



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors concludes Plenary Assembly, March 5 – 8, 2024.

- Commission finalizes *Pilot Annual Report on Safeguarding Policies and Procedures in the Church* and approves submission to the Holy Father.
- Commission approves an expanded version of the *Universal Guidelines Framework* (UGF)
- Commission welcomes Holy Father's endorsement of *Memorare Initiative* capacity-building program in the Global South and expands engagement with local churches.
- Commission green-lights high level Study Group on the issue of vulnerable adults and their safeguarding in Church entities.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors concluded its Spring Plenary Assembly on Friday May 8, 2024, with the approval to submit its *Pilot Annual Report on Safeguarding Policies and Procedures in the Church* to the Holy Father as requested. It also finalized a revised *Universal Guidelines Framework* (UGF) which it plans to roll out very soon.

Moving forward with 'concrete closeness'

In his audience with the Commission Thursday, the Holy Father spoke of the Church's ministry of protecting minors and closeness to victims of abuse as a concrete reality. Underlining the vital role of accompanying victims and survivors, the Holy Father reaffirmed the Commission's expanded mandate as it reaches ten years since its establishment in March 2014.

The Commission revised and improved an expanded *Universal Guidelines Framework* that includes not only the higher level principles of safeguarding expected throughout the Church, but provides greater detail in terms of 'criteria' and 'indicators' to explain how these principles might be implemented and evaluated in each local church. Special attention

was given to a program to ensure the UGF becomes known and operational in those parts of the Church where expertise and resources are lacking.

The revised framework of safeguarding standards was presented to the May 2023 Plenary as a model for the development of the Universal Guidelines Framework (UGF) and was approved in its draft form, following a period of public commentary in September 2023. Following further revision and evaluation the Commission is piloting a final draft across the regions aimed at setting a benchmark against which the Church can assess safeguarding capacity, measure weakness and set targets for improvement. The guidelines work together to articulate what makes the Church a safe and welcoming place for children and vulnerable people, especially victims/survivors their families and communities.

Through the UGF the Commission will concretely measure progress in achieving these goals on a global scale in its *Annual Report on Safeguarding Policies and Procedures in the Church*, which as stated by the Holy Father, “should not be just another document, but should help us better to appreciate the work that still lies ahead.”

Much of the Plenary Assembly was dedicated to review and evaluation of the *Pilot Annual Report*, which the Holy Father requested of the Commission in 2022. In 2023 the Commission developed and published on its website a methodology and blueprint for the Annual Report.

The Pilot Annual Report builds on the first ten years of the Commission’s experience, especially in relation to the accompaniment of victims and survivors. It evaluates the status of safeguarding policies and procedures at level of those thirteen national churches that took part in ad limina visits in 2023, the Report offers an assessment of the trends at a regional level pointing to areas for improvement and it offers recommendations on how to move forward in achieving the goals of truth, justice, reparation, and non-re-occurrence of child sexual abuse in the Church across the world. There is also a section that reviews how various Curia departments engage the local church in the ministry of safeguarding.

The Commission has approved the Pilot Annual Report and will shortly present it to the Holy Father and the competent authorities for their consideration and eventual publication.

An unwavering commitment to victims and survivors

The Commission makes its own the Holy Father's words that as a Church our commitment to 'restore the fabric of broken lives and heal victims' pain' and is encouraged by his endorsement of the Commission's *Memorare Initiative*, established in 2022 with support from the Italian Episcopal Conference.

The Memorare Initiative is a capacity-building program to bring practical resources to those churches which are struggling to implement basic safeguarding norms to prevent the abuse of children and vulnerable people and establish victims' support services.

The pillars of the program are rooted in *Vos estis lux mundi art2*. specifically:

- The establishment and promotion of pathways for disclosure for victims/survivors of sexual abuse with the church;
- Formation for church personnel at all levels in how to safely and competently accompany victims and survivors, their families and communities and transparently and accountably manage allegations of abuse;
- Build up local safeguarding networks to promote culturally appropriate mechanisms to counter cultural or societal barriers to addressing and reporting abuse as well as prevention models and act as a focus point for regional information gathering.

Thanks to its Regional Group structure and the generosity of donor churches, Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) have been finalized with nine local churches in the Global South including Paraguay, Panama, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Mexico, Rwanda, Central African Republic, AMECEA, the Archdiocese of Mombasa, Kenya, and will soon sign with Lesotho.

During its Plenary Assembly this week, the Commission also welcomed Mons. Roberto Pio Alvarez, Bishop of Rawson in Patagonia, Argentina who signed an MoU to establish the Memorare Initiative in the civil province of Chubut in Patagonia, Argentina. [All the MoUs are available on the Commission website.]

The Commission believes its regional presence alongside the local reality of the Church is essential to verifying the nature and scope of the challenges that lie ahead.

Exploring the Concept of Vulnerability in the Church

Over the course of ten years, the Commission has heard from its work with victims/survivors of concerns regarding the concept of vulnerability in the Church and how safeguarding entities act with regards the condition of persons who are in a position of vulnerability to abuse in all its forms.

The Commission gave the go ahead for the implementation of the proposal of the Study Group Committee to examine the reality of vulnerable persons in the context of the Church's ministry and how this informs safeguarding efforts. Intended as practical reflection on what currently presents obstacles or confusion in the Church's approach to these questions, the goal of the initiative is to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to the questions around vulnerability to provide concrete recommendations on how the Church might better combat the harms committed against non-minors by the Church's ministers in a variety of pastoral settings.

The findings of the Study Group will be presented in a report and set of recommendations.

Closeness to Church pastors, apostles of safeguarding

The Commission also met with the Prefect and officials of Dicastery for Bishops and discussed matters of mutual concern, especially as decisions relate to the operational elements of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* and the need to display greater transparency when decisions stemming from VELM are implemented in particular cases.

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