

Address from Archbishop Thibault Verny
President
at the Opening of the Autumn Plenary Assembly of the
Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors,
Krakow, Poland
October 2025

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

With a spirit of profound humility and earnest hope, I address you today as we gather in Plenary Assembly—my first such occasion in the capacity of Commission President.

I speak with humility, conscious of the deep suffering endured by victims and survivors of abuse within our Church. I am equally mindful of the weighty expectations placed upon this Commission and its mandate.

Yet, I also speak with hope—hope that springs from the reassuring truth that I do not stand alone. As I behold this assembly, I am heartened by the collective strength that resides in the individual gifts of our members and staff. In you, I see both the present and the promise of our mission: to protect children, and all those who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances, from harm within our Church.

Allow me, therefore, to begin by renewing my sincere gratitude to His Holiness Pope Leo XIV for the honour of serving alongside you and representing you in this vital undertaking, and for the trust he places in our Commission.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Cardinal O'Malley, whose unwavering leadership has left a lasting legacy. His humility has shown how much he is a servant for

the protection of the most vulnerable. His attitude has inspired a spirit of service among the members and staff of our Commission. I reaffirm my commitment to build on this legacy with determination, vigilance and without complacency.

Finally, I would like to thank each and every member and staff member of the Commission for the welcome and support I have received, and for everyone's commitment.

It is not without significance that the appointment of a new President— only the second since the Commission's founding eleven years ago— should coincide with the dawn of a new Pontificate.

In the eyes of the faithful, and in the wider public, this moment marks the beginning of a new chapter in the Church's safeguarding mission.

As we turn the first page of that new chapter, and continue to consolidate the Commission's Strategic Objectives, I wish to share with you the visionary framework that has matured during my first three months in office.

I envision a future where safeguarding is integral, universal, and foundational in the life of the Church.

This necessarily passes through building safeguarding systems and rendering them operational, but the success or failure of those systems depends on a higher value: The human-relational and spiritual dimension. How we relate to and communicate with each other as a community of believers, in other words the conversion of hearts.

I envision a Church in which safeguarding is not peripheral rather an expression of our baptismal identity and a moral imperative embedded within every ecclesial structure.

To this end, I believe our mission is articulated in four principal aims:

- To foster a Universal Safeguarding Culture, through the development of coherent and consistent guidelines that uphold the dignity and safety of every child and vulnerable person.
- To cultivate a Common Language of Safeguarding, via the Universal Guidelines Framework — a unifying instrument across cultures, languages, and ecclesial jurisdictions.



- To strengthen Regional Safeguarding Networks, by empowering local actors and facilitating sustained dialogue through national focal points with the Commission in accompaniment.
- Walking and engaging in dialogue with local civil institutions.

Therefore, I invite each of you to bring your expertise and discernment to our reflections on the Universal Guidelines Framework. It is not merely a technical resource; it is the vessel through which our safeguarding efforts are channelled, and the visible embodiment of our ecclesial accountability and care.

In parallel, we shall turn our attention to the Memorare Initiative, our principal capacity-building programme. The increasing number of requests from across the global Church signals a growing awareness — an acknowledgment that the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable persons is a tragic reality, present in every context of ecclesial life and society. Yet, alongside this awakening, we must also confront the resistance that persists, particularly regarding the programme's central objective: the accompaniment of victims and survivors through the establishment of public, stable, and accessible reporting systems. This resistance must be neither ignored nor dismissed; rather, it must be engaged, explored and understood with honesty, humility, and a commitment to constructive dialogue.

Our collaboration with the Curia, bishops, and lay and religious leaders as well as victims and survivors themselves is essential to understanding the factors that contribute to resistance. This dialogue must be characterised by mutual respect and shared responsibility. The Annual Report serves as a key instrument in this regard. With each iteration, our understanding of the complexities faced by other Curia offices and the local churches deepens, enabling us to offer more nuanced support and formulate realistic recommendations. It is our hope that we are increasingly recognised not as adversaries, but as allies — those who assist rather than impose.

A long-term objective in our work with the Curia remains the clarification of safeguarding competencies across the various Dicasteries, alongside the promotion of compassionate and coherent accompaniment for victims and survivors who seek reparation. This work requires both pastoral sensitivity and juridical precision as well as openness to the



evolving dimensions of abuse in ecclesial contexts which can only be gained through rigorous and ongoing study and reflection.

In this spirit, I ask you to give serious consideration to the progress reports from our existing Study Groups on Vulnerability and Online Abuse. These are delicate and complex areas, that demands our attention if we are to uphold both justice and care and offer realistic recommendations.

We are all acutely aware of the unresolved questions that continue to impede the pursuit of justice and healing for many and which also dominate public discourse. Each new crisis, each unresolved high-profile case, compounds these concerns and underscores the urgency of our work.

With a new pontificate and a new Commission presidency, the eyes of the world are upon us. There is a palpable expectation — not only that the Church will act, but that it will do so with clarity, courage, and compassion.

Friends, we have been journeying together since 2022, some of you for longer. Our collective journey has been marked by many challenges but also by significant developments: the publication of two annual reports, the advancement of the Universal Guidelines Framework, and the establishment of capacity-building programmes within local churches. These are not isolated achievements, but rather signs of a maturing ecclesial response — one that seeks to embody synodality and subsidiarity in safeguarding practice.

It may be that we shall not witness the full fruits of the seeds we are sowing. If progress is to be enduring it cannot be immediate. Yet this must not deter us. As we enter the final two years of our five-year mandate, I ask you to renew your commitment, and to place your expertise once more at the service of the most vulnerable.

Let us have the courage to think independently, to name what remains unaddressed, and to propose viable paths forward. This is what victims and survivors ask of us. It is what the faithful and the wider public expect. And it is how we can most faithfully support the Holy Father and the leadership of the local Church.



We move forward not with complacency, but with hope. With courage. And with a shared responsibility for the healing and protection of all God's people.