



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

A Press Release of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors at the Conclusion of its Plenary Assembly, Palazzo Maffei-Marescotti, May 3 – 6, 2023

On Friday May 5, Pope Francis met with the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors where he welcomed the new members as well as those continuing their service and the group of associates from around the world.

During the audience Pope Francis encouraged the Commission to continue with their efforts to improve guidelines and standards for the conduct of those in service to the Church to safeguard against sexual abuse in the Church.

He spoke about the Commission's expanded mandate which represents a comprehensive vision of how the Church can become an ever-safer place for all. The Commission maintains that vision and firmly believes that promises must be coupled with verifiable changes within the Church that can demonstrate how young and vulnerable people are not at risk and how those who have been impacted by abuse are taken care of.

In his address, Pope Francis reaffirmed once again that the sexual abuse crisis is “particularly serious for the Church”, because “it undermines her ability to fully embrace and bear witness to God’s liberating presence”. “The failure to act properly to halt this evil and to assist its victims has sullied our witness to God’s love”, he said.

He also stressed that the “sins of omission” though they seem “less real”, are not less grave than the actual sins committed by abusers. The Commission welcomed the Holy Father’s words and his confirmation of the Motu Proprio *Vos estis lux mundi* as permanent law.

During the Plenary Assembly, the following decisions were made: *

- Updating the Church's *Guidelines* that were first issued in 2011 by the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and that requires a focus on safeguarding throughout the entire Church [see *Praedicate Evangelium*, Article 78.2). The Commission's new *Universal Guidelines Framework* [UGF] will now be submitted to Church leaders, victims' groups, and other key stakeholders for a period of public commentary before final approval later this year. [Universal Guidelines Framework available May 31, 2023]
- Flowing from the Universal Guidelines Framework, the Commission began work on an Audit Tool, requested by Pope Francis in his April 2022 audience with the Commission. This instrument will serve to evaluate the adequacy of local churches safeguarding guidelines.
- In line with Pope Francis direction on addressing safeguarding inequalities within the Church, the Commission has established a Fund made up of contributions from Bishops Conferences to provide capacity-building programs to ensure greater access to training and assistance to victims, their families, and communities in poorer parts of the world. [Collaboration Agreement with the Bishops Conference of Italy]. The Commission approved a protocol to accompany this Fund and that regulates use of donated funds as part of a capacity building program called *Memorare*. [Financial Disbursement Protocol]. The first pilot program agreement was signed with the Church in Rwanda [Memorandum of Understanding with Rwanda].
- The Plenary reviewed the partnership arrangement with the GHR Foundation, first shared with the Commission in December 2022, which operates a program to provide regional safeguarding consultants. A similar partnership was established in 2020 between GHR and the Dicastery for Integral Human Development to assist with the Church's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the Commission, GHR oversees the hiring, contracting and direct payment of these regional staff. All consultants were present for the Plenary as well as for the audience with the Holy Father [Staff and Consultant List].
- The Commission reviewed the framework for the *Annual Report on Safeguarding Policies and Procedures in the Church* requested by Pope Francis in April 2022 and

reiterated in the most recent audience. The plan adopts a *human-centered design* methodology that focuses on how the needs of victims and survivors can be prioritized and addressed in the Church's reporting mechanisms with the purpose of offering proposals to the Holy Father on how gaps can be addressed.

- The Commission discussed way to respond promptly to the Holy Father's request in his address to the Commission to animate the Church to combat the evils of online child abuse.
- The Commission approved of a 5-year *Strategic Plan* identifying objectives, goals, and performance indicators to measure progress and to provide accountability to stakeholders. [Strategic Plan Summary]
- In accordance with the recently signed collaboration agreement, the Commission met with the Dicastery for the Evangelization of Peoples to further the goals of safeguarding through the work of the Vatican office that oversees the Church's life in more than half the territory of the globe. [Memorandum of Information Exchange]. The Plenary commissioned an in-depth study of the theme of *vulnerability* in its various forms so as to equip Church entities with robust measures to combat this emerging area of abuse.

Commission President, Cardinal Sean O' Malley, OFM, Cap. said:

"These developments represent a major shift towards a more impact-focused direction for the Commission. At times, this new direction has been both steep and fast for all of us reflecting the urgency of the challenges. This accelerated pace over the last six months has caused growing pains as we have attempted to respond to both short and longer-term needs. In our Plenary, we developed key adjustments to our working methodology so as to clarify our different roles and to create a sense of common ownership of our mandate and of our collective responsibility for its implementation. The Holy Father has asked a lot from us, and we are all committed to making this work. We have sought the necessary resources to respond adequately, and we are confident in the plan we have laid out and the people we have working with us."

* Publication of the documents referenced in parentheses were approved for distribution by the Plenary Assembly and, unless indicated otherwise, will be posted to the Commission website in the coming days