

Annual Report Plenary Address

Dr. Maud de-Boer Buquicchio

Chair

Palazzo Maffei Marescotti, Rome

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Afternoon session: Tuesday, March 17th

Dear colleagues,

It is my privilege to address you at the outset of our Plenary discussions surrounding the Annual Reports. As has become customary, we will be covering several editions of the Annual Report over the coming days.

This afternoon, I would like to offer a brief reflection on the Second Annual Report published last October, and the Third Annual Report under our final consideration. Then, tomorrow I will be pleased to provide some additional remarks regarding the Fourth Annual Report.

Second Annual Report

With that said, allow me to begin with our published Second Annual Report - covering the reporting period 2024. Needless to say, but I will still say it, our task covering a particular year, is not over with the public release of the AR. On the contrary, our very mission of accompanying the Church requires a continuous listening path with our key stakeholders, as I will describe in a moment.

A little reminder of the contents of the Second Report: it included a yearlong study into the Conversional Justice pillar of “reparations”, guided by Prof. David Smolin’s

conceptual research, alongside practical examples of the Church's successes and shortcomings related to reparations.

At the same time, our Annual Report Victim/Survivor Focus Groups offered participants the opportunity to share with us what reparations mean to them. This culminated in an operational vademecum on reparations that we published in the Main Findings and Observations of the Second Report.

Importantly, our Focus Groups were expanded to all four of the Commission's regions. Allow me to renew my gratitude to Patricia for her vision and leadership around this listening methodology. These Focus Groups enable the Annual Report to be systematically and authentically victim/survivor-centered.

In Section 1, we covered 18 episcopal conferences and 2 religious institutes.

In Section 2, all four of our regions submitted their detailed analysis of safeguarding trends and challenges, across their local realities. Consistent with our Conversional Justice pillar-in-focus, the Regional Groups were invited to provide specific input on the practices of reparations in their regions.

In Section 3, we were pleased to cover the Second Section of the Dicastery for Evangelization, commonly known as Propaganda Fide. This Dicastery is responsible for a vast number of local Churches in the missionary territories, primarily in Asia and Africa. Their inclusion in Section 3 was a significant and concrete realization of the Memorandum of Understanding that we signed with them in 2023.

Finally, in Section 4 we piloted a methodology to accompany lay associations, as a critical and growing reality within the Church – often left on the margins of the traditional ecclesial hierarchy. We were pleased to apply that pilot methodology to the Focolare Movement.

As I have often said, the Annual Report has a progressive methodology. Each edition is designed to build on the last, as we aim towards an ever more credible and practical tool for the Church.

During our October 2025 Press Conference we sought to highlight this year's methodological improvements. Each of our improvements revolved around the need for



external data sources to verify the self-reported data submitted to us by Church authorities. Our three primary improvements included: (1) the expansion of the Victim/Survivor Focus Groups into all four regions; (2) the solicitation of independent input from the Apostolic Nuncios in the countries that we cover; and (3) the inclusion of relevant public data from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Public reactions to these developments have been very encouraging, including from some of our key stakeholders in the international community. Among others, I am pleased to note positive feedback from our counterparts at UNICEF and in the Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children. Indeed, Special Representative Najat Maalla M'jid, publicly acknowledged our work in her recent reports to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

As far as journalistic coverage, it is noteworthy that articles focused on our critical policy observations and recommendations – rather than individual high-profile cases. This is profoundly consistent with our mandate and our mission to promote integral conversion in the Church – elevating the conversation towards accountability, transparency and policy reform.

Finally, and very importantly, we have received good feedback from our internal Church stakeholders. Our President wrote to each Church entity covered in the Second Annual Report, with an official copy of the text and an invitation to continued dialogue. Similar letters and official copies were sent to the Apostolic Nuncios in the countries we covered and the relevant dicasteries of the Roman Curia. Responses have been encouraging. Of the Church entities covered, we have already engaged in direct dialogue with the Italian conference, the Bosnian conference, the Slovakian conference, the Maltese conference, the South Korean conference, the North African conference, the Dicastery for Evangelization, and the Focolare Movement. Of our broader Church stakeholders, the publication has opened the door for deepened dialogue across the Roman Curia, including with the Secretary of State, the DDF, the Dicastery for Bishops, the Dicastery for Eastern Churches, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, the Dicastery for Religious, the Prefecture of the Papal Household, and the General Secretariat of the Synod. I believe this shows the tremendous power of the Annual Report as a tool for the

Commission's presence across the Roman Curia, and in promotion of our institutional role after the promulgation of *Praedicate Evangelium*. Archbishop Thibault, Bishop Luis and Stefano continue to lead these critical interdicasterial engagements. This important work continues today – seizing on the current momentum.

In the local Churches, our hope is for the Regional Groups to take a further leading and proactive role in facilitating direct follow-up. The AR Team, as recently expanded with Agustin Diaz - our new Annual Report Assistant - remains available to support you. Your closeness to the local Churches uniquely positions you to accompany strategic action on the recommendations that we make to local Church authorities. We look forward to developing the most effective modalities of this regional work, over the coming months.

Allow me to conclude this reflection with a word of gratitude to all of you, including our personnel who diligently supported each step of this Report's development: from the first *Ad Limina* visit in 2024, all the way until its publication in 5 languages this past October. Thank you for your tireless commitment to this impressive accomplishment!

Third Annual Report

Now let me turn our attention to the Third Annual Report, as we seek your final input before it moves to publication, this coming October.

As you will recall the full data collection for the Third Annual Report experienced significant delays, especially due to the death of our beloved Pope Francis. Therefore, the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Third Annual Report - that the Commission reviewed in our October 2025 Plenary Assembly - did not include the detailed findings for all Church entities that we accompanied. As such, the Commission approved the text *ad referendum* for the synodal phase, with the various Church entities.

In the weeks following that Plenary Assembly, the Commission's AR Team drafted our analysis of the various Church entities and coordinated the synodal phase. The AR Team received and reviewed synodal feedback from 100% of the Church entities that we cover in this Report. This represents an unprecedented response rate to the synodal phase and is an indication of our growing authority and credibility.

The AR Team now presents the up-to-date version of the Third Annual Report with synodal feedback already consolidated. Allow me a moment to provide an overview of its full breakdown.

From the outset it is important to mention that the Third Annual Report focuses in a special way, on consecrated life. I will share more on this in a moment.

But first, in the Introduction, we continue our rotating study of the various Conversional Justice pillars. As you will recall, this year's pillar-in-focus is "justice". Prof. David Smolin presents reflections from his extensive research into the most salient pastoral, theological and human rights considerations for the Church's provision of "justice". I am pleased that Prof. Smolin will be joining us today for an updated presentation on this part of the text.

Then, the Third Annual Report includes an expanded methodology for the V/S Focus Groups – building even further off the Second Report. Namely, participants were invited to contribute from the very outset - including during the initial drafting phase. This additional consultation invited participants to share input on the pillar of "justice". Then, during the synodal phase, the AR Team coordinated implementation of a second round of consultations with the Focus Groups. These sessions invited participants to review and provide direct feedback on specific excerpts of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, itself.

The text also presents our High-Level Recommendations to the Holy Father. We especially hope to discuss these with you, today. Many of our recommendations focus specifically on religious life, considering our dedicated accompaniment this year. Indeed that accompaniment came to a highpoint this past November, when we held the workshop entitled: "Building Communities that Safeguard Dignity." Findings from this workshop have deeply impacted the analysis throughout this Report. Listening to these extraordinary women and men made us understand much better the dilemmas facing them when their vows are exploited and a culture of fear drives impunity amidst intra-congregational abuse. In this respect one testimony of this workshop still rings in my ears : "I sometimes feel having to navigate as a submarine" . Our High Level Recommendations are inspired by this and other testimonies from the Workshop, alongside our detailed study of the various institutes covered in the Report.

Considering the suspension of the Ad Limina visits during the 2025 jubilee, Section 1 is almost entirely dedicated to the various entities of religious life. In total we cover 8 religious institutes, conferences and federations. With significant diversity among them, we believe that we have accompanied a representative set of religious entities. This process served as a powerful laboratory for developing a sustainable plan to accompany religious life – from year-to-year, and report-to-report. Our team that works on this part of the methodology will be pleased to explain some of these concrete ideas tomorrow, as we look towards the Fourth Annual Report, and beyond.

Section 1 also includes coverage of the local Church in the Philippines, after the Regional Group Asia/Oceania triggered Channel 3 of the methodology. We have been pleased with our data collection in the Philippines, including quinquennial responses from 56 of the Conference's 87 dioceses. Importantly, this coverage of the Philippines also allowed the Commission to pilot the general population survey, developed in partnership with Gallup and the Australian Catholic University. This survey methodology consulted 2,000 Filipinos, including 1,000 who regularly frequent the Catholic Church in the Philippines. This survey design - which many of you contributed to in your personal capacities - aims to measure the inculturation and saturation of local safeguarding measures. Let me be clear: this is a first-of-its-kind survey. It offers an independent audit of the safeguarding policies and procedures in a given local Church. As you will see, the AR Team has included these survey findings right alongside the bishops' self-reported data. Tomorrow, we will be pleased to welcome a presentation from Dr. Hania Farhan, Gallup's Senior Director of Research and Methodology, to explain the survey further.

In Section 2, the AR Team continued its annual data collection with the Regional Groups. Consistent with our Conversional Justice pillar-in-focus, contributions included a particular emphasis on the administration of justice in the various regions.

For Section 3, our enhanced dialogue with the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life led to the landmark signing of our Memorandum of Understanding on September 10th, 2025. Based on that MoU, the AR Team collected detailed data from the Dicastery, through a customized questionnaire. The responses were analyzed and form the basis of Section 3.

Finally, Section 4 continues the Commission's accompaniment of lay associations, further solidifying the pilot methodology used in the Second Annual Report. This Report presents our findings on the Community of Sant'Egidio.

At the culmination of this Plenary Assembly we will ask your consensus for the publication phase, to ensure an on-time publication in 5 languages this October. Over the coming months, the AR Team and the Communications Team will work side-by-side to prepare valuable communications material for your reference and preparations, ahead of its launch.

Before concluding, allow me to emphasize Conversional Justice is a fundamental and crosscutting framework for all of our work and analysis, as presented in our successive Annual Reports.

It is something that victims and survivors have asked from us: the development of a comprehensive response to the scourge of abuse in the Church. Without truth, justice, reparations and institutional reform there is no healing and without these elements there is a risk that abuse continues in the Church with impunity.

Conversional Justice is all the more valuable for the Roman Curia, not least because of the example it is called to set, in its service to the local Churches. Indeed, its concepts emphasize the notion of ongoing conversion and transformation in service of God, Catholic teaching, and the protection of the most vulnerable. Importantly, this stands precisely in contrast to the disciplinary and crisis-driven approach to individual cases or class actions in some countries – particularly in the US - that has thus far predominated and is the backdrop, motivating misplaced fears around Conversional Justice as a concept. In other words, Conversional Justice is our path out of crisis, not towards greater crisis!

With that, let me end on another word of gratitude to all those who contributed to this report, under such pressing and extraordinary circumstances, and especially the members of the tremendous AR team, especially: Stefano, Nathan, Claudia and Agustin. Thank you for your attention and I open the floor to your reactions and questions.

Afternoon Session: Wednesday, March 18th

Fourth Annual Report

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Welcome back from lunch and thank you for your dedicated work this morning, on the Third Annual Report. Your feedback was deeply enriching and the AR Team will work swiftly to incorporate your final suggestions, before we proceed to the translation and editorial steps.

I now turn our attention to the Fourth Annual Report. Data collection for this report is currently underway, and will continue until the end of the calendar year.

This year's Conversional Justice introduction will continue our rotating study of the various interrelated pillars. In this case, considering the Fourth Annual Report will be the last of our current Commission's mandate, we are undertaking a joint study of the last two pillars: "truth" and "institutional reform", especially to prevent future abuse. Prof. Smolin is beginning his conceptual research and will have his initial thoughts for us to discuss in October. The first consultations with the AR Victim/Survivor Focus Groups will similarly begin collecting insight from participants on what "truth" and "institutional reform" mean, in the context of the Church's response to abuse.

Regarding Section 1: as you will have seen on Teams, Ad Limina visits have already begun, including meetings with the Slovaks, Puerto Ricans, Peruvians and Nigerians. Over the coming weeks we will welcome the Ugandans, Gambians, Vietnamese and many more. In fact, we are scheduled to meet with a staggering 28 episcopal conferences this year!

As our Ad Limina Team prepares for these visits, we ask for your help and support! Nathan shares the preparatory documents with the Regional Groups on Teams, in the weeks ahead of each visit. There is a dedicated column on the far right of these preparatory documents, where we can collect your direct insights on specific matters. I kindly renew our invitation for your engagement with these documents. Your contributions are not only important for our preparations, but the analysis you provide in those documents is directly



incorporated in our drafting of the Annual Report. It is an opportunity for you to impact the text, from the very outset.

I am also pleased to report that we have successfully planned four additional Gallup surveys to coincide with these Ad Limina visits. Gallup has already implemented and delivered findings from surveys in Nigeria and Vietnam, with surveying soon to begin in Honduras and Hungary. Impressively, Gallup's delivery of these findings for Nigeria came in time for us to discuss select results directly with the Nigerian bishops, during their Ad Limina visit. Consistent with one of our key Objectives in the Strategic Plan, this demonstrates how we are increasingly leveraging our Ad Limina visits as a moment for customized, collegial and privileged dialogue with the bishops. A similar enriching Ad Limina visit is upcoming with the Vietnamese, to discuss results from the survey in their local Church, as well.

As one of the key ideas emerging from last year's dedicated accompaniment of religious life, we have written to each of the conferences of major superiors in our Ad Limina countries for this year. Facilitated by a letter from our President the AR Team has proposed a customized questionnaire to each of these national religious conferences, designed to solicit a parallel report to the bishops' quinquennial questionnaires. This will help us ordinarily capture the religious' perspective in preparations for the Ad Limina visits and ultimately the Annual Report. We are pleased to have already begun receiving responses.

To further capture the voices of religious men and women, we will continue our dedicated coverage of specific religious institutes in Section 1, with the inclusion of approximately 5 distinct institutes.

Data collection for Section 2 will soon begin in the regions. The AR Team has completed the customization of our reporting guidance for this year, with a particular focus on our two Conversional Justice pillars-in-focus: "truth" and "institutional reform". We look forward to your input, and thank the Regional Experts and Advisors for coordinating this work at the regional level.

For Section 3 we are working to include the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. The next key step is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, which is currently



under final consideration. Upon its signature, we will proceed with our ordinary questionnaire methodology, to collect important data on the safeguarding efforts and challenges at the Dicastery.

Then, for Section 4, we are looking to include detailed coverage of the International Office for Catholic Education (OIEC). We began dialogue with this Office last year and even considered their inclusion in the Third Annual Report. However, to allow us more time for data collection across their six regions we have moved them to the Fourth Annual Report. This accompaniment of OIEC will not only allow us to provide specific recommendations to this important Church body, but will also allow us to study the broader safeguarding trends across Catholic primary and secondary education.

The AR Team also continues its work consolidating additional external data sources. The Commission's ongoing dialogue with UNICEF has produced valuable insights into the best available prevalence data. In particular, this dialogue has pointed the AR Team in the direction of attaining disaggregated prevalence data from Cambodia, Nigeria, El Salvador and Honduras – all Ad Limina countries in 2026.

Finally, the AR Team has been leading an initial exploration of how artificial intelligence might support the day-to-day work of the Annual Report. Among rising response rates to our quinquennial questionnaire, there is an abundance of data to sift through. As such, we have begun carefully exploring how an ethical large language AI model might be used to facilitate the summarization of this data. We will be pleased to offer an initial demonstration of what might be possible, thanks to an initial collaboration with a socially-minded, human-rights based and closed circuit artificial intelligence platform.

I once again thank you for your attention and look forward to our dialogue around these exciting developments