



Vatican City, September 27, 2023.

For immediate release

A Call to Action on the Occasion of the Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals and the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

- Commission urges solidarity with victims and survivors in light of ongoing revelations of abuse.
- Commission calls on Church leaders to increase commitment and resources to promote safeguarding everywhere.
- Commission asks that safeguarding be given a priority in the Synod on Synodality.

Solidarity with those who hunger and thirst for justice.

As the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, we express our deep sorrow and unwavering solidarity first and foremost to the victims and survivors of so many despicable crimes committed in the Church. Every day seems to bring forth new evidence of abuse, as well as cover up and mishandling by Church leadership around the world. While some cases are subject to intense reporting in the media, others are hardly known--if at all--leaving many countless people to suffer in silence. All abuse involves the anguish and pain of a terrible betrayal, not only by the abuser, but by a Church unable or even unwilling to reckon with the reality of its actions.

We hear and are disturbed by reports of the actions of individuals holding responsible offices within the Church, the cries of those impacted, as well as the legacy of atrocious behavior associated with lay and other movements and so many areas of the Church's institutional life. We are profoundly shaken by the immense pain, enduring suffering and revictimization experienced by so many, and we unequivocally condemn crimes and their impunity perpetrated against so many of our brothers and sisters. We reaffirm our steadfast commitment to work to ensure, as much as possible, such heinous and reprehensible acts are eradicated from the Church.

Recent publicly reported cases point to tragically harmful deficiencies in the norms intended to punish abusers and hold accountable those whose duty is to address wrongdoing. We are long overdue in fixing the flaws in procedures that leave victims wounded and in the dark both during and after cases have been decided. We will continue to study what is not working and to press for necessary changes so that all those affected by these atrocious crimes get access to truth, justice, and reparation. We also pledge to use our role to press other Church officials with responsibility to address these crimes to fulfil their mission effectively, to minimize the risk of further transgressions, and secure a respectful environment for all.

A Call for Conversion Among Church Leaders

Our Commission was established shortly after the election of Pope Francis in 2013. In harmony with the Council of Cardinals, the Commission has overseen a series of initiatives that have highlighted the reality of sexual abuse and the need for robust reforms in confronting both abuse and its mishandling by Church leaders. We are now in the process of aligning our efforts more closely with those of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and all those parts of the Roman Curia whose work impacts safeguarding around the world.

However, five years after the 2019 Summit on the Protection of Minors that gathered Church leaders from all over the world, deep frustrations remain, especially among those seeking justice for the wrongs done to them. No-one should have to beg for justice in the Church. The unacceptable resistance that remains points to a scandalous lack of resolve by many in the Church that is often compounded by a serious lack of resources. Pope Francis has warned that the inequalities in the world should not infect the Church.

There can be little effective change in this area without the pastoral conversion of Church leaders. As the College of Cardinals gathers in Consistory we are encouraged by the Holy Father's frequent reminder to those called to this special role that the blood they are called to pour out is their own and not that of those under their care. As a model of courageous self-sacrifice, the creation of new Cardinals is an opportune moment for reflection, repentance, and renewal of our unwavering commitment to safeguard and advocate for the most vulnerable, using all means possible.

We call upon all those in the Sacred College to remember victims and their families and to include as part of their oath of fidelity a commitment to remain steadfast in honoring those impacted by sexual abuse by uniting with them in the common pursuit of truth and justice. All bishops and religious superiors should echo this commitment. Together with all those who are worn down by abuse and its consequences, we say: “Enough!”

A Catholic Call for Change

An important moment in furthering these efforts is found in the upcoming 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. The reality of sexual abuse in our Church goes to the heart of the Synod’s agenda. It deals with who we are as a community of faith, founded on Jesus. It permeates discussions on leadership models, ministry roles, professional standards of behavior, and of being in right relationship with one another and all of creation.

We ask that sexual abuse in the Church permeate your discussions as they address teaching, ministry, formation, and governance. As a community of the reconciled, the Church’s sacred worship should also find adequate inclusion and expression of this most intimate of Church failures. While at times it may seem like a daunting set of questions to face, please rise to the challenge so that you may address, in a comprehensive way, the threat posed by sexual abuse to Church’s credibility in announcing the Gospel.

We urge you to dedicate meaningful time and space to integrate the testimony of victim/survivors into your work. Indeed, many if not all of the Synod’s participants have their own experiences of confronting or dealing with sexual abuse in the Church which could become an explicit part of your deliberations.

We urge you to work towards the day when all ministries in the Church become places of welcome, empathy and reconciliation for those impacted by abuse. Join with those who rail against the endemic complacency of those in the Church and society that silence these testimonies, minimize their significance, and stifle hope for renewal.

We urge you to work towards the day when our Church takes full account and full responsibility for the wrongs done to so many in its care.

We urge you to work towards the day when all children are protected by appropriate safety policies and procedures, ones that are known and verified.

We urge you to work towards the day when transparent and accessible systems of redress for wrongdoing by the Church’s ministers’ function well according to acceptable standards.

We urge you to work towards the day when all in our Church understand and take responsibility for robust safeguarding in dioceses and parishes and schools and hospitals and retreat centers and houses of formation and all the other places where the Church is present and active.

That day is yet to arrive. And for many it seems a long way away.

We make our own the message given to us by Pope Francis during our most recent audience. He said:

[W]here harm was done to people's lives, we are called to keep in mind God's creative power to make hope emerge from despair and life from death. The terrible sense of loss that many experience as a result of abuse can sometimes seem a burden too heavy to bear. Church leaders, who share a sense of shame for their failure to act, have suffered a loss of credibility, and our very ability to preach the Gospel has been damaged. Yet the Lord, who brings about new birth in every age, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ezek 37:6). *Even when the path forward is difficult and demanding, I urge you not to get bogged down; keep reaching out, keep trying to instill confidence in those you meet and who share with you this common cause. Do not grow discouraged when it seems that little is changing for the better. Persevere and keep moving forwards!* (emphasis added)

We urge you to work towards these long-overdue goals not just for one or two days during your gathering, but to consider them throughout the entire Synod process. Their achievement will be a singular sign of the Synod's success, a sign that we are walking with the wounded and the forgotten as disciples of the one Lord, in search of a better way.

ENDS