous advocacy for the rights of victims and survivors of abuse, and to abuse prevention education, transparency, accountability and zero tolerance in our Church.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors looks forward to now assisting the Church in Portugal as it reflects on the recommendations contained in the Final Report.”

## **History and Mandate**

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors is a body of the Holy See created by Pope Francis on 22 March 2014 with a "consultative function, at the service of the Holy Father" to "propose initiatives to the Roman Pontiff ... in order to promote the responsibility of the particular Churches in the protection of all minors and vulnerable adults".

With the coming into force of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, on 6 June 2022, the Commission was placed in organic connection with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (art. 78, §1). Under *Praedicate Evangelium* the Commission assumes the role of assisting all local ecclesiastical authorities "in developing appropriate strategies and procedures by means of Guidelines" (Art. 78, §2).

The Holy Father, in Audience with members on April 29, 2022, indicated the Commission's responsibilities for the implementation of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, Article 2 "to assist the Conferences of Bishops [...] in establishing suitable centers where individuals who have experienced abuse, and their family members, can find acceptance and an attentive hearing, and be accompanied in a process of healing and justice." At the same Audience Pope Francis also tasked the Commission to present him with an Annual Report "on the Church's initiatives for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults[...]This report will be a factor of transparency and accountability and – I hope – will provide a clear audit of our progress in this effort."

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