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ON CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SAFEGUARDING

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Executive Summary



Pope Francis directed the Commission in his address at the end of the Plenary in April 2022 as follows:

I would like you, on an annual basis, to prepare for me a report on the Church's initiatives for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults. This might be difficult at the beginning, but I ask you to begin where necessary, in order to furnish a reliable account on what is presently being done and what needs to change, so that the competent authorities can act. This report will be a factor of transparency and accountability and — I hope — will provide a clear audit of our progress in this effort. Without that progress, the faithful will continue to lose trust in their pastors, and preaching and witnessing to the Gospel will become increasingly difficult.

After much time dedicated to this unique and universal safeguarding responsibility within the Church, the Commission presents its pilot Annual Report on Church Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding.



Mandate and vision: conversion to a culture of safeguarding

In addressing sexual abuse, Pope Francis is leading the Church according to the principles of the Catholic Faith with a commitment to **conversion away from evil** and **to healing the wounded**. To advance the Holy Father's vision, the Commission has adopted **the framework of conversational justice** to underpin its theory-of-change model. This conversational justice framework consists of the following five essential interconnected pillars:



The Annual Report is an instrument of conversion itself, as part of a process to promote and map, with **clear standards**, the Church's transition over time. It documents **where risks remain**, and **where advances can be found** in the Church's efforts to protect children and vulnerable adults. It collects **resources** and **good practices to be shared** across the Universal Church, and makes specific recommendations to promote further progress in safeguarding.

A new tool in the Commission's commitment

The Annual Report gives the Commission an opportunity to report its **findings and recommendations** on a **systematic basis** — to be shared with the **Holy Father, victims/survivors, local Churches, and all the People of God**.

The Annual Report begins with **the Commission's main findings and observations that emerge throughout the Report**. These are:

1

The need to better promote **victims'/survivors' access to information**, to address the concern of opaque canonical processes as a source of re-traumatisation. Measures should be explored that provide the right of any individual to information relating to him/her, especially the circumstances and responsibilities related to their case of abuse — with due regard to data protection laws and requirements.

2

The need for a **holistic approach to the definition and enforcement of vulnerability in the Church's safeguarding provisions**. A more uniform definition of vulnerability must be developed. To help in this pursuit, experience gained through the exercise of judicial functions should be shared, with a level of detail sufficient to promote coherent and uniform juridical outcomes, in all areas of the world.

3

The need for consolidation and **clarity around the jurisdictions held by dicasteries** of the Roman Curia, to ensure the efficient, timely, and rigorous management of cases of abuse referred to the Holy See.

4

The need for a streamlined **process for discharge from office**, to enable a smooth and simple pathway for the resignation or removal of a Church leader, when warranted.

5

The need to further develop the Church's magisterium on her safeguarding ministry, to promote conversion within the Church regarding child dignity and human rights in relation to abuse. This must be through a unified and theological-pastoral vision.

6

The need to study **damages and compensation policies** to promote a rigorous approach to reparations, as part of the Church's commitment to the healing journey of victims/survivors.

7

The need **to promote the professionalisation of safeguarding in the Church**, by providing formal academic opportunities and adequate resources for aspiring safeguarding practitioners.

The Annual Report then offers an analysis of a number of Church entities by presenting the following:

- 1) a detailed **profile**
- 2) a **safeguarding overview**
- 3) the Commission's critical observations of the safeguarding **challenges** faced
- 4) the Commission's ensuing **recommendations**.

Data collection for this analysis has involved a synodal process with each of the Church entities concerned.

Sections of the Annual Report



Section 1 The Local Church in Focus

The Commission recognises the paramount importance of **accompanying local Church leaders** in their responsibility to implement prevention and response policies. During the reporting period, the Commission engages in **standardised data exchanges with the local bishops and religious superiors**. The purpose of Section 1 is to present **an account of the safeguarding activities and challenges in the local Churches**.

The review of bishops' safeguarding policies and procedures takes place through the *ad limina* process, by special request from either an episcopal conference or one of the Commission's Regional Groups. On this basis, the Commission reviews between **15 and 20 local Churches each year**, with the intention to **review the whole Church over a period of five to six Annual Reports**. Each Annual Report also includes an analysis of select religious institutes.

One episcopal conference from each region that came on an *ad limina* visit during this reporting period is presented in detail. These conferences are:

- > Mexico
- > Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands
- > Belgium
- > Cameroon



The remaining conferences that came on their *ad limina* visits during the reporting period are presented in abbreviated format, but following the same methodology. These conferences are:

- > Rwanda
- > Ivory Coast
- > Sri Lanka
- > Colombia
- > Tanzania
- > Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kinshasa)
- > Zimbabwe
- > Zambia
- > Ghana
- > Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville)
- > South Africa, Botswana, and Eswatini (Southern African Bishops' Conference)
- > Togo
- > Burundi

The religious institutes covered in this Annual Report are:

- > Consolata Missionary Sisters (Female)
- > Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Male)

The Commission's findings within the local Churches varied. While some Church entities and Church authorities demonstrate a clear commitment to safeguarding, others are only **at the beginning of undertaking the Church's responsibility regarding the occurrence of abuse**. At times, the Commission found a troubling **lack of reporting structures and victim/survivor accompaniment services, as required by the Motu Proprio Vos estis lux mundi**. The Commission also recognized that there is **a particular priority to develop safeguarding within religious life**. Still, in many other instances, the Commission was deeply encouraged by the robust and professional safeguarding regime in place.



Section 2 The Church's Safeguarding Mission in the Continental Regions

The Commission noted the importance of increasing solidarity among episcopal conferences in the various regions, to **mobilise resources for universal standards** in safeguarding, to create **centres for victims'/survivors' reporting and assistance**, and to develop a true **culture of safeguarding**.

Section 2 is authored by the members and personnel of the Commission's Regional Groups, and is based on their expertise and knowledge of regional safeguarding realities. It is particularly informed by the Commission's **engagement with victims/survivors at the local level**.

The Commission's findings within the continental regions varied. While parts of the Americas, Europe, and Oceania have benefitted from substantial resources available for safeguarding, **a significant part of Central and South America, Africa, and Asia have inadequate dedicated resources**. The Commission therefore noted the **urgency of increasing solidarity among episcopal conferences**, to mobilise resources for a universal standard in safeguarding.



Section 3 Safeguarding Policies and Procedures of the Roman Curia in Service of the Local Church

The Commission notes that as a **network of networks**, the Roman Curia can uniquely serve as **a hub for sharing good practices** in safeguarding, in its service to the local Churches. The Commission aims to promote a common vision and to collect reliable information, in order to foster a higher degree of transparency in the Roman Curia's procedures and jurisprudence with regard to individual cases of clerical abuse.

The purpose of Section 3 is to:

- a) communicate the **different safeguarding responsibilities** of the various dicasteries
- b) promote **the development of shared safeguarding standards** across the Roman Curia
- c) facilitate an **all-of-government approach** to safeguarding
- d) disseminate **trauma-informed and victim/survivor-centred approaches** to dicasterial work.

This Annual Report includes preliminary information on the **Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith** and an analysis of the **Dicastery for the Clergy**.

The Commission found a persistent concern regarding the **transparency in the Roman Curia's procedures and juridical processes**. The Commission notes that this will continue to foment distrust among the faithful, especially the victim/survivor community.

This section also presents a brief history of **normative developments in safeguarding** across the past three pontificates.



Section 4 The Church's Safeguarding Ministry in Society

The Church, in advancing her mission to **promote human rights in the broader society**, engages an array of populations to which she must **ensure proper safeguarding standards**. The purpose of Section 4 is to demonstrate how the Church's safeguarding work in the broader society can help to combat the diverse and evolving incidence of abuse, wherever it occurs.

In this Annual Report, the Commission presents findings in "case studies" on the **Caritas organizations**, across its institutional levels. This Annual Report includes an analysis of:

- 1) **Caritas Internationalis**, at the universal level
- 2) **Caritas Oceania**, at the regional level
- 3) **Caritas Chile**, at the national level
- 4) **Caritas Nairobi**, at the diocesan level

The Commission recognises the great complexity of the mission carried out by Caritas, and the safeguarding strides made in recent years. However, the Commission found a **wide variation in safeguarding practices among the various Caritas entities**, despite a common standard set out by Caritas Internationalis as the confederation with universal purview. The Commission notes its concerns regarding the **enforceability of a common safeguarding standard** across Caritas's various entities.

The Memorare Initiative

At the Holy Father's request, the Commission developed the **Memorare Initiative for victims/survivors**. Inspired by the prayer to the Blessed Virgin, its aim is to develop in the Global South:

- 1) **centres for reporting and assistance**, compliant with the *Motu Proprio Vos estis lux mundi*
- 2) capacity building through **local safeguarding formation**
- 3) **a network of safeguarding professionals** at the local level

Local Memorare Initiatives will also produce increasingly robust data on the safeguarding activities of the local Church, as an important data source for future editions of the Annual Report.

Listening to and learning from victims/survivors: from 2014 to 2024 and beyond

The Annual Report represents a coalescing of **the Commission's learnings over its first ten years**. The Commission has always included **victims/survivors** of sexual abuse **among its members, advisors, and personnel** — some who publicly identify as such and others who have chosen not to.

All of the testimony from victims/survivors, their advocacy groups, and their families **has impacted** the Commission's work. However, some specific examples of structured and trauma-informed interactions have included:

- a) A **Correspondence Protocol for Survivors and their Representatives**, developed by the first Commission, which allowed it to establish appropriate and safe processes by which to engage victims/survivors and their communities
- b) The Commission's **Survivor Advisory Panels**, designed for the integration of victims'/survivors' recommendations on the Church's practices and policies for prevention and response
- c) A **Victim/Survivor Pilot Focus Group for this Annual Report**, which was implemented at the level of one of the regions. Future iterations of the Annual Report will develop this approach across each of the regions

The lessons learned from these **direct engagements with victims/survivors** deeply inform the **analysis** presented in this Annual Report. The **Commission is fully committed to further expanding victims'/survivors' involvement** in the Annual Report process.

Acknowledgements

The Commission wishes to acknowledge the dedicated work that made this pilot Annual Report possible. The Commission is indebted to the countless victims/survivors who have contributed to and accompanied the Commission's work since its establishment. The Commission thanks the Annual Report Team, as the primary collaborators for this report, including: Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, *Member and Chair of the Annual Report Team*, Fr. Andrew Small, OMI, *former Secretary of the Commission*, Stefano Mattei, *Director of Policy and the Annual Report*, Nathan Leopold, *Annual Report Associate*, and Francesco Pappalardo, *Commission Canonist*.

The Commission also thanks its members and the various personnel who contributed to the analysis presented in this report. From the Commission membership: Bishop Luis Manuel Ali Herrera, *Secretary of the Commission*, Teresa Morris Kettelkamp, *Adjunct Secretary of the Commission*, Fr. Tim Brennan MSC, Ernesto Caffo, Juan Carlos Cruz, Teresa Devlin, Emilie Rivet Duval, Irma Patricia Espinosa Hernandez, Sinalelea Fe'ao, Nelson Giovanelli Rosendo Dos Santos, Sr. Arina Gonsalves RJM, Bishop Peter Karam, Archbishop Thibault Verny, Ewa Kusz, Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Sr. Teresa Nyadombo Annah HLMC, Sr. Niluka Perrera, and Neville Owen. From the Commission personnel: Emer McCarthy, Anna Valsi, Augusta Muthigani, Claudia Giampietro, Fr. Daniel Portillo, Daniele Donnini, Deria Licastro, Rosanna Giacometto, Eliane De Carli, Ines Franck, Patience Mwangi, and Jordi Pujol. The Commission also thanks all of its prior members and personnel, whose contributions paved the way for this pilot Annual Report.

Finally, the Commission wishes to thank all of the Church entities that engaged, in earnest, with this pilot Annual Report process. This engagement demonstrated a meaningful commitment to our common safeguarding ministry across the various episcopal conferences, religious congregations, dicasteries, and Caritas organizations.



Message from the President of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors



Our pilot Annual Report is the product of a great deal of discussion, reflection, time, and effort that began with Pope Francis's direction to the Commission during an April 2022 audience with the Holy Father that coincided with our Plenary Assembly:

*I would like you, on an annual basis, to prepare for me **a report on the Church's initiatives for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.** This might be **difficult at the beginning**, but I ask you to begin where necessary, in order to furnish **a reliable account** on what is presently being done and what needs to change, so that the competent authorities can act.*

*This report will be **a factor of transparency and accountability** and — I hope — will provide **a clear audit** of our progress in this effort. Without that progress, the faithful will continue to lose trust in their pastors, and preaching and witnessing to the Gospel will become increasingly difficult.*

It is the firm belief of the Commission's members and staff that all the People of God, and especially Church leaders, have been called to work toward two goals: (1) a Church that is safe from abuse within, and (2) a Church that is an effective protagonist against abuse and an advocate for the dignity of children and vulnerable adults throughout the world. Our goal is to develop an Annual Report with a commitment to transparency and accountability, in solidarity with victims and survivors throughout the world.¹

Our Holy Father called for the Annual Report to make clear that safeguarding needs to be at the heart of all dimensions of the Church's ministry.

First, it should be an instrument of knowledge for us to better understand how our values can inform our response to the scourge of abuse and help to establish effective means of prevention in all countries. Truth, justice, reparations, and institutional reform should serve as a roadmap for our work.

Second, we seek to develop a platform for sharing both good practices and the challenges faced in the local Churches. Throughout our ten years of dedication to the cause of safeguarding, it has been the Commission's belief that we can help share solutions to address the most pressing challenges.

¹ Among those who have experienced sexual harm, some identify as a "victim" and others prefer "survivor". Out of respect, this report uses the term "victim(s)/survivor(s)" throughout.

Third, it serves to measure and document developments in the Church's safeguarding initiatives throughout the world. We seek to use data collected through the Annual Report's well-developed methodology as a means for tracking which initiatives are working and those that are falling short. It is our hope that this work will be a sign of our commitment to restore the hope and trust of victims and survivors — as well as their families and communities.

Fourth, it serves as a systematic mechanism for the Commission's safeguarding professionals to provide expert insights and recommendations for specific Church entities.

Finally, it serves as a synodal tool to build collegiality and communion around the Church's safeguarding ministry. This pilot Annual Report alone has directly engaged over 20 Church entities, to constructively discuss their safeguarding commitments, achievements, and shortcomings. Sharing this information can be helpful for developing all of our initiatives, in our common mission of safeguarding.

In the scriptures we journey with the Lord from suffering and death to the Resurrection, to new life. This is the spirituality of reparation that the Holy Father shared with the Commission at another audience in May of 2023. Providing acknowledgement of and reparation for the Church's abuse crisis is difficult. As expressed in the Prayer of St. Francis, where there is darkness, we must work relentlessly to bring light. The Annual Report is a tool that can help us to continue working together, on behalf of safeguarding and protecting the people of the Church and all people of good faith.

I am grateful to all who helped make this pilot Annual Report possible, especially the victims and survivors who have courageously spoken out. Your resilience is a testimony of hope. And I am also grateful to all who are working to develop and implement the policies and procedures necessary for the Church to be in the best position to prevent any recurrence of abuse.

With the assurance of my prayers for you and all your loved ones,

Cardinal Seán O'Malley, OFM, Cap.



Summary of the Commission's Main Findings and Observations



The material contained in this pilot Annual Report represents, in part, the reality of the Church's efforts toward building a culture of safeguarding, corresponding to the mandate given to the Commission by the Holy Father. It is a first attempt to capture not only a theoretical basis for that long-term work but also a pilot application of that theory by offering a presentation of what is happening in local Churches and communities, today. Its focus has been on the policies, procedures, and mechanisms required by Church norms, established to keep children and vulnerable adults safe. It also focuses on the offering of care owed to those impacted by abuse. This pilot Report is not intended as an audit of the incidence of abuse within Church contexts. This is especially due to time and capacity constraints. It is also due to a lack of reliable data in some countries, most notably reliable statistics on the number of children who are sexually abused. Hopefully, future Reports will address the incidence of abuse, including the question of progress in reducing and preventing abuse. This might more completely fulfil the long-term auditing function of the Commission.

After the completion of this pilot Annual Report, the Commission is able to highlight certain main observations based on its safeguarding expertise that aim to: (1) show current deficiencies, (2) promote sound policies and practices, and (3) boost the Church's overall efforts in safeguarding. These observations stem from the process of collaboration with ecclesiastical bodies but also from the vast experience accumulated by the Commission's members and related personnel. The Commission recognises that the points that have emerged from this initial consideration, which note key areas for action, need in-depth and informed study. Accordingly, the Commission will seek to promote inter-dicasterial and inter-disciplinary reflection on these areas. It offers its full cooperation to the bodies involved.

The Commission recognizes that among the top priorities of those impacted by abuse is access to the truth. In line with the call for ever greater transparency, measures should be explored that provide the right of any individual to information related to him/her retained by any Church entity, especially the circumstances and responsibilities related to their case of abuse — with due regard to data protection laws and requirements. As two examples, a Procurator for the aggrieved party and a role comparable to the function of an Ombudsman are proposed for consideration and study by the relevant institutions of the Roman Curia. This study and consideration should be consistent with Article 8, §1 of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*.

Also, there are various normative sources that address the question of vulnerability in adults, occasionally making its definition and enforcement in safeguarding provisions different across contexts. A more uniform definition of vulnerability must be developed. To help in this pursuit, experience gained through the exercise of judicial functions should be shared, with a level of detail sufficient to promote coherent and uniform juridical outcomes, in all areas of the world.

The Commission also notes the important role played by the Roman Curia, and the fact that responsibilities exercised by the dicasteries and local Church authorities are fragmented. An unambiguous and shared protocol that clarifies the various responsibilities, and their limits, in a timely manner would help to avoid delays in the Roman Curia's service to the local Churches.

This should especially be consistent with Article 9, §1 of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*.

In its ten years of service, the Commission has seen Church leaders who have been subjects of past administrative actions and/or inactions that have been the source of additional harm to victims/survivors of sexual abuse. Such a reality reveals the need for a disciplinary or administrative proceeding that provides an efficient path for resignation or removal from office.

The Commission acknowledges the need to promote conversion within the Church regarding child dignity and human rights in relation to abuse. This must be through a unified and theological-pastoral vision. The Commission believes that the desirable end point might be a document of the Magisterium unifying these perspectives — as an Encyclical, dedicated to the Protection of the Child and Vulnerable Adults in the Church's life.

The Commission reiterates the importance of compensation for victims/survivors, as a concrete commitment to their healing journey. Compensation in the Church is not merely reduced to financial aspects, but embraces a much broader spectrum of actions. In fact, as witnessed in the Commission's local work, other aspects such as acknowledging mistakes, public apologies, and other forms of true fraternal closeness to victims/survivors and their communities are often even more important. To this end, the Commission will delve into the pillar of reparations in the next edition of the Annual Report to better represent all these needs. Nevertheless, economic reparations are also particularly relevant, and the Commission will continue to offer its cooperation to key Church bodies so that standardised and known procedures are developed in a more comprehensive way.

Many Church authorities have shared with the Commission their view of professional training in safeguarding as a fruitful investment to help them better govern their dioceses or congregations. They recognise that this training helps develop a culture of care for victims/survivors of clerical sexual abuse. However, it is necessary to address the significant disparity in resources among local Churches. This resource gap must continue to be filled, to foster the professionalisation of safeguarding across the Church. Finally, the Commission recommends the involvement of the Pontifical Universities in Rome and other academic institutions to create dedicated courses of study for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults within the Church. The curricula should cover the various areas of safeguarding and be designed for clergy, religious, and lay people working in the local Churches.



Introduction and Background

In 2024, the Commission marks ten years (two three-year terms and one five-year term that is still ongoing) since it was formally established by the Holy Father. These ten years have seen an expansion and deepening of awareness of the reality of sexual abuse in the Church and its mishandling. The Commission has accompanied this painful trajectory as more national Churches have come to terms with this terrible reality. The Commission has repeatedly offered constructive advice to the Holy Father and accompanied Church leadership in various ways. It has sought to prioritise the experience of those impacted by sexual abuse, for their own well-being and in response to their requests for assistance. This work helps to ensure that their experience and legitimate demands for justice and greater prevention measures are respected.

The challenge of drafting a comprehensive report on the Church's safeguarding efforts has required the Commission to adopt a framework and theory-of-change model in order to understand how to bring about the necessary changes recommended in this Report. The Commission has adopted the concept of conversional justice as a framework to situate its findings and recommendations.

Conversional Justice

Conversion and abuse

Pope Francis recognised the necessity of spiritual conversion in addressing abuse in *Vos estis lux mundi*, stating: "In order that [the crimes of sexual abuse], in all their forms, never happen again, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church..."²

In May 2023, Pope Francis reiterated: "Indeed, a culture of safeguarding will only take root if there is a pastoral conversion in this regard among the Church's leaders"³

The Annual Report facilitates a process of ongoing conversion by the Church

The Commission's Annual Report is designed to facilitate a process of ongoing conversion by the Church. This process of ongoing conversion includes at least two transitions or stages, which sometimes may overlap or coincide. The first transition is a move away from times of widespread sexual abuse that was frequently mishandled and covered up — to a new period when policies for safeguarding, reporting, investigations, and care for victims/survivors make abuses rare, and provide appropriate responses. The second transition concerns the long-term process of properly addressing the aftermath of periods of widespread abuse and mishandling of cases, by providing or facilitating care for victims/survivors and by addressing the impacts on the entire Church. Both transitions require practices of truth-telling, justice, reparations, and guarantees of nonrecurrence through personal and institutional reform.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes the first stage of conversion: "It is by faith to the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life".⁴ Renouncing evil requires the first transition of turning away from practices that



facilitate, tolerate, and permit widespread abuse, through acknowledging the truth, providing or facilitating justice and reparations for victims/survivors, and making personal and institutional reforms that provide guarantees of nonrecurrence.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes the second stage of conversion as an uninterrupted task for the whole Church, which "follows constantly the path of penance and renewal".⁵ Such a path of conversion and penance "is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defence of justice and right, by the

² FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Vos estis lux mundi* (25 March 2023).

³ FRANCIS, *Address to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (5 May 2023).

⁴ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, n. 1427.

⁵ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, n. 1428.

admission of faults, [and] revision of life".⁶ This process of change is directed first to Church authorities and then to the whole People of God. This pathway of penance and renewal requires the second transition of addressing the aftermath of widespread abuse and the mishandling of cases. Truth-telling continues to be important during this second transition, and justice and reparations for victims becomes even more prominent as survivors may come forward in increasing numbers from past cases that occurred over many years. Institutionalizing reforms and safeguarding practices can effectively prevent the recurrence of large-scale abuse.

Churches are differently situated as to the two transitions

The different geographic regions that are the focus of the Commission's work — and even different Churches within the same country — have different histories with regard to clerical abuse. For some, the issue has been recognised and well publicised for more than a generation. For others, the issue has burst into public awareness and prominence within the last decade. There are yet others where the issue of clerical abuse has not yet become a publicised issue within their societies. These three situations correspond to different realities of conversion. The Annual Report takes these different realities into account.

Truth

Truth in Catholic theology

Truth-telling is particularly important given the nature of sexual abuse, which is typically conducted in private and kept secret. The domination of victims/survivors by abusers is often expressed in manipulation and threats designed to keep victims/survivors (especially children) silent and to cause them to internalise a self-blaming shame and stigma.⁷ Truth-telling about abuse is the foundation of providing accountability, justice, reparation, and healing for survivors.

Equally important is the telling of the truth about the failures of Church authorities. If not for these failures of leadership, there would be no large-scale abuse.

Theologically, the Catechism grounds the imperative toward truth-telling in the Eighth Commandment, stating that the commandment "forbids misrepresenting the truth in our relations with others".⁸ "Offenses against the truth...are fundamental infidelities to God and...undermine the foundations of the covenant".⁹ Perpetrators and enablers of abuse have engaged in misrepresentations as a consistent pattern of such "infidelities to God" through denials and cover-ups of what has been done to victims/survivors.

Jesus's statements that He is "the truth" (John 14:6) and that "the truth will make you free" (John 8:32) further frame what is at stake. Indeed, Jesus, who is the truth, sets us free from our sins and "sanctifies" us.¹⁰



⁶ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, n. 1435.

⁷ PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS, *Culture of Healing* (2022).

⁸ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, n. 2464.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, n. 2466.

Ascertaining the truth

The Church's centuries-old *ad limina* process is one mechanism to facilitate the finding of truth about the perpetrating and enabling of abuse in the Church. As part of the *ad limina* process, exchanges between the local Churches and the Commission about safeguarding policies are an important tool in the Commission's oversight mandate.

As a means of finding the truth, however, the *ad limina* process is incomplete. Particularly with a large-scale human rights violation, multiple sources of information are essential. These include the following:

Victims/survivors

It is imperative to hear from victims/survivors. For example, victim/survivor focus groups can provide valuable feedback on their experiences with Church authorities in response to disclosures and reports. In particular, such focus groups could be invited to comment directly on aspects of the Annual Report and/or the Annual Report process. More broadly, consultations should be pursued with formally organised victim/survivor groups, which generally have been created for the purposes of support and advocacy. In addition, the Commission should continue its tradition of regularly engaging with and listening to victims/survivors, as well as selecting victims/survivors as members and personnel of the Commission, whether publicly identified as such or not.

Disciplinary Section of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

The Disciplinary Section of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has publicly shared limited statistical information on its activities.¹¹ In order for the Annual Report to be an auditing mechanism, as requested by the Holy Father, the Commission would need access to more specific statistical information from the Disciplinary Section.

Reports by regional or local Churches

Some local Churches have themselves collected and publicised statistical information. Of course, this information would be particularly relevant in the year in which a particular local Church is going through the *ad limina* process. However, even in other years, this data can be a useful point of comparison.

Government reports and reports by independent ad hoc groups

Sometimes governments, because of investigations into cases, have issued useful reports or made information public. Independent ad hoc groups also create helpful and reliable reports that are useful sources of information.

International organisations and global/local NGOs
Publicly available information from international organisations and global and local NGOs should be consulted and analysed. Moreover, any such organisations likely to have additional information should be approached to ascertain if they are willing to share information or cooperate with the Commission's Annual Report process. Questions sent to these organisations should, to the degree applicable, include (but not necessarily be limited to) the kinds of questions about safeguarding activities sent to local Churches through the *ad limina* process.

Media sources

The Commission should research and evaluate publicly available information from media sources, particularly those of greater reliability. It may also be useful to approach media sources to ascertain if they have additional information that they are willing to share.

¹¹ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Activities of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/attivita-cfaith/rc_con_cfaith_index-attivita-cfaith_en.html.

Justice

Pope Francis has recognised that “the evil that does not spare even the innocence of children” requires in response “disciplinary measures and civil and canonical processes”.¹² Further, the Holy Father has promised that “[c]lergy and bishops will be held accountable when they abuse or fail to protect children”.¹³

For victims/survivors, however, civil and canonical processes can be difficult, slow, and even a source of ongoing victimisation.¹⁴ By their nature, these processes tend to focus on allegations and perpetrators rather than on the present needs of survivors. It is important for survivors to be properly heard, accompanied, and supported. Thus, one part of the Annual Report process will be to assist Church authorities in considering how to supplement the civil and canonical processes that supply justice with processes that address the experiences, perspectives, and needs of victims/survivors. Justice should not come at the cost of further trauma.



Reparations

In May 2023, Pope Francis called for a “spirituality of reparation”.¹⁵ He indicated that this work of reparation would require listening carefully to victims/survivors.¹⁶ The role of apologies, formal and informal, is closely linked to the necessity of listening. Pope Francis himself models and directs this combination of listening and apologising to survivors as a means of healing.¹⁷

Reparation in this context refers to the repair of victims/survivors, not the restoration of perpetrators, which should be dealt with separately. Victims/survivors should not be coerced or manipulated into meeting or communicating with perpetrators, as the spiritual restoration of perpetrators is not the responsibility of victims/survivors. The Annual Report process is designed to assist local Churches in developing, in conjunction with victims/survivors, approaches to this delicate process of facilitating healing.

Guarantees of nonrecurrence

As noted earlier, *Vos estis lux mundi* had as a fundamental goal that the “crimes of sexual abuse...never happen again...”.¹⁸ Abuse was enabled in an environment of secrecy and concealment, and abuse will be prevented in an environment of truth, accountability, justice, listening to victims/survivors, reparative services, and personal and institutional reforms.

Safeguarding and child-protection measures will be addressed in more detail through the Commission’s *Universal Guidelines Framework* currently under development. The Annual Report audit function will also provide a mechanism for improvement of such processes.

¹² FRANCIS, *Address at the End of the Eucharistic Concelebration* (24 February 2019).

¹³ FRANCIS, *Address on Meeting with Victims of Sexual Abuse* (27 September 2015).

¹⁴ PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS, *Culture of Healing* (2022).

¹⁵ FRANCIS, *Address to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (5 May 2023).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ FRANCIS, *Address on Meeting with Victims of Sexual Abuse* (27 September 2015); *Address to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (5 May 2023); *Address to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (29 April 2022); *Address to the Meeting Organised by the Italian Episcopal Conference for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable People* (18 November 2023).

¹⁸ FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter Motu Proprio Vos estis lux mundi* (25 March 2023).

Final considerations

Safeguarding children from abuse is not a distraction from the Church’s work of evangelisation, but rather an expression of it.¹⁹ As the Holy Father has stated:

“Mending the torn fabric of past experience is a redemptive act, the act of the suffering Servant, who did not avoid pain, but took upon himself the iniquity of us all (see Is. 53:1-14)”.²⁰

The methodology of this pilot Annual Report is intended as an application of spiritual practices necessary for those occasions when the Church confronts widespread evil, exploitation, and abuse within the Church. As the Holy Father has further stated, “Now is the time to repair the damage done to previous generations and to those who continue to suffer”.²¹

Before beginning our analysis of Church contexts and realities, the Commission offers what it considers a vital anchor for all its work: the experience, testimony, and demands of those who have been impacted by abuse in the Church.

Listening and Responding to Victims and Survivors: Toward a Methodology of Inclusion and Representation

“Listen with compassion and encourage and challenge as needed”.

“The Church has mostly taken action to address the issue of sexual abuse of minors within the institution when it has been forced to. Most of its actions have been reactive. The Church possesses the wisdom, the resources, and now the tragic experience to become a world leader for all societies in identifying, preventing and healing the effects of sexual abuse”.

Participants in a Survivor Advisory Panel to the Commission, 2019 (conducted virtually)

The work of the Commission is best captured in terms of a process that has been under way, since its inception, of incremental learning through interaction with two stakeholder groups: (1) victims/survivors of sexual abuse and their families and advocates, and (2) Church leadership. In its first ten years, the Commission has undertaken information-gathering through a multisectoral engagement with both groups. The task of interacting on behalf of the Church with people who have been profoundly traumatised by interactions with the institutional Church is highly complex. Any communication with victims/survivors necessarily presupposes a willingness for dialogue on their part, and requires a relationship of trust established over time in an appropriate and safe context. It also presupposes that victims/survivors are willing to be identified — and that there are safe channels for identification.

When it was created in 2014, the Commission immediately pointed to the absence of safe spaces for victims in the Church, along with a lack of structural channels for disclosure and assistance services. It quickly became clear that the Commission would have to first become a platform for the voice of victims/survivors, while at the same time helping create safe spaces at a local level for the existing victim/survivor community within the Church.

¹⁹ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, n. 2-3.

²⁰ FRANCIS, *Address to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (5 May 2023).

²¹ *Ibid.*



Listening and responding to victims/survivors

Since its formation, the Commission has included victims/survivors of abuse among its membership, advisors, and personnel — some who publicly identify as such and others who have chosen not to. The insights that they have offered in terms of (1) gaps in safeguarding policies and norms and (2) language and approach in education, formation, and pastoral outreach continue to have the most direct impact on the Commission's work.

That said, all Commission members have first-hand professional experience working with children and vulnerable adults — and with communities impacted by sexual abuse in an institutional setting.

Initially, the Commission divided its expert members into thematic working groups, with one group specifically led by victims/survivors and dedicated to healing and care for victims/survivors and their families.



The remit of this group in its first iteration (2014–2018) is summarised in three areas:

1. To communicate with survivors, families, and interested organisations to ensure that their views and experiences are heard and considered in the Commission's work
2. To consider their advice about what should be done to protect minors and to care for victims/survivors and their families
3. To recommend how the Paramountcy Principle (Art. 3.1, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) would be implemented by the Commission

The group set several tasks for itself, which included:

1. The development of protocols on appropriate official responses to victims/survivors
2. The development of protocols on how to facilitate visits to the Commission offices by victims/survivors from different countries, which would contribute to personal healing
3. Recommendations on safeguarding guidelines with regard to best practices on the local diocesan response to a disclosure of abuse, and subsequent case management, communication, and support

The group also developed the *Correspondence Protocol for Survivors and their Representatives*, which has allowed the Commission to establish appropriate and safe processes by which to offer assistance. The protocols that guide these interactions set out professional parameters for the assistance that the Commission can offer in terms of information sharing, referrals, and follow-up. They also establish the criteria for responses as well as the methodology to be applied in responding/listening to or receiving a victim or survivor of abuse.

While fully aware that out of the global population of victims/survivors, only a small sample contact the Commission, the Commission believes that an analysis of this sample is helpful insofar as it reflects trends and outcomes — and identifies gaps and open questions — brought to the Commission's attention by those who are directly affected. It allows the Commission to focus on specific policy areas for further study, and in turn offer recommendations.

Survivor Advisory Panels

In 2017, in collaboration with local Church leadership, the Commission began introducing Survivor Advisory Panels (SAPs) in North and South America, Africa, Europe, and Asia. These panels were based on the model developed by the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission for England and Wales. They were designed as platforms for the integration of recommendations from victims and survivors regarding the methodologies, practices, and policies for intervention and assistance for people who have been abused in a Church context.

SAPs are formal groups of individuals who have direct experience with sexual abuse, and they provide ongoing advice, guidance, and input. Their input helps organisations and institutions ensure that their responses are comprehensive and sensitive to the needs of victims/survivors.

Over a period of four years (2018–2022, which included a global pandemic), the Commission piloted SAPs in Brazil, Zambia, and the Philippines, as well as a virtual SAP online — periodically assessing the progress, challenges, and outcomes from the establishment of the panels and their inclusion in the life of the local Church.

SAP members generously offered their time and testimonies in person or by video to the Commission's safeguarding formation programs on all five continents. They also helped develop a protocol for video testimonies to ensure a safe environment for both the person recording their story and those receiving it.

In 2021, the SAPs conceptualised a seminar to gather and evaluate the learnings over four years across the global Church. This seminar had the aim of producing a practical model for active and informed listening and responding to victims/survivors of clergy sex abuse in diverse cultural settings. Titled "A Culture of Healing: Promoting a Culturally Sensitive Approach for Listening and Responding to Those Who Have Been Abused" (2022), the seminar was offered online in five languages to approximately 700 attendees from five continents.

As the Commission approached its third term, a final assessment of the work of the SAPs was conducted to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the model as a platform for the voice of victims/survivors in the Church. This assessment also allowed the Commission to summarise for the Holy Father the key recommendations that emerged.²²

The Annual Report pilot focus group

"We are very specific when we show our wounds, but the Church's response is not concrete; it is cold, vague or none at all".

"I don't understand how they were not moved by our suffering; if one is moved even by a starving dog in the street, why were they not moved to know that so many of us were suffering in there; why haven't they done anything?"

"If to us as victims the Church does not take care of us, and to our families even less, how can those domestic Churches be recovered, if it is the same Church that closed the doors to them?"

"Who was going to tell me that the least difficult part of this whole process was going to be the abuse! The truly terrible thing is what happens when you dare to denounce, there the world really comes crashing down on you".

Participants in a pilot focus group, 2024

²² PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS, *Culture of Healing* (2022). Retrieved from: <https://www.editricelas.it/prodotto/culture-of-healing/>.

Within this methodology of engagement with victims/survivors and their families, the Commission noted the need to include key voices in the content and structure of the Annual Report process. The Commission sees the use of focus groups, in addition to SAPs, as particularly useful. Both types of groups are valuable in providing critical perspectives and insights, but they differ in terms of their ongoing versus temporary nature and the level of focus in their discussions.

Focus groups are generally smaller, less-formal, shorter-lived gatherings of individuals that typically delve deeply into specific issues, gather feedback on specific topics, and/or generate new ideas or solutions. The purposes of these groups may be more targeted, focusing on a particular aspect of the Annual Report process.

Focus groups can be especially useful in identifying and addressing gaps in the Commission's methodology for the Annual Report. The Commission can gain greater insight into how the Annual Report could respond to the specific needs and challenges faced by victims/survivors. This direct feedback could inform and enrich approaches to safeguarding and protection in the future.

The use of a focus group for victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church offers a valuable opportunity to encourage participation, active listening, and continuous improvement in the Annual Report process.



Methodology for focus groups

The methodology for the participation of a victim/survivor focus group in the Annual Report process must be carefully planned and executed. It should follow the Commission's *Correspondence Protocol*. It must take into account the following basic aspects:

1. Identification of participants: It is crucial to select participants who are willing to share their experiences and opinions. It may be helpful to have the collaboration of organisations that support survivors of sexual abuse.
2. Well-trained interviewers: Those who will be conducting the interviews with participants must be experts and professionals not only in safeguarding but especially in accompanying victims/survivors of sexual abuse.
3. Discussion guide on the Annual Report: A discussion guide should be developed that includes open-ended questions to encourage free expression by the participants, without inducing specific answers.
4. Safe environment: It is imperative to create a safe and confidential environment so that participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. To this end, it is essential to have an informed consent for each participant where confidentiality is guaranteed.
5. Data analysis: Analysis of the information collected should identify patterns and emerging themes.

A focus group consultation for the Annual Report was implemented during this reporting period as a pilot scheme in the Americas. By conducting a pilot, the Commission was able to identify potential problems in the focus group design, especially regarding the questions asked, the group dynamics, and other factors that might affect the validity and integrity of the results. Future iterations of the Annual Report will refine and implement this methodology in each of the regions.



Section 1

The local Church in Focus

Introduction to Section 1

Purpose

There are 114 episcopal conferences worldwide.²³ The Commission plans to review 15–20 conferences each year, with the aim of covering them all within 5–6 years — or roughly the term of each Commission. As a result, not every national Church is covered in each iteration of the Annual Report. The local Churches that the Commission will present in each Annual Report correspond primarily to the episcopal conferences that engage in their *ad limina* visit for the year under review, because this is the ordinary channel that the Commission uses to engage a local Church. The findings from each of the episcopal conferences will be presented, organised by discrete country.

²³ This number does not include the hierarchical structures of the Eastern Rite Churches, who also fall under the Commission's accompaniment mandate.

In this pilot Annual Report, one conference from each region that had their *ad limina* visit during the reporting period will be presented in full detail. Any remaining conferences that had their *ad limina* visit during the reporting period will be presented in abbreviated format. Finally, after the findings from each of the episcopal conferences are presented, the selection of religious orders from the reporting period will be presented. It is important to note that the recommendations are not presented in any particular order.

Tracking and promoting safeguarding activities in the local Churches

Safeguarding is an indispensable component of the Church's mission, and the responsibility of all the People of God.²⁴ Therefore, the primary purpose of the first section of the Annual Report is to present an account of the safeguarding activities of local Churches — where the People of God live their vocations in daily contact with their brothers and sisters.



Support by the local Churches



The Church's concept of subsidiarity, whereby decisions are taken at the level at which they will have the most relevant impact, recognises that people's lives are most affected by their experiences in their immediate surroundings.²⁵ The Commission strongly believes that this concept of subsidiarity is particularly relevant when it comes to safeguarding minors and vulnerable adults. When crimes of abuse are committed within the victim's/survivor's community of trust, representatives of the local Churches should act as front-line support for their healing through pastoral care and accompaniment referrals.

Service to the local Church

Authority and responsibility over the local Church are concentrated in the wide-reaching executive, juridical, administrative, and managerial powers vested in the local bishop, or figures of juridical equivalence.²⁶ From a governance perspective, this figure is termed "the local ordinary". In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission considers it important to examine and accompany the effectiveness of prevention and response policies prescribed by local ordinaries, usually through their episcopal conferences or conferences of religious. This ongoing involvement is also consistent with the Principles and Criteria for the Service of the Roman Curia, outlined in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*.²⁷



²⁴ FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Vox estis lux mundi* (25 March 2023); "Our Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to be a shining example of virtue, integrity and holiness."

²⁵ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (No. 186). Retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

²⁶ Can. 381 CIC - §1. A diocesan bishop in the diocese entrusted to him has all ordinary, proper, and immediate power which is required for the exercise of his pastoral function except for cases in which the law or a decree of the Supreme Pontiff reserves power to the supreme authority or to another ecclesiastical authority.

²⁷ FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, II n. 3; "...with timely counsel, encouraging the pastoral conversion that they promote, showing solidary support for their efforts at evangelisation, their preferential pastoral option for the poor, their protection of minors and vulnerable persons..."

Methodology

Safeguarding policy review

Safeguarding guidelines developed and published by national Churches are a crucial tool in creating a safer Church.²⁸ According to the mandate set out in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, the Commission is called to assist local Churches in developing and implementing their safeguarding guidelines.²⁹ In the past, Church leaders too often made decisions on an ad hoc basis, according to their own discretion and without reference to acceptable standards. This led to poor handling of cases of abuse. Church authorities will reduce the risk of abuse by supporting the development, implementation, and auditing of safeguarding guidelines. This approach is consistent with the sociological theory of integration, whereby an individual's behaviour generally adjusts to a broader set of norms. By explicitly defining those norms in a set of guidelines, an institution can chart a new cultural and moral direction.

The Commission's review of safeguarding guidelines takes place through the following channels:

Channel 1

The *ad limina* process, with a predetermined rotating schedule of local Churches each year.

Channel 2

Spontaneous requests from local Churches that, because of an updating or local review of existing policies, seek assistance from the Commission.

Channel 3

A request by the Commission's Regional Groups, which might share concerns about a specific local Church, and a particular need to offer assistance.

²⁸ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Circular Letter to Assist Episcopal Conferences in Developing Guidelines for Dealing with Cases of Sexual Abuses of Minors Perpetrated by Clerics*, 2011.

²⁹ Art. 78 PE §2.



Channel 1 The *ad limina* process

The *ad limina* visits constitute an important moment in the relationship between the Holy See and the local Churches.³⁰ Canon Law indicates that every five years, each diocesan bishop is required to submit a written report³¹ and make an in-person visit to Rome³² to meet with the Holy Father and the various dicasteries of the Roman Curia³³ — all distinct departments of the Holy See.

In relation to the Commission's work vis-à-vis the *ad limina* visits, the following aspects should be kept in mind:

- > The dicasteries of the Roman Curia engage in the *ad limina* process all year round. Dicasteries regularly host groups of bishops on a country-by-country basis or, where the number of bishops is large, in separate groups of 20-30 bishops. These visits include conferences from the Latin Rite Churches and the Eastern Rite Churches. Accordingly, the Dicastery for Bishops, Dicastery for Evangelisation, and Dicastery for the Eastern Churches share competencies in organising these visits.
- > In preparation, each bishop responds to a series of questions that address the entire life and ministry of a specific diocese. Known as the quinquennial report — meaning “five-yearly” report — these extensive reports are requested approximately a year in advance of the in-person visit.³⁴
- > There is currently no section of the quinquennial report that is specifically dedicated to safeguarding. However, the Commission has developed a series of statistical and descriptive questions regarding the diocesan safeguarding program that it sends to bishops preparing for the *ad limina* visit. As a pilot program, several episcopal conferences have already received a draft set of these questions and responded ahead of their *ad limina* visits.
- > Ahead of the *ad limina* visit, the Commission reviews a conference's safeguarding guidelines against the *Universal Guidelines Framework*.³⁵
- > Together, the questionnaires and review of safeguarding guidelines help the Commission prepare for an in-person meeting with the diocesan bishops.³⁶ These meetings facilitate “an open and cordial dialogue” that allows the Commission to ask specific clarifying questions and collect meaningful additional data.³⁷ The meetings are hosted by the Commission's leadership, although Commission members often also participate in these meetings and/or offer their evaluation of the minutes from the meeting.

³⁰ Art. 39 PE. This visit has a particular importance for unity and communion in the life of the Church, inasmuch as it constitutes the summit of the relationship of the Pastors of each particular Church, each Episcopal Conference, and each hierarchical structure of the Eastern Churches with the Bishop of Rome.

³¹ Can 399 CIC - §1. Every five years a diocesan bishop is bound to make a report to the Supreme Pontiff on the state of the diocese entrusted to him, according to the form and time determined by the Apostolic See.

³² Can 400 CIC - §1. Unless the Apostolic See has established otherwise, during the year in which he is bound to submit a report to the Supreme Pontiff, a diocesan bishop is to go to Rome to venerate the tombs of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul and to present himself to the Roman Pontiff.

³³ Art. 41 PE. The visit is divided into three principal moments: the pilgrimage to the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles, the meeting with the Roman Pontiff, and the discussions with the dicasteries and Institutions of Justice of the Roman Curia.

³⁴ CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the *ad limina* visit (1988).

³⁵ PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS, *Universal Guidelines Framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/universal-guidelines-framework/>.

³⁶ Art. 42 PE - §1. The Prefects or their equivalents, and the respective Secretaries of the dicasteries and Institutions of Justice, should prepare diligently for the meeting with the Pastors of particular Churches, the Episcopal Conferences, and the hierarchical structures of the Eastern Churches by carefully examining the reports received from them.

³⁷ Art. 42 PE - §2. In meeting with the Pastors mentioned in §1, the Prefects or their equivalents, and the respective Secretaries of the dicasteries and Institutions of Justice, through an open and cordial dialogue, should offer them counsel, encouragement, suggestions, and appropriate indications with the aim of contributing to the good and development of the whole Church in observance of the common discipline, and receive suggestions and indications from the Pastors in order to offer an increasingly effective service.

- > There are challenges in collecting comprehensive and reliable data from the *ad limina* visits, including:

- + Local Churches do not have a long tradition of compiling data related to safeguarding.
- + The data is self-reported and contains little third-party verification.
- + An over-reliance on the testimony of bishops in this oversight mechanism risks minimising other important areas in which good safeguarding practices are essential, including religious congregations and lay movements.

Channel 2 Request from the local Church

The Commission engages with a local Church when a given national episcopal conference or religious conference directly solicits the Commission's advice and accompaniment. When such a request is received, a comprehensive review of the national safeguarding guidelines is initiated, based on the *Universal Guidelines Framework*. This review is followed, coordinated, and realised at the level of the Commission's respective Regional Groups.

Channel 3 Request by the Regional Group

The Commission engages with a local Church when one of the Commission's Regional Groups decides to initiate a review of a specific episcopal conference or religious conference's national safeguarding guidelines. Such an engagement is at the full initiative of the Regional Group. The Commission's particular and proactive closeness to specific local Churches facilitates this data exchange. The subsequent comprehensive review of the national safeguarding guidelines is conducted using the *Universal Guidelines Framework*.

Capacity building and the Memorare Initiative

In April 2022³⁸ and May 2023³⁹ the Holy Father urged the Commission to ensure that the necessary expertise in safeguarding is present or can be developed throughout the Church. In response, the Commission has created a capacity-building program — the Memorare Initiative — that provides advice and also financial resources (through grants from the Memorare Fund) to those parts of the Church where such resources are lacking. By partnering with the local Churches, the Commission can offer accompaniment to promote compliance with the reporting requirements found in Article 2 of *Vos estis lux mundi*.

Memorandum of Understanding — reporting requirement

Memorare Initiatives in the local Churches begin with a Memorandum of Understanding that determines the roles and responsibilities of the local Church and of the Commission. Built into the Memorandum of Understanding is a reporting requirement, as prescribed by the Commission to the local Church. The reporting exercise is conducted using a standard reporting questionnaire that solicits statistical and descriptive data on the activities of the Memorare Initiative in the country. This anonymised data includes: (1) statistics on abuse reports received, (2) victim/survivor accompaniment services delivered,

³⁸ FRANCIS, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (29 April 2022); “[...]to assist and oversee in dialogue with the Conferences of Bishops – in establishing suitable centres where individuals who have experienced abuse, and their family members, can find acceptance and an attentive hearing, and be accompanied in a process of healing and justice, as indicated in the *Motu Proprio Vos estis lux mundi* (cf. Art. 2).”

³⁹ FRANCIS, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (5 May 2023); “The *Motu Proprio* calls, in particular, for setting aside places for receiving accusations and caring for those who report that they have been harmed (cf. Art. 2). To be sure, improvements can be made on the basis of experience, by Episcopal Conferences and individual bishops.”

and (3) the provision of safeguarding courses. In time, the Memorare Initiative will provide an important and reliable source of data from victims/survivors within a local Church.

The Commission's outreach to victims/survivors as a central part of its ministry

In addition to the data and testimonies received from formalised Memorare Initiatives, the Commission also includes its ongoing learnings from listening to victims and survivors.

These listening exercises have been structured and regular, as noted in the introduction of this report. Moreover, Commission members living in the various regions are regularly in contact with victims and survivors at the local level.

Religious orders

The Commission acknowledges the importance of its mandate to also accompany “the Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and their Conferences”.⁴⁰ The Commission has noted that religious orders and their superiors are not included in the traditional *ad limina* process, nor is there an analogous process written into Canon Law for religious life. Therefore, in addition to the Commission's review process through the *ad limina* visits, the Commission also selects several religious orders each year to bring into focus.

The methodology for evaluating religious life follows much the same process as for the episcopal conferences, including: (1) a safeguarding guideline review process and (2) the furnishing of a questionnaire to conduct a mapping of safeguarding activities and structures. The Commission especially notes the importance of a dedicated channel for reviewing and reporting on the religious orders because of their transnational nature. The religious orders presented each year reflect the orders that the Commission has engaged with during that reporting year, especially those that have submitted responses to the questionnaire.

⁴⁰ Art. 78 PE - §2.



Profile

Mexico is a nation with 19 archdioceses, 73 dioceses, 4 territorial Prelatures, and 2 Eparchies. It relies on the Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano (CEM) as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the CEM in three groupings: Group 1 on 24 April 2023; Group 2 on 30 May 2023; and Group 3 on 22 June 2023.



CEM
Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano

Episcopal Conference of Mexico

Safeguarding overview

- > The Commission piloted a safeguarding questionnaire with the Mexican Episcopal Conference during their *ad limina* process. This pilot consisted of a set of approximately ten detailed questions, to be answered by the bishops in narrative form. In total, the Commission received 20 responses, representing a response rate of 20% out of 98 total local Churches in the country.
- > The Commission noted the presence in each individual diocese of a diocesan commission for the protection of minors. These diocesan commissions were instituted by episcopal decree and represent the central safeguarding organ at the diocesan level. They are supported at the national level by the “Consejo Nacional de Protección de Menores”, which is “a multidisciplinary body of the Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano (CEM) created by the Bishops of Mexico to respond comprehensively to the problem of child sexual abuse by clergy and pastoral agents in the ecclesiastical sphere”.⁴¹
- > The Conference collaborates with CEPROME,⁴² a regional network of civil safeguarding practitioners in Latin America promoting safeguarding services and formation across the region. The Commission notes that many diocesan commissions have benefited from this training.
- > The Conference also benefits from the presence of the “Organización de Seminarios de Mexico (OSMEX)” — a unified network for all seminaries across the country. The Commission recognises such a network as a good practice, considering the value that a centralised database offers for vetting seminarians as they prepare for Holy Orders.
- > There are promising collaborations between the bishops and the “Sistema Nacional de Protección Integral de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes (SIPINNA)”⁴³ — with data that tracks abuse throughout society.
- > The Commission's national guideline review process evaluated the latest guidelines submitted by the Conference to the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in November 2016. These guidelines carried the title “Líneas Guía para tratar los casos de abuso sexual de menores por parte del clero”.
 - + After the *ad limina* visit, during the CXV Plenary Assembly of the Mexican Episcopal Conference, held from 13 November to 17 November 2023, the National Council for the Protection of Minors presented a proposal to update the guidelines, with suggestions and corrections received by each bishop. These are titled “Líneas Guía para el cuidado y la promoción de la dignidad, libertad e integridad de los menores y de los adultos vulnerables en el ámbito del sexto mandamiento del Decálogo”.
 - + The text was elaborated, reviewed, and modified by a commission of specialists that included the National Council for the Protection of Minors, with the support of the Mexican Association

⁴¹ CEM - Consejo Nacional de Protección de Menores. Retrieved from <https://cem.org.mx/consejo-nacional-de-menores/>.

⁴² CEPROMELAT. Retrieved 26 February 2024 from <https://cepromelat.com/acerca-de-2/>.

⁴³ Secretaría Ejecutiva del Sistema Nacional de Protección Integral de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes (SIPINNA). Retrieved 26 February 2024 from <https://www.gob.mx/sipinna>.

of Canonists and the Conference's juridical team. The new document addresses certain aspects of the procedure to be followed in the event of alleged crimes committed by clerics. The document also better addresses: (1) the issue of prevention and training, (2) the accompaniment of victims/survivors and offenders, (3) the issue of reparation of damages, and (4) the extension of the scope of the guidelines to crimes committed by members of consecrated life and lay people (pastoral agents, volunteers, and workers in the Church).

- + The new document was unanimously approved by the 117 voting attendees. It is now subject to the full review of the Commission, based on the *Universal Guidelines Framework*. The Commission looks forward to accompanying the Conference in this comprehensive review process.

Challenges

- > The Commission notes significant cultural barriers to reporting abuse that prevent the process of justice.
- > There are complexities in handling reports with respect to civil authorities, especially in pursuit of a common approach for the whole Conference, arising from (1) cultural stigmas and (2) differences across the States of the Mexican Union in legislation, professional resources, and geographic conditions. At numerous junctures this has resulted in the faithful's submission of reports only to the ecclesiastical authorities, and not to the civil courts. While respecting the Church's commitment to promote reporting in the civil forum, a difficulty has emerged in entering into a reciprocal relationship with the judicial system. This remains the prerogative of citizens and the state.
- > The Commission notes the importance of developing audit mechanisms built into the diocesan safeguarding infrastructure. Many dioceses still need an audit mechanism in place to ensure ongoing improvement and evaluate possible deficiencies.
- > The Commission underlines the Conference's concern with slow procedures and updates on cases from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. This challenge risks renewed trauma for victims/survivors and their families and was noted as a challenge for bishops in their efforts to accompany victims/survivors. The Commission further notes the role that the Dicastery must play in swiftly addressing incidents where bishops themselves are implicated in cases of negligence or dereliction of duty, or are alleged to be the direct perpetrator of abuse.
- > There is a need for more consistent domestic funding for safeguarding formation and victim/survivor accompaniment services — especially amidst a noted interest and enthusiasm for safeguarding formation, notably expressed by the lay faithful.
- > The Commission is concerned that although there is a National Council for the Protection of Minors to coordinate safeguarding efforts, there is a need for a more comprehensive victim/survivor accompaniment service available, at the diocesan level.

Recommendations

The Commission welcomes a formal invitation to visit Mexico. Such a visit would help manifest the Commission's closeness to the local Church and further develop the Commission's accompaniment services. In addition, the Commission recommends that the Episcopal Conference of Mexico undertake the following:

1. Institute formal requirements for and guaranteed access to ongoing formation for all pastoral agents, to nurture a culture of safeguarding.
2. Build formal and stable relationships with civil authorities, especially the "Sistema Nacional de Protección Integral de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes (SIPINNA)".
3. Develop audit mechanisms at all levels of the safeguarding infrastructure. The Commission remains available to accompany the development of these audit mechanisms and/or provide direct support using its own audit tool.

4. Develop a communication protocol for engagement with victims/survivors.
5. Develop a Memorare Initiative in Mexico, which should include an exploration of reorganising the diocesan commission structures at the metropolitan level. Underresourced and rural dioceses would especially benefit from this arrangement, whereby the large archdioceses would be able to house a centralised program for the ecclesiastical province.



Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

Profile

The Church in Papua New Guinea (PNG) has 19 dioceses, while the Church in the Solomon Islands (SI) has 3 dioceses. The two island nations rely on a joint episcopal conference, known as the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (CBC PNGSI). The Commission met with the Conference on 12 May 2023.

Safeguarding overview

- > The Commission notes that the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands and the Federation of Religious (FOR) established a team in 1990 for developing guidelines and principles to deal with sexual abuse cases. This team is known as the Right Relationships Task Force. In 2002, the first protocol was drafted, titled "Dealing with cases of sexual abuse involving clergy, religious and Church personnel". It was approved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2005.
- > The Conference's most up-to-date safeguarding document is titled "Child Protection Policy of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, for the Care, Wellbeing and Protection of Children". It was published in December 2022 and dissemination is reported to have reached some of the dioceses, but not all. A reported 3,000 copies of the policy were printed and disseminated. This document also includes a Code of Conduct, which the dioceses replicate based on their own contexts.
- > The Conference published an updated case management protocol in August 2022 titled "Protocols for dealing with issues of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct by Clerics, Religious and Church workers". A reported 3,000 copies of the protocol were printed and disseminated.
- > The Major Seminary and Catholic Theological Institute have ten sessions on safeguarding that provide structure for the ten-week program on "Protecting Children God's Ways", which includes "Protocols for dealing with issues of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct by Clerics, Religious and Church workers", mentioned immediately above. It is mandatory for all seminarians.
- > The Right Relationships Director⁴⁴ (safeguarding point person), in collaboration with the bishops of each diocese, is responsible for organising the sensitisation of the "Protocols for dealing with issues of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct by Clerics, Religious and Church workers" and the "Child Protection Policy of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, for the Care, Wellbeing and Protection of Children" to the priests of the dioceses. After these training opportunities, hard copies of the Protocols and Child Protection Policy are reported to be distributed to each priest.

⁴⁴ Secretary Sr Ancy John. Right Relationships in Ministry. Retrieved 26 February 2024 from <https://www.pngsicbc.com/right-relationships-in-ministry>.

- > Every diocese is reported to have two persons who are trained to be Diocesan Child Protection Volunteer Officers. They are trained in the legal policies of the country and Church policy. They in turn go to the different schools, communities, and parishes of their respective dioceses to create awareness about child protection as well as equip more people in this sensitisation work. The Diocesan Child Protection Volunteer Officers have a yearly weeklong formation and updating course. This course has been held for the past two years at the Conference level and hosted by the Right Relationships in Ministry Office.
- > The Conference reports to have people trained in all dioceses for the ecclesiastical office required in *Vos estis lux mundi*. These people are known as “Contact Persons” according to the Protocols. Their main task is to conduct the preliminary investigation of reported abuse. When complaints of clergy sexual abuse or sexual misconduct are reported, the bishops are responsible for sending the Contact Person to interview the victim/survivor and any witnesses. On the basis of these interviews, the Contact Person then makes a report recommending that the bishop begin the ecclesial investigation.
- > The Right Relationships in Ministry Office’s yearly budget is reported to be approximately Kina 60,000 (around US\$16,000). The Bishops’ Conference and the Federation of Religious contribute Kina 44,000 to the office. The national Office of Child and Family Services is reported to also contribute some funding assistance for child protection training. Capacity-building programs such as training workshops for the Contact Persons, assessors, and Child Protection Officers rely on annual grants. In prevention programs such as sensitisation to the Protocols and Child Protection Policy, the dioceses cover the expenses. In case management related to clergy sexual abuse, the dioceses and religious congregations manage all the expenses incurred.
- > The bishops and religious demonstrate an encouraging collaboration on safeguarding. As explained above, this includes joint funding for the national Right Relationships in Ministry Office, which seems to form the foundation of the Commission-endorsed One Church Approach.
- > The Directory of key safeguarding officers is held at the level of the Right Relationships in Ministry Office.
- > The bishops report to have close working relationships with lay associations. Bishops report to have supported these lay associations with various formation programs.
- > Victims/survivors are said to be advised and updated about their cases either by telephone or at the diocesan office.
- > The bishops report to have some safe houses, which serve as residences for victims/survivors of abuse and violence. If there is a demonstrated need, victims/survivors might be referred to the safe house, which provides a certain amount of legal, medical, psychological, and spiritual assistance.
- > There is a standard practice in place for managing alleged perpetrators, which includes administrative leave, an explanation of their rights, instructions to have no communications with the victim/survivor, counselling, and observation.

Challenges

- > The child protection system in Papua New Guinea suffers from limited financial and human resources capacity. This leads to inadequate formation opportunities. It also leads to a lack of accompaniment services for victims/survivors. The Commission noted the bishops’ specific example of a prohibitively high cost of the test kits for victims/survivors of sexual violence that provide admissible evidence in a criminal justice process.
- > Current governance and coordination mechanisms in the local Church occasionally lead to inefficient efforts in safeguarding. The Conference reports difficulties in ensuring a streamlined protection infrastructure. A lack of established safeguarding offices in all dioceses also creates coordination challenges and raises concerns about accessibility.
- > Geographic distance is another challenge that causes considerable physical and resource exhaustion, especially with regard to reaching out, establishing, and maintaining contact with victims/survivors and witnesses. This has led to a higher incidence of burnout, raising concerns around the need for more consistent commitment and passion in the work of safeguarding.
- > There is inadequate provision for different types of victim/survivor support services.
- > Victims/survivors do not play a direct role in the formulation of Church safeguarding policy.
- > There are no specific agreements between the local Church and civil authorities surrounding sexual

abuse. In general, the Commission notes the bishops’ lack of support from the civil authorities, due to challenges faced by the local government.

- > There is a lack of trained experts in safeguarding, especially canon lawyers and psychologists.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends the following to the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands:

1. Provide full dissemination of the updated guideline document, and offer robust training to accompany its reception and implementation.
2. Adopt the Memorare Initiative as a capacity-building program, and submit a grant application to the Memorare Fund for support in its realisation. Doing so will help to fill the persistent gap that the Commission notes in timely and reliable victim/survivor accompaniment services at the local Church level.
3. The Right Relationships in Ministry Office should publish the national Directory of safeguarding officers and disseminate it so that it is accessible to all.
4. Formalise a One Church Approach to safeguarding, building on the amicable and cooperative relationship that already exists between bishops and religious.
5. An independent and periodic audit mechanism should be written into the safeguarding guidelines, along with a dedicated budget to furnish such an audit.
6. Develop a robust data collection regime for all safeguarding activities in the local Church.

Profile



Episcopal Conference of Belgium

The Church in Belgium has nine dioceses and relies on one episcopal conference, known as the Episcopal Conference of Belgium. As of 2020, the Belgian Church counted approximately 1,113,700 children in Catholic primary and secondary schools; an additional 219,388 adults in Catholic higher education; and an estimated 125,290 people in Catholic adult education. An estimated 370,000 young people frequent Catholic youth movements in Belgium. The Commission met with the Conference on 24 November 2022.

Safeguarding overview

- > The Commission notes a 400-page joint report published in 2019 by the bishops and religious major superiors titled “Abus sexuels de mineurs dans une relation pastorale dans l’Église en Belgique – Vers une politique cohérente 1995-2017”.⁴⁵ The report covers areas including: (1) a history of early measures taken to address abuse, (2) the Conference’s engagement with victims/survivors and civil processes, (3) the safeguarding guidelines and codes of conduct in place, (4) reporting mechanisms in place, (5) victim/survivor accompaniment services available, and (6) safeguarding formation opportunities.
- > The Commission notes an update in 2019 to the code of conduct document formerly titled “Du tabou à la prévention”.⁴⁶ The current code of conduct for all collaborators in the Church is titled “Code

⁴⁵ LES ÉVÊQUES ET LES SUPÉRIEURS MAJEURS DE BELGIQUE, *Abus sexuels de mineurs dans une relation pastorale dans l’Église de Belgique: Vers une politique cohérente* (12 February 2019).

⁴⁶ COMMISSION INTERDIOCÉSAINNE POUR LA PROTECTION DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES, *Du tabou à la prévention: Code de conduite en vue de la prévention d’abus sexuels et de comportements transgressifs dans les relations pastorales avec les enfants et les jeunes* (2 June 2014).



de conduit pour les collaborateurs dans l'Église catholique en Belgique".⁴⁷ The code of conduct provides for mandatory background checks, consistent with civil law.

- > The Commission notes a brochure titled "Une souffrance cachée"⁴⁸ from 2012 providing a detailed orientation⁴⁹ on: the local Church's (1) accompaniment of victims and survivors, (2) case management, (3) handling of perpetrators, (4) reparation considerations, (5) local contact points, and (6) penal provisions.
- > The Conference produces an Annual Report presenting data on reports made to Conference, diocesan, and religious contact points. This includes the most recent report detailing 47 new reports of abuse received between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023.⁵⁰ Reports from earlier years, documenting previous reporting statistics by year, are found in links embedded in the 2022/2023 report.
- > There was an Arbitrage Centre in place between 2012 and 2016 for welcoming victims/survivors and providing accompaniment services, including financial compensations for 507 victims/survivors.⁵¹ Subsequently, "listening points" were established to continue this work, to offer further accompaniment and financial compensations.
- > A report produced on the Arbitrage Center, presented to the "Chambre des Représentants de Belgique: Comité scientifique du Centre d'arbitrage en matière d'abus sexuels", included a reported 504 dossiers received between April 2012 and June 2016.⁵²
- > The Commission notes La Fondation Dignity in place, as a registered juridical person, representing the Church's engagement with victims/survivors for accompaniment services and reparations.⁵³
- > The resignation of the Bishop of Bruges involved a large public communications effort, including a pastoral letter to the People of God, which addressed, among other points: (1) an apology for the Church's failures and (2) a commitment to and listing of concrete measures to be taken in response.⁵⁴
- > The Belgian Church's Ratio (no. 202) is dedicated to the prevention of abuse (sexual and other) in pastoral relationships. This attention takes the form of sessions on affectivity, psychology courses, a course on "deviance and abuse", and a commented reading of the "Code of conduct for collaborators in the Church". The Conference reports more than 60 training sessions across the dioceses and religious orders over the past 10 years.
- > The Conseil de Supervision serves as a form of audit for bishops and religious major superiors.⁵⁵ Such an audit mechanism is rarely seen, and the Commission looks forward to reviewing and exploring it as a good practice to be shared with other episcopal conferences.
- > The Conference is in cooperation with two parliamentary commissions: (1) dating from 2010, the "Commission spéciale relative au traitement d'abus sexuels et de faits de pédophilie dans une relation d'autorité, en particulier au sein de l'Église catholique"⁵⁶ and (2) the ongoing Flemish Parliamentary Commission, "Bijzondere commissie voor de evaluatie van de aanpak van seksueel misbruik in de Kerk en in andere gezagsrelaties in het algemeen en van de rol van instellingen en voorzieningen op het terrein van jeugd, welzijn en onderwijs in het bijzonder".⁵⁷
- > The Code of Conduct for collaborators in the Church applies to all who have a formal function or volunteer role that includes engagement with children or young people.⁵⁸
- > There are relevant contact points at the local level, with a centralised resource webpage documenting their contact information.⁵⁹

⁴⁷ <https://www.cathobel.be/2019/06/code-de-conduite-pour-les-collaborateurs-dans-leglise-catholique-en-belgique/>

⁴⁸ LES ÉVÊQUES ET LES SUPÉRIEURS MAJEURS DE BELGIQUE, *Une souffrance cachée: pour une approche globale des abus sexuels dans l'Église* (12 January 2012).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁰ CATHOBEL, *Rapport annuel - Points de contact uniques abus* (19 September 2023).

⁵¹ LES ÉVÊQUES ET LES SUPÉRIEURS MAJEURS DE BELGIQUE, *Abus sexuels de mineurs* (12 February 2019), 9.

⁵² CHAMBRE DES REPRÉSENTANTS DE BELGIQUE, *Rapport final du Comité scientifique du Centre d'arbitrage en matière d'abus sexuels* (6 March 2017).

⁵³ LES ÉVÊQUES ET LES SUPÉRIEURS MAJEURS DE BELGIQUE, *Abus sexuels de mineurs* (12 February 2019), 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ LES ÉVÊQUES ET SUPÉRIEURS MAJEURS DE BELGIQUE, *Abus sexuels de mineurs* (12 February 2019), 15.

⁵⁶ LES ÉVÊQUES ET SUPÉRIEURS MAJEURS DE BELGIQUE, *Abus sexuels de mineurs* (12 February 2019), 4.

⁵⁷ *Bijzondere Commissie voor de Heroverweging van de Vlaamse Instellingen* [Special Committee for the Review of Flemish Institutions]. Retrieved from <https://www.vlaamsparlament.be/nl/parlementair-werk/plenaire-vergadering-en-commissies/commissies/bijzondere-commissie-voor-de>.

⁵⁸ LES ÉVÊQUES ET SUPÉRIEURS MAJEURS DE BELGIQUE, *Abus sexuels de mineurs* (12 February 2019), 17.

Challenges

- > The crisis surrounding the revelations of sexual abuse in the Church (especially in the Flemish-speaking part of the country) including the mismanagement and inaction by Church leaders regarding specific cases has had a strong impact on the Church's engagement with young people and its ability to minister to them, due to a breakdown in trust among the faithful and broader society.
- > The Commission notes that there are many Belgian priests abroad. These priests are under the oversight of Missio-COPAL, which is responsible for maintaining contact with the Belgian diocesan priests posted to Latin America, Africa, and Asia — accompanying them both spiritually and in administrative matters arising from their expatriation. Logistical considerations with these priests abroad make for challenging oversight, especially vis-à-vis safeguarding.
- > There are also many foreign priests working in Belgium. While under the authority of the local bishop where they work, these priests are supported by the Episcopal Commission Pro Migrantibus. This Episcopal Commission wrote a report in 2016 titled "Prêtres venus d'ailleurs" covering the life, arrival, mission, and formation of priests from abroad. Integrating these priests into the safeguarding apparatus of the Belgian Church is a challenge due to cultural differences and resistance to safeguarding.
- > Despite the presence of a communications strategy outlined in the 2019 report, the Conference reported concerns with the efficacy of its communication approach in sensitising and building trust in its safeguarding efforts among the People of God and the broader society.⁶⁰ The Commission notes many safeguarding documents and reports that can be hard to navigate, especially for the public.
- > The Belgian Church has many solidarity efforts around the world for the Church in need, including, for example, funding for clergy formation in missionary territories. However, the safeguarding requirements included as minimum standards for grant funding still need to be mapped and developed. Otherwise, programs sponsored by the Belgian Church through Missio⁶¹ and Proma⁶² might inadvertently fund important outreach programs to children and vulnerable adults still in need of updated safeguarding measures and resources in place.
- > Although some formation has been offered in each diocese, there are persistent questions as to the guaranteed safeguarding training available for pastoral workers, especially the lay faithful.⁶³ Questions about ongoing formation for the clergy are also of concern.
- > There is a division between the French-speaking and Flemish dioceses, which function in notably different ways.

⁵⁹ CATHOBEL, *Abus sexuels dans l'Église*. Retrieved from <https://www.cathobel.be/eglise-en-belgique/la-conference-des-veques/abus-sexuels-dans-leglise/>.

⁶⁰ LES ÉVÊQUES ET LES SUPÉRIEURS MAJEURS DE BELGIQUE, *Abus sexuels de mineurs* (12 February 2019), 299–369.

⁶¹ Missio Belgium. <https://www.missio.be/fr/>.

⁶² <https://promavzw.be/english/>.

⁶³ LES ÉVÊQUES ET LES SUPÉRIEURS MAJEURS DE BELGIQUE, *Abus sexuels de mineurs* (12 February 2019), 13.



Recommendations

The Commission recommends that the Episcopal Conference of Belgium undertake the following:

1. Partner with the Commission's European Regional Group to evaluate Missio-COPAL's safeguarding protocols and practices for overseeing Belgian missionary priests abroad.
2. Partner with the Commission's European Regional Group to evaluate how the Episcopal Commission Pro Migrantibus might better oversee the vetting and integration of foreign priests into the Belgian safeguarding apparatus.
3. Formally engage the Commission in the ongoing review of the national safeguarding guidelines titled "Du tabou à la prévention". Such a review would be based on the Commission's *Universal Guidelines Framework*.
4. Formally engage the Commission in a review and updating of the document "Une souffrance cachée", dealing with victim/survivor accompaniment policies and procedures.
5. Formally engage the Commission in a review of the Conference's communications strategy. In this process, the Commission might offer to facilitate direct engagement with a victim/survivor advocacy group in Belgium to solicit their input and suggestions for a consolidated communications plan. The Commission might also explore better use of the robust institutional and stable Catholic media outlets, noted during the *ad limina* process.
6. Contribute to the Commission's solidarity fund for building safeguarding capacity, known as the Memorare Fund. This should especially be explored in the context of the Belgian Church's Pro Afris convention (renewable every five years) for solidarity with the Church in Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi.
7. Require all lay people already undergoing training (reported at 5,000 people per year) and certainly lay people with pastoral appointments (reported at 2,136 people) to undergo mandatory ongoing safeguarding training, if they are not already.
8. Continue implementing safeguarding as part of its youth pastoral strategy, and consistent with specific civil safeguarding legislation, specifying the expected completion date.
9. The Belgian Church's solidarity funds Missio and Proma should engage the Commission to review the minimum safeguarding requirements included in their grant programs.



National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon

Profile

The Church in Cameroon has 25 dioceses and relies on the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon as its episcopal conference. The episcopal conference is bilingual, with French and English as its official languages. The Commission met with the Conference on 11 September 2023. This in-person *ad limina* visit was preceded by a week-long Commission delegation visit in September 2023.

Safeguarding overview

- > The Commission notes strong engagement and interest from the local Church, including from both the bishops' conference and the conference of major superiors, regarding the Memorare Initiative. On the occasion of the Commission's delegation visit in-country, multiple local convenings were held to negotiate its eventual adoption in Cameroon. The Presidents of the respective Juridical Affairs Commissions of the bishops' conference and the conference of major superiors are currently in ongoing and direct dialogue about edits to the proposed Memorandum of Understanding establishing the Memorare Initiative in Cameroon.⁶⁴ The bishops also conveyed their interest in the Memorare Initiative directly to the Holy Father during their *ad limina* audience with him.
- > The Commission welcomes the Conference's generous response to the Commission's supplemental quinquennial questionnaire on safeguarding activities in the local Church.
- > The Commission notes a series of existing guideline documents, including: (1) the "Directives des évêques du Cameroun concernant les abus sexuels sur mineurs", published in 2021, (2) the "Politique de protection des mineurs et des personnes vulnérables dans l'enseignement catholique: Lignes directrices", published in 2022, and (3) the "Safeguarding and Protection Policy for Children and Vulnerable Adults", published in August 2023 as an update to the 2021 document. The Commission has yet to review the latest document, published in 2023, or the document specific to Catholic education, although it notes a strong foundation established by the 2021 guidelines that it had previously reviewed. The Commission makes special note of a particularly good practice in the 2021 guidelines calling for consultation with parents, civil authorities, catechists, and educators for the development of the safest possible environment for minors.
- > A vetting process for candidates to Holy Orders exists and is reportedly consistent with the *Ratio fundamentalis*, including a focus on a criminal background check. This process is said to be conducted by trained seminary formators.
- > Some safeguarding formation opportunities have been offered, including: (1) courses hosted by the Conférence Nationale des Supérieurs Majeurs du Cameroun in three ecclesiastical provinces — Garoua, Bertoua, and Yaoundé — on the theme "Les abus de pouvoir sur les personnes consacrées dans les communautés religieuses: Defis et perspectives"; (2) a day of canonical formation hosted by the Département de Droit Canonique de l'Institut Catholique de Yaoundé on the theme "Le nouveau droit pénal de l'Église catholique" working toward the reception of *Pascite gregem Dei*; (3) a course hosted by the Diocese of Sangmelima titled "Les abus sur les personnes consacrées dans les communautés religieuses" and "La pédophilie au presbyterium de Sangmelima"; and (4) other opportunities offered at both the Catholic University of Central Africa and the Catholic Institute of Yaoundé.
- > The Commission notes the Centre de Thérapie et de Protection des Mineurs in Yaoundé, established by the Jesuit Provincial of West Africa in 2019, offering listening services for victims/survivors and formation in affective maturity to religious communities.

⁶⁴ Mons. Christophe Zoa for the bishops' conference; Sr. Dr. Therese Martin Ngueme for the conference of major superiors.

- > The Commission notes cases reportedly managed in close adherence to *Vos estis lux mundi* and the “Vademecum sur quelques points de procédure dans le traitement des cas d’abus sexuels sur mineurs commis par les clercs” at the level of the diocesan bishop or major superior, assisted by canon lawyers. The Conference reports to have specific diocesan reporting structures in place in some dioceses. The Conference reports around ten known cases that are being handled based on the new canonical norms.
- > The Conference reports agreeable collaboration with civil authorities, and specifically notes the ten-year statute of limitations in Cameroonian law for sexual abuse of a minor.
- > Reported provisions for alleged perpetrators include: (1) removal from the ministry where the alleged offence occurred and, often, (2) the transfer of the alleged perpetrator to a monastery for psychological and spiritual support.
- > Each diocese reports to establish its own tribunal according to canonical requirements, and is assisted by the Commission Juridique de la Conférence Épiscopale Nationale.

Challenges

- > The Commission notes the divisions and lack of trust between parts of the anglophone and francophone groups within Cameroonian society. The Commission especially acknowledges the resulting civil unrest and violence and highlights the ensuing increased risks posed to minors and vulnerable adults.
- > The scarcity in financial and human resources has a profound effect on the local Church’s ability to allocate dedicated funding for safeguarding to support: (1) robust initial and ongoing formation for all pastoral agents, (2) robust reporting mechanisms in each diocese, (3) fully responsive case management systems, assisted by lay experts, (4) victim/survivor accompaniment services, (5) and an audit mechanism of the local Church’s safeguarding apparatus. The Commission notes that the Conference expressed the urgent need and commitment to “defend, protect and heal” victims/survivors even amidst financial challenges.
- > Each diocese is responsible for ongoing safeguarding formation of the clergy and for victim/survivor accompaniment services. The Conference expressed concern that with this decentralised approach, safeguarding formation and victim/survivor accompaniment is not organised in a structured and integral way to engender better synergy and avoid inefficiencies.
- > Strong social pressures — such as rejection, marginalisation, and stigmatisation — prevent victims/survivors from reporting abuse and foster a culture of silence and taboo around sexual abuse. The Conference even raised suspicions that this culture of silence might be exacerbated by abusers directly repressing reporting by victims/survivors. These cultural challenges engender a hesitation to address the problem of abuse head-on. The Commission notes that this hesitation is shared by some Church authorities.
- > The Commission notes the need for further collaboration around safeguarding between bishops and religious and similarly between bishops and lay associations.
- > The country is linguistically bifurcated, reflecting certain challenging divisions in the country that are also reflected, at times, in the Church.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon undertake the following:

1. Expand safeguarding as a way of promoting common ground and coalition building between groups split along linguistic divisions, and facilitating much-needed collaboration between the bishops, religious, and lay associations.
2. Adopt the Memorare Initiative in Cameroon to promote (1) a coordinated safeguarding training capability, (2) enhanced victim/survivor accompaniment services, and (3) the establishment of reporting mechanisms consistent with *Vos estis lux mundi*, Art. 2, especially considering that some dioceses are reported to have no formal reporting structures. The need for a formal organisational structure for safeguarding has been stressed by the Conference. The Commission’s Memorare Fund would support this effort by providing additional funding for safeguarding to address the scarcity of resources

stressed by the bishops. Moreover, it would also allow better collaboration with lay experts, who typically require remuneration for their services.

3. Engage in a process of guideline review, accompanied by the Commission’s African Regional Group. A particular focus should be placed on developing culturally responsive guidelines for the local Church in Cameroon, given its specific cultural challenges.
4. Implement a minimum safeguarding formation mandate (initial and ongoing) for all clerics, religious, Church personnel, and Church collaborators.
5. Support the establishment of a formal victim/survivor advocacy group, especially in light of the Conference’s acknowledgement that including victims and survivors in different Church associations has historically allowed for meaningful advocacy and support from fellow members.

Summaries of findings from all other 2023 *ad limina* countries



Rwanda

Profile

The Church in Rwanda has nine dioceses and relies on the Conférence Épiscopale du Rwanda as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 10 March 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission was encouraged to meet with a small delegation of bishops from Rwanda during their *ad limina* visit to Rome. The Commission notes, in particular, the commitment of Cardinal Antoine Kambanda and Bishop Edouard Sinayobye, who have taken the lead for the Conference as protagonists in safeguarding. The Commission notes the proactive engagement of the whole Conference regarding building capacity in safeguarding, which led the Commission to share details about the Memorare Initiative during the in-person visit. The Church in Rwanda then became the first country to adopt the Memorare Initiative, with the joint support of both the Conference of Bishops and the Conference of Religious — thereby realising the One Church Approach to safeguarding that the Commission endorses.

The Commission sent a delegation to Rwanda in September 2023 as a follow-up to the *ad limina* visit and was pleased to see progress on Memorare Rwanda under the leadership of the local Memorare Advisor, whose work has been made possible by a grant from the Commission’s Memorare Fund. This delegation found a strong commitment from local Church leadership on safeguarding. The Commission notes the importance of the Memorare Initiative in providing safeguarding training across the local Church, and encourages the Memorare Advisor to develop culturally sensitive curricula. The Commission notes a Tribunal Ecclésiastique Interdiocésain du Rwanda and is interested in better understanding its competencies as well as exploring the successes and challenges with this tribunal, especially vis-à-vis the requirements of *Vos estis lux mundi*.

Challenges mentioned during the *ad limina* process include the memories of trauma and abuse that haunt the Rwandan people from the genocide and also from the scourge of sexual abuse. It was agreed during the in-person visit that this trauma necessitates a better set of accompaniment services for victims and

survivors because of the importance of interrupting the cycle of violence, especially because victims/survivors who are left on their own or even rejected by their own community have had a tendency to turn to drugs, alcohol, or delinquency. The Commission stresses these accompaniment services as a key provision of the Memorare Initiative in Rwanda. The Commission also asserts its interest in learning more from the Church in Rwanda about the Rwandan experience with transitional justice in the aftermath of the genocide. The Commission notes outstanding questions on good practices for handling perpetrators and the need for further reflection on the actual interpretation of the concept of vulnerable adults. The Commission did not note an audit mechanism in place and encourages the development of such a mechanism.

Guidelines and policies

Between 2010 and 2015, the Conference produced two texts containing guidelines for dealing with cases of crimes against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue. The Commission, having briefly reviewed the 2010 text, focused its main analysis on the 2015 text, titled “Traitement canonico-pastoral des cas d’abus sexuels commis par les clercs diocésains contre les mineurs. Addendum aux Normes canonico-pastorales particulières pour le clergé diocésain au Rwanda”. The Commission recognises the effort that the Conference has put into producing this document, which is an excellent procedural document to distribute to bishops and experts involved in the Conference’s safeguarding activities. However, the Commission found that certain areas need to be further developed, such as the establishment of offices for receiving complaints and accompanying victims/survivors, as required by *Vos estis lux mundi*; the development of training and prevention initiatives; and the necessary updating of the applicable legislation, which has undergone significant changes since 2015. For this reason, the Commission has made itself available to assist the Conference in the review and updating of the policies on safeguarding, especially through the launch of the Memorare Initiative in Rwanda.



Ivory Coast

Profile

The Church in Ivory Coast has 15 dioceses and relies on the Conférence des Evêques Catholiques de Côte d’Ivoire as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 18 September 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission noted a lack of data on the prevalence of sexual abuse against minors and vulnerable adults in Ivory Coast, indicating a need to prioritise safeguarding in the local Church’s pastoral plan. The Commission notes an urgent need for an increase in research into rates of abuse, as well as a continued sensitisation campaign, to support the local bishops in bringing to light the true scourge of abuse. By establishing reporting mechanisms compliant with *Vos estis lux mundi*, the Commission believes that data might begin to be collected in a more consistent and reliable way. A broader commitment to the Holy Father’s vision for safeguarding was manifested in the bishops’ request for the Commission’s accompaniment. The bishops specifically shared an interest in better promoting safeguarding formation opportunities and in supporting the creation of stable structures staffed by safeguarding experts, many of whom already live in-country, according to the bishops. Therefore, the Commission proposed the Memorare Initiative on the occasion of the in-person visit, and affirms the value of its adoption in the Ivory Coast.

Guidelines and policies

In 2020, the Conference produced its guidelines on crimes against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue. After a review by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in 2021 it released the final text: “Normes complémentaires relatives aux abus sexuels, à la protection des mineurs et personnes vulnérables, promulguées par la Conférence des Evêques Catholiques de Côte D’Ivoire”. Overall, the Commission notes a positive review of the guidelines and acknowledges that it is a text focusing on the most important elements in the fight against abuse, with a structure that welcomes engagement. The commitment to the development of prevention policies and the general commitment of the Conference to implement these guidelines in the various dioceses and parishes should be emphasised positively. The Commission considers it particularly important, at an overall level, to substantially expand the area of formation, and that the Conference launch formation programs aimed at Church personnel, seminarians, the ongoing formation of priests, pastoral workers, and the entire ecclesiastical community so that the culture of safeguarding can develop at every level of ecclesial society. The Commission emphasises the importance of consistency between the definitions given at the subnormative level and the provisions of civil law — especially those to be used in disciplinary contexts. Therefore, the Commission deems it advisable to clarify definitions incorporating universal canon law and local state law. It is also advisable to consider introducing audit tools for the verification of procedures and the continuous updating of the guidelines.



Sri Lanka

Profile

The Church in Sri Lanka has 12 dioceses and relies on the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Sri Lanka as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 8 November 2023.

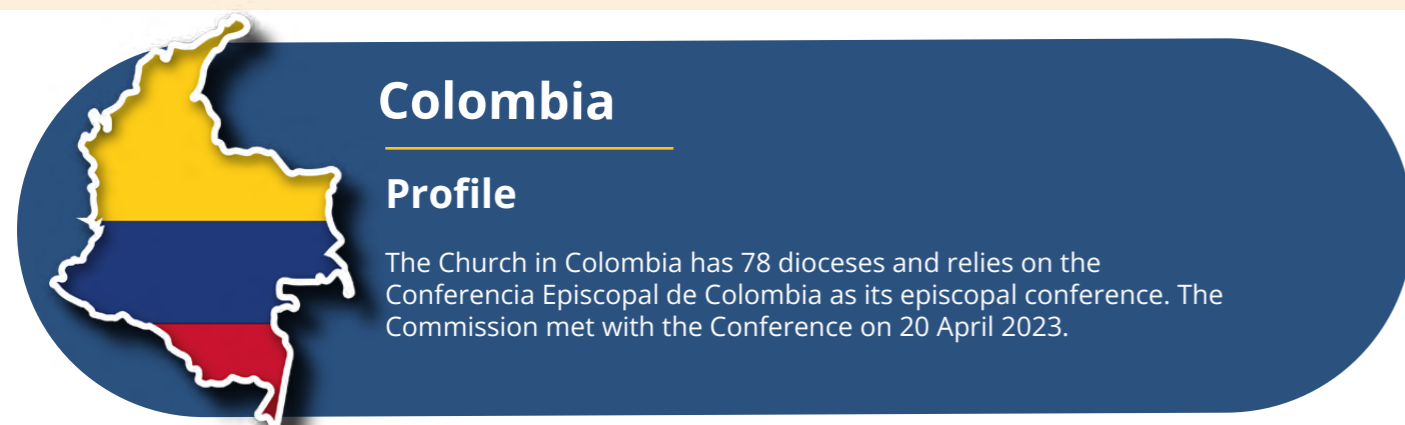
Ad limina visit

During the *ad limina* process, the Commission noted an encouraging engagement by the bishops regarding their safeguarding ministry. Particular leadership was demonstrated by H.E. Cardinal Albert Malcolm Ranjith, Archbishop of Colombo, who expressed the need for a national pastoral policy on the local Church’s response to abuse. An emphasis was also placed on the need for local safeguarding formation and a national commission to oversee this training across the dioceses. Consistent with these needs, as expressed by the bishops, the Commission presented and suggested adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Sri Lanka. The Commission particularly recommends the Sri Lankan Church’s engagement with the Memorare Initiative for several reasons that emerged in the *ad limina* process. First, the Sri Lankan Church’s guidelines date from 2014 and do not reflect recent changes in canon law, especially compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*. Second, the Commission noted a marked need to place more attention on the care and accompaniment of victims/survivors. The Commission was grateful for the Sri Lankan Church’s feedback on Phase 1 of the *Universal Guidelines Framework* consultations, and looks forward to robust next steps in the follow-up phase of the *ad limina* process.

Guidelines and policies

Following the 2011 Circular Letter of the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Conference produced and published its own guidelines in 2014 on crimes against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, titled “Guidelines and procedures to be followed as mandated by the Catholic bishops’ conference in Sri Lanka, in dealing with cases of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults perpetrated by clergy/religious”. An analysis of the text reveals the commitment of the Conference to this important issue. If assessed according to the canonical standards at the time, the text must be viewed positively.

Nonetheless, in view of subsequent normative reforms, consideration should be given to a revision of the instruments adopted. With the introduction of *Vos estis lux mundi*, it became necessary to set up offices in each diocese to receive complaints and assist victims/survivors. With the reform of Book VI of the Code of Canon Law, there has been a substantial expansion in the nature of the protected rights, namely life, dignity, and human freedom. In this context, a change in the approach to abuse is necessary. It is therefore useful to continue working for the development of safe environments, involving the entire Church community. Formation must take on a central role — involving not only seminarians, priests, and religious but also the entire community — in order to develop a widespread culture of safeguarding. A formation must be promoted that not only makes people aware of appropriate behaviour and risk factors, but also makes each individual capable of identifying possible dangerous situations and knowing how to respond to any requests for support from a presumed victim/survivor.



Colombia

Profile

The Church in Colombia has 78 dioceses and relies on the Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 20 April 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission was pleased to engage with the second delegation of bishops from the Episcopal Conference of Colombia. Broadly, the Commission noted an encouraging structural infrastructure within the Conference, including national guidelines, diocesan guidelines, and local reporting systems. Ahead of the in-person visit, the delegation of Colombian bishops was presented with an opportunity to complete the Commission's standard *ad limina* questionnaire dedicated to safeguarding. The Commission was grateful to have received 17 responses from the 35 ordinaries who constituted the second episcopal grouping, representing a response rate of 49%. The Commission reviewed the delegation's responses with care and gained important insights. In particular, there is a lack of financial and human resources for enacting a robust safeguarding action plan aimed at activating the Conference's guidelines in the life of the local Church. Given this persistent challenge, the Commission presented its Memorare Initiative as a local capacity-building program, to help enhance the local safeguarding regime. The Commission strongly encourages the adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Colombia. The Commission noted an earnest reflection on the part of the bishops regarding their shortcomings and the breakdown of their protocols, which has led to much pain for victims/survivors. This reflection gave rise to an openness on engaging with the Commission in a guideline and protocol review, especially as it pertains to the bishops' engagement with victims/survivors, their communities, and the broader local Church.

The Commission specifically recommends the facilitation of an organised victim/survivor advocacy group in order to integrate victim/survivor perspectives in policy making. Of particular importance is the facilitation of safeguarding formation for lay people and clergy alike. The provision of current safeguarding formation opportunities was noted in each diocese, as supported by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, but with a program expiration in 2024. Good practices were found in the Conference's (1) psychological evaluations of candidates for Holy Orders, (2) diligent vetting of clergy transferring between ecclesiastical provinces, and (3) lay involvement in safeguarding structures. Persistent challenges include the need for: (1) a better definition for "vulnerable adults", (2) codes of conduct and detailed protocols to deal with alleged perpetrators, (3) a more structured relationship with media sources, (4) expert knowledge on recent changes to universal law, and (5) stable audit mechanisms in place. The Commission looks forward to engaging the Conference in addressing these challenges together.

Guidelines and policies

In 2012, the Episcopal Conference of Colombia forwarded to the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith its first text containing guidelines for dealing with crimes against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue. This text, titled "No descuides el carisma que hay en ti. Orientación y procedimientos en la formación afectiva de sacerdotes y religiosos", was the first such approach by the Conference and as a result had some critical shortcomings. In 2022, however, after working over a period of several years with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Conference drafted a new text titled "Cultura del cuidado en la iglesia Católica colombiana: Líneas guía".

The Commission recognises the maturity of the text, which deepens the theme of care with the introduction of mechanisms to receive complaints, as required by *Vos estis lux mundi*. The Commission notes with attention the Conference's choice to refer to all updated relevant legislation in appendices, which makes the text less user-friendly. Nonetheless, the Commission commends the usefulness of the guidelines in helping the universal and holistic approach to the subject matter being addressed.



Tanzania

Profile

The Church in Tanzania has 35 dioceses and relies on the Tanzania Episcopal Conference as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 15 May 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission noted a thoughtful engagement by the Conference during the in-person *ad limina* visit. The bishop addressing the Commission on behalf of the Conference highlighted child dignity at the heart of their safeguarding work and stressed the abuse of minors as both a sin and a crime. The Conference stressed the need to update and consolidate its guidelines, soliciting the Commission's accompaniment in this endeavor. The Commission responded to this request by way of the African Regional Group, which remains available to accompany the review effort. As part of this process, the Commission reiterates its recommendation for the Conference to provide responses to the quinquennial questionnaire specifically devoted to safeguarding, which was shared with the Conference ahead of their in-person visit. The Commission commends the handful of dioceses that have dedicated diocesan commissions for child protection. The Commission also highlights the robustness of the Conference's National Catholic Directory, available on its website. The Commission notes this thorough and meticulously prepared directory as a good practice to be shared with other conferences. Such systematic data collection provides a foundation to promote accountability and access to services across the local Church. The Commission believes that this national directory will prove particularly helpful in the further development of a national safeguarding capability, to build on the Conference's existing national Child Protection Committee and Child Protection Coordinator, which are mentioned in the guideline documents but have not yet been practically observed by the Commission. Toward that end, the Commission presented the Memorare Initiative during the in-person visit and strongly recommends its adoption in Tanzania. The *ad limina* process demonstrated a robust existing physical infrastructure as well as a human resource network, at the diocesan level, to host the various activities included in the Memorare Initiative.

The *ad limina* visit also stressed the persistent challenge regarding the lack of resources to fund a robust safeguarding apparatus. The Commission firmly believes that the Memorare Initiative is appropriate given these conditions in the local Church. Important questions were raised during the in-person visit as to (1) the definition of "vulnerability", (2) the challenges of reaching rural dioceses, (3) the concerns about



false accusations, (4) combatting the culture of silence, and (5) how to better involve Catholic families in the local Church's safeguarding ministry. The Commission hopes to explore these questions in a formal follow-up process with the Conference. The Commission did not note any audit mechanism in place to evaluate the safeguarding regime across the country, and recommends that one be developed. Finally, the Commission calls upon the specific support of H.E. Cardinal Protase Rugambwa, Cardinal-Archbishop of Tabora, due to his generous accompaniment of the Church's safeguarding ministry in his former role as Secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelisation.

Guidelines and policies

The guidelines of the Conference were published in 2014, after review by the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The document, titled "Policy and Guidelines on Child Protection for the Catholic Church in Tanzania", represents the Conference's first approach to safeguarding. The Commission recognises the commendable attention given in the text to prevention and the care of victims/survivors and third parties involved, as well as those accused of a crime. The Commission recognises the Conference's desire to create a network of structured action through the creation of a national commission for the protection of minors and the establishment in each diocese of a Child Protection Coordinator, who would be a point of reference for the handling of cases in the diocese. The Commission recognises the importance of continuing to develop the area of training and to promote training initiatives for priests, religious, and all pastoral workers to broaden the culture of safeguarding in the local Church's social fabric.

The Commission notes the importance of considering the most up-to-date canonical regulations, which now promote the protection of life and the person, and which notably name new figures such as "vulnerable adults" that are subject to specific canonical protections. For this reason, the Commission encourages dialogue with the Conference for the continued refinement of the policies already developed.

on child protection. According to the Conference, all 48 dioceses have structures in place, consistent with *Vos estis lux mundi*, although the lack of competent safeguarding practitioners and investigators was mentioned as a persistent challenge in staffing these ecclesiastical offices. A national safeguarding structure is also in place at the Conference Secretariat, known as the "Cellule ad hoc de protection des mineurs dans l'Église". This national safeguarding effort is staffed by a dedicated person holding the title of adjunct-Secretary General. Such an interdiocesan approach was stressed during the in-person *ad limina* visit as a good practice, especially considering the limited resources available in the local Church. Questions about the definition of "vulnerable adult" and the age of consent were specifically raised. The Commission noted no audit mechanism in place for the Conference's safeguarding apparatus. The Commission did not receive a response to the quinquennial questionnaire sent ahead of the in-person visit, although responses are said to be forthcoming.

Guidelines and policies

The Conference presented its guidelines in 2023, consisting of two complementary texts titled "Directives de la Conférence Épiscopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) pour le traitement des cas d'abus sexuels commis par les clercs sur les mineurs et les personnes vulnérables" and "Guide pour la protection des mineurs et des personnes vulnérables dans l'Église-famille de Dieu en RD Congo". The two texts are a very up-to-date policy platform and reflect the current standard of safeguarding policies and strategies. The canonical legislation has been updated according to the new Code of Canon Law and *Vos estis lux mundi*, requiring offices for receiving complaints in each diocese.

The Commission wishes to continue a dialogue with the Conference to assist in the development of certain operational areas and categories of the guidelines. The Commission also notes the new perspective given by the reform of Book VI, which protects the life, liberty, and dignity of the person. In order to reflect the spirit of this legislation, the Commission emphasises the need to continue to focus — first and foremost — on the consequences for the victim/survivor, i.e., the person.



Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kinshasa)

Profile

The Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has 48 dioceses and relies on the Conférence Épiscopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 12 October 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission was heartened to hear a strong commitment to safeguarding on the part of the bishops during the in-person *ad limina* visit. The local Church hierarchy seems engaged and alert to the need for a focus on safeguarding. However, there was also specific mention of a broader societal stigma around safeguarding as an imposed Western ideology that does not respond to African challenges. The Commission notes that this was shared by some in the local Church, including leadership. Therefore, a sensitisation campaign regarding the prevalence of abuse is critical. Simultaneously, a more accurate understanding of the true scale of abuse requires a significant effort to fight the culture of silence that is pervasive in the local Church. The Commission notes this culture of silence as a serious impediment to reporting by victims/survivors. This was reiterated by Church leadership as a leading challenge. The Commission observed a good practice in that the Conference noted the importance of providing safeguarding formation opportunities for non-cleric Church personnel, who are often left untrained. The Commission presented the Memorare Initiative as a way to build capacity in the local Church's formation programs. The Commission noted insufficient structures in place to accompany victims/survivors of abuse, and again suggested the Memorare Initiative as a way of creating a stable centre for the provision of these services. The importance of a One Church Approach to a safeguarding regime was stressed, as the Commission was unable to determine the extent to which bishops and religious collaborate



Zimbabwe

Profile

The Church in Zimbabwe has eight dioceses and relies on the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 6 September 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission was encouraged by the engagement and commitment to safeguarding shown by the bishops during their *ad limina* visit. The Commission acknowledges several good practices in place, including: (1) a designated diocesan safeguarding officer in one of the dioceses, housed within the Diocesan Education Commission, (2) a pilot safeguarding formation program in four dioceses, and (3) a program known as Youth Alive Zimbabwe in one of the dioceses, reported to have offered children's rights and safeguarding training to over 40,551 children and 20,903 adults. The Commission also notes a particularly interesting practice in one diocese explained as a "child-led safeguarding committee" that functions under the principle of "nothing for children without children". The Commission is very interested in further exploring this child-led committee, in partnership with the local bishop sponsoring this initiative, as a practice to be shared with other episcopal conferences. The Commission also notes funding from Porticus and Catholic Relief Services that has allowed the Conference's Education Secretariat to train school management, teachers, and learners in safeguarding. The Commission noted throughout the *ad limina* process the persistent challenges with funding for safeguarding. The Commission responded to this concern by presenting and recommending the adoption of the Memorare Initiative. The Commission hopes to see the Memorare Initiative implemented in 2024, as a meaningful follow-up to the *ad limina* visit in 2023. The Commission noted the specific lack of a vehicle for the



pilot safeguarding training course, which represents a significant challenge in reaching rural areas. The Commission is interested in how a dedicated mode of transportation might fit into a proposed budget for Memorare Zimbabwe. The Commission applauds the survey conducted in the Archdiocese of Harare to assess awareness and implementation of safeguarding policy, and notes that the results demonstrate a significant gap in the local Church's sensitisation to safeguarding. The Commission did not find any audit mechanism as part of the safeguarding regime in Zimbabwe and recommends that one be developed.

Guidelines and policies

The Conference published its own text in 2013 containing guidelines for dealing with and preventing crimes against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, following a review by the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The title was "ZCBC & CMRS: A Pastoral and Procedural Protocol for Dealing with Allegations of Misconduct". The Commission notes that it was a well-crafted first text that guided the reader through the subject matter and gave precise instructions on how to deal with cases. The text also gave clear indications on how to receive complaints, emphasising the need to have such complaints deposited before competent persons.

In 2022, the Conference published and forwarded to the Commission a new text of the guidelines titled "ZCBC safeguarding and implementation policy procedures for protection of minors and vulnerable adults". The text responds to the principles promoted by the Commission, also giving ample space to prevention, recruitment policies for staff, ongoing training for priests, and the training and selection of seminarians. The Commission recognises the importance of integrating all aspects of the new legislation and wishes to continue a dialogue with the Conference to assist future developments.



Zambia

Profile

The Church in Zambia has 11 dioceses and relies on the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 27 March 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission was very encouraged by the engagement that it received from the bishops during the *ad limina* process. The bishops have demonstrated a proactive approach to safeguarding, and are eager to build capacity around their existing safeguarding apparatus. This proactive approach was especially made clear through the bishops' questions on the updated version of *Vos estis lux mundi*, and the Conference's responsibilities to ensure compliance. The Commission noted that the Conference had a full-time safeguarding officer at the national level, housed within the Education Committee, but have run out of funding for the position. Notably, this officer was a lay person, which the bishops highlighted as a useful characteristic. In response to the funding challenge, the Commission presented the Memorare Initiative and encouraged its adoption in Zambia. The bishops and religious convened virtually around adoption of the Memorare Initiative and were very receptive from the outset.

In follow-up to the in-person phase of the *ad limina* visit, the Commission sent a delegation to Zambia to meet with the bishops' Extended Executive Board and the men and women religious conferences' Executive Boards. On the occasion of that visit, Memorare was discussed in even greater detail, and the Commission hopes to see its adoption in 2024. The Commission notes a challenge to safeguarding posed by separate conferences for the men and women religious, and encourages a close collaboration between both conferences in order to avoid inefficiencies in child protection efforts. The Commission notes a safeguarding team at the national level with representatives from each diocese. The Commission acknowledges that the bishops report the presence of a safeguarding point person in each diocese. The Commission notes some training being done piecemeal, but also acknowledges the challenge with

reaching more rural areas. Other challenges that were mentioned include: (1) families concealing abuse, (2) a very patriarchal society, (3) a culture of silence (especially for young girls) that prevents reporting, (3) a lack of widespread knowledge of reporting systems, (4) missing reporting systems, and (5) clericalism. The Commission did not note any audit mechanism in place and strongly recommends developing one.

Guidelines and policies

The Conference published a text in 2011 containing guidelines on crimes against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, and in 2017 they published the current guidelines titled "The ZCCB Child Protection Policy". The Commission especially recognises as a positive element of the guidelines the provision of a child protection commission that has the duty to oversee the state of child safeguarding policies at the national level, and whose members should be persons of proven integrity and expertise in child protection. However, the Commission wishes to encourage dialogue on (1) updating the relevant canonical legislation, (2) defining in more detail the procedures for receiving complaints, and (3) disseminating in the dioceses a network of appropriate structures, with staff adequately competent in the field, to allow suitable access to victims/survivors who wish to make a complaint, as required by *Vos estis lux mundi*. The Commission also recognises the importance of continuing the development of education and training initiatives for seminarians, priests, and lay personnel, some of which are already addressed in the policies.



Ghana

Profile

The Church in Ghana consists of 20 dioceses and relies on the Ghana Bishops' Conference as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 24 May 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission was pleased to engage the bishops on their safeguarding ministry during their *ad limina* visit. The Commission shares its heartfelt condolences to the Church in Ghana after the passing of Cardinal Richard Kuuia Baawobr, MAfr. The Commission acknowledges Cardinal Baawobr as one of the local Church's protagonists for safeguarding, and dedicated to the care of children. The Commission notes the bishops' strong credibility in society and their reputation for meaningful social work. The Commission urges the bishops to use this reputation to advance a robust safeguarding apparatus to create safe environments in the Church and throughout its ministries in the broader society.

The Commission notes that some dioceses have stable safeguarding offices or child protection officers, but highlights that this is not uniform across all 20 dioceses. The development of such offices is important in the local Church's service to victims/survivors, in accordance with *Vos estis lux mundi*. A persistent challenge to the realisation of a robust safeguarding infrastructure arises from the lack of financial resources dedicated to safeguarding. As such, the Commission presented its Memorare Initiative to supplement the local Church's safeguarding efforts, and encourages its adoption in Ghana, even if it is begun only at the level of one or two ecclesiastical provinces. Indeed, the Commission notes that it has received interest in the Memorare Initiative from one ecclesiastical province in particular. The Commission notes the ongoing effort to unite the men and women religious into one conference, and further encourages this consolidation, due to the benefits of a joint approach to safeguarding. The Commission acknowledges concerns raised about the definitions of "vulnerability" and "vulnerable adults", especially vis-à-vis women religious. Other discussions included good practices and protocols for concerns surrounding celibacy and the children of priests. The Commission expressed concern about anti-gay taboos and proposed legislation in Ghana, which often can create a barrier to victims/survivors in reporting same-sex abuse. The Commission also notes the challenge of clericalism and the culture of secrecy that prevents victims/survivors from coming forward, and encourages research into addressing



these issues. Finally, the Commission did not note any audit mechanism built into the safeguarding apparatus in Ghana and recommends that one be developed.

Guidelines and policies

In 2019, the Conference forwarded to the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith its first edition of guidelines on crimes against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue. The Commission recognises the Conference's commitment and the special attention given to training and education on safeguarding. The text introduces the figure of the Child Protection Officer who, assisted by the Child Protection Committee, has the role not only of assisting victims/survivors and receiving their reports but also of providing for the development of training programs aimed at seminarians and priests as well as pastoral workers. The Commission recalls the importance of taking into account the most up-to-date canonical regulations, which now promote the protection of life and the person. For this reason, the Commission encourages dialogue with the Conference for the continued refinement of the good policies already developed.

The Commission had the opportunity to present a questionnaire to the bishops during their in-person visit, to produce a better mapping of safeguarding efforts under way, and hopes to receive responses to this questionnaire in 2024. The Commission also noted the bishops' desire to review their national guidelines, which they say do not yet reflect changes in universal law, especially the updated *Vos estis lux mundi*. The Commission remains available to accompany that effort. Finally, the Commission does not note any audit mechanism in place, and strongly encourages that one be developed.

Guidelines and policies

The Conference published its guidelines on safeguarding in 2021. The Commission appreciates the effort made by the Conference in approaching the subject, recognises the good will of the document, and considers it an excellent starting point for the development of safeguarding within the country. At the same time, the Commission recalls the importance of the development throughout the region of centres for the reception of complaints, as envisaged by *Vos estis lux mundi*, and the importance of the development of training programs aimed not only at seminarians and priests but also at all pastoral workers, the latter of which are particularly important in Congo-Brazzaville. It is extremely important to take into account the most up-to-date canonical regulations, which now promote the protection of life and the person. For this reason, the Commission encourages a dialogue with the Conference for the continued refinement of the good policies already developed.



Republic of Congo (Brazzaville)

Profile

The Church in the Republic of Congo has nine dioceses and relies on the Conférence Épiscopale du Congo as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 17 November 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission was encouraged by the reflection demonstrated by the bishops during the *ad limina* process. The Commission noted the importance that the bishops placed on their safeguarding ministry, despite persistent challenges. The bishops reported the establishment of a national office to receive and listen to victims/survivors of clerical sexual abuse at its headquarters, known as the Centre Interdiocésain des Œuvres, in Brazzaville. This office is said to be chaired by a bishop-delegate, who is always the responsible bishop for either clergy formation or the Episcopal Commission for Youth. The office is said to also be staffed by both qualified priests and lay people. The bishops reported several cases handled by this office to date. The Commission notes that the bishops shared their desire to update their national Ratio, for priestly formation, to include safeguarding training for seminarians. The Commission encourages this effort and remains ready to accompany the drafting of this amendment.

The Commission noted a strong interest in capacity building around safeguarding, especially with the provision of safeguarding formation opportunities. Persistent financial and structural concerns were stressed as an impediment to a robust training and victim/survivor accompaniment capability. The Commission replied to this interest with a presentation of the Memorare Initiative and encourages its adoption in the Republic of Congo. The Commission notes many advantages for its adoption in addressing a myriad of concerns raised during the *ad limina* process, including: (1) a lack of outreach and accompaniment services to victims/survivors, (2) the need to develop better data on protection procedures and structures, (3) the need to better collaborate with the Conference of Religious, especially on safeguarding, (4) the need for the training of more qualified personnel to be placed at the service of national or provincial ecclesiastical tribunals, and (5) the need to better reach rural dioceses. The Commission also notes certain cultural considerations, including an aversion on the part of victims/survivors to pursuing civil justice channels, provided the Church is addressing the case of abuse transparently and genuinely. The Commission also notes the bishops' request for a Commission delegation to be sent to the Republic of Congo for training and local convenings around safeguarding. The Commission remains eager to see this through.



South Africa, Botswana, and Eswatini (Southern African Bishops Conference)

Profile

The Church in South Africa, Botswana, and Eswatini has 30 dioceses in total, with 27 dioceses in South Africa, 2 dioceses in Botswana, and 1 diocese in Eswatini. The Church in these three countries relies on the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) as a joint episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 14 June 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission was heartened to note a strong engagement and commitment from the Conference during the in-person *ad limina* visit. The bishops collectively expressed the importance of meeting with the Commission and registered full attendance for their in-person meeting. The Conference President has been a vocal supporter of safeguarding since the February 2019 summit, for which the Commission is particularly grateful. The Commission noted a safeguarding committee at the national level as the primary safeguarding structure in place. The Commission also noted an analogous committee on child protection at the Leadership Conference of Consecrated Life — the conference of religious that serves as the counterpart to the bishops' conference. The Commission sees the collaboration between these two conferences as critical to a robust and integrated national protection regime, consistent with the Commission's recommendation for a One Church Approach to safeguarding. To facilitate such a One Church Approach, the Commission explained the Memorare Initiative to the Conference, and encouraged its adoption in SACBC countries. The need for additional dedicated resources for safeguarding was also stressed, and the Commission explained the benefits of the Memorare Fund, which could be made available to them in the context of a Memorare Initiative.

During the in-person visit, the bishops highlighted the need for further sensitisation on safeguarding. The Commission emphasised how the Memorare Initiative might accompany such a sensitisation campaign. The Commission noted South Africa's robust experience with transitional justice after the formal end to apartheid, and therefore suggested how the Conference is uniquely positioned to support a robust truth-telling study, to transparently document the phenomenon of clerical sexual abuse. The Commission noted particular concern for abuse experienced by religious sisters. The Commission believes that this is an important concern that might be addressed in a Conference-wide truth-telling study. This concern also touches on a question raised during the in-person visit regarding the definition of "vulnerability". The Commission shared a recommendation during the in-person visit for the development of a Code of Conduct to address a lack of clarity in the contemporary understanding of "vulnerability", noting that a clerical professional standards policy has proven helpful in determining acceptable behaviour by a cleric toward other adults. The Commission observed a particular concern for strict anti-LGBTQ laws in Eswatini, including anti-LGBTQ sentiment that the Commission sees as an obstacle for victims/survivors to report cases of same-sex abuse.

Inadequate seminary formation was noted as another driver of abuse. However, the Commission warned against the assumption that initial formation is sufficient to prevent abuse and emphasised the importance of ongoing safeguarding formation. The Commission identified the Southern African Council of Priests as a group promoting permanent formation for priests at the Conference level and a possible partner in safeguarding formation. The bishops expressed particular concern with delays in the processing of cases at the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Commission acknowledges this persistent and frequent concern, re-stressing the importance of addressing it at the highest levels of the Roman Curia. The Commission also noted the need to reinforce the ecclesiastical tribunals in Conference countries, and reiterates the Memorare Initiative's ability to do so. Finally, the bishops concluded by highlighting their desire to collaborate with the Commission, and the Commission in turn looks forward to better accompanying the Conference's safeguarding ministry.

The Commission notes the ongoing effort to unite the men and women religious into one conference, and further encourages this consolidation, due to the benefits of a joint approach to safeguarding. The Commission acknowledges concerns raised about the definitions of "vulnerability" and "vulnerable adults", especially vis-à-vis women religious. Other discussions included good practices and protocols for concerns surrounding celibacy and the children of priests. The Commission expressed concern about strong anti-gay taboos and proposed legislation in Ghana, which often create a barrier to victims/survivors in reporting same-sex abuse. The Commission also notes the challenge of clericalism and the culture of secrecy that prevent victims/survivors from coming forward, and encourages research.

Guidelines and policies

In general, the document promulgated by the Conference in 2013 provides an excellent basis for the implementation of child protection and safeguarding policies. Following the annotations made by the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the document is complete and conforms to the standards set out in the 2011 Circular Letter. However, it should be noted that the document was last updated in 2013 and therefore does not include the most recent legislation, which has changed extensively and should be reviewed and incorporated accordingly. The Commission remains available to accompany this review.



Ad limina visit

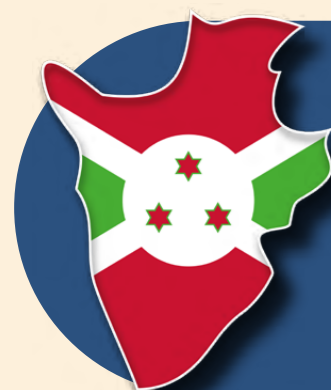
The Commission was pleased to receive an encouraging engagement from the bishops regarding their safeguarding apparatus during the *ad limina* visit. Broadly, the Commission noted a strong desire from the Conference to continue building their child protection program. The year 2024 marks the 30-year jubilee for many of the dioceses in Togo. The Commission sees this as a powerful opportunity to highlight safeguarding as a pastoral priority. During their in-person visit, the bishops presented the Commission with a 22-page document outlining multiple structural safeguarding provisions in place in Togo. Among these structures is a national safeguarding entity, which is led by a bishop-delegate and comprises a robust group of high-profile leaders in the local Church. During the in-person phase, the bishops noted a lack of reports received, despite the roll-out of national, diocesan, and parish-level reporting mechanisms. The bishops and the Commission discussed how this is likely due to a lack of sensitisation on the phenomenon of abuse. In parallel, the Commission noted that many dioceses have a strong social media presence, and recommended exploring these respective social media followings as a tool for sensitising the People of God on safeguarding.

The Commission resoundingly noted a resource shortage that stands as an obstacle to effectively training pastoral agents in safeguarding. The Commission presented the Memorare Initiative as a way of addressing that resource shortage and encouraged the Conference to adopt it for the local Church in Togo. The national safeguarding entity, already established at the Conference level, would serve as a great sponsor to house, coordinate, and support the Memorare Initiative in Togo. Existing physical infrastructure for the Memorare Initiative's trainings and victim/survivor accompaniment services seems robust across dioceses. The bishops demonstrated three particularly good practices that the Commission wishes to highlight: (1) requiring all pastoral agents, especially including those in charge of lay movements and associations, to sign the Code of Conduct and submit it to the designated person responsible for juridical affairs, (2) requiring all those responsible for juridical affairs to attest to the archived record of signed Codes of Conduct from all those under their supervision, and (3) providing an auto-evaluation matrix tool to evaluate progress and persistent shortfalls in the safeguarding regime, present in each Church institution. The Commission notes that this latter provision, namely the presence of an audit tool, is rarely found in conferences' safeguarding infrastructure yet is critical to a robust protection program. Therefore, the Commission especially commends the Conference's efforts to develop this tool — and suggests sharing it, as a good practice, with other conferences around the world. Finally, the Commission hopes to receive answers to its safeguarding questionnaire presented to the Conference during their *ad limina* visit, in order to help map in a granular way the many safeguarding efforts across the country.

Guidelines and policies

The Conference produced its text on safeguarding in 2016. This text was forwarded by the Conference to the then-Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, which is why it was not among the documents in the Commission's archives. The Conference presented its policies to the Commission during its *ad limina* visit and forwarded a digital copy. The text is certainly an excellent starting point for policy development in the region, and the Commission particularly appreciates the attention and care given to prevention

and education. In fact, training programs are envisaged not only for seminarians and priests but also for Church employees, as well as in Catholic schools and colleges in the region. The Commission emphasises the importance of bringing policies up to date with the most recent canonical regulations, which have undergone major reforms in recent years. As described by *Vos estis lux mundi*, there is a need to develop offices for receiving complaints, where the faithful can easily access and receive the best care and attention from the Church. The Commission is very willing to cooperate with the Conference in the development and updating of the policies and their implementation.



Burundi

Profile

The Church in Burundi has eight dioceses and relies on the Conférence des Evêques Catholiques du Burundi as its episcopal conference. The Conference traveled to Rome for their *ad limina* visit during the week of 13–17 March 2023.

Ad limina visit

The Commission regrets not meeting with the bishops from Burundi on the occasion of their *ad limina* visit to Rome. However, the Commission was able to deliver informational material regarding the Memorare Initiative to the bishops while they were still in Rome. The Commission notes a positive response to the Memorare Initiative from the bishops upon their return to Burundi. The Commission strongly encourages the adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Burundi and hopes to receive renewed engagement from the bishops, working toward its adoption in 2024.

Guidelines and policies

Not having had the opportunity to speak with the Conference during their *ad limina* visit, the Commission merely expresses its appreciation for the work carried out by the Conference, which published its guidelines in 2019 and the regulations for the ecclesial offices to receive complaints in 2022. The quality of the texts presented and the attention that the conference has paid to the subject matter in question is appreciable. The Commission wishes to work with the Conference in greater detail on these documents, as it has done with many other conferences in the region.



Consolata Missionary Sisters (Female)

Profile

The Institute of Consolata Missionaries is an international religious order of consecrated people of Pontifical Right, that is, whose establishment was approved directly by the Holy See. It is overseen closely by the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. The Consolata Missionary Sisters, which is a female religious order, self-report 478 members worldwide, 165 of whom are under the age of 70 years old. They are present in 17 countries around the world, with a focus on evangelisation and human development.

Safeguarding overview

- > The Commission notes one sister dedicated to safeguarding, in all the sisters' activities around the world.⁶⁵ She has been trained at the Gregorian University's Institute for Anthropology, with a Diploma in Safeguarding, and is based in one of the formative communities near Nairobi, Kenya. This safeguarding point person serves without a term limit.
- > The Commission notes the well-defined responsibilities of the safeguarding officer, as explained in the document "Nomina della referente per la tutela dei minori":
 - + Provide consultation service to the Executive Board and Circumscription Directorates about the management and accompaniment of any cases of abuse in the sisters' work around the world.
 - + Coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Guidelines for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults so that respect and awareness of the rights and needs of children and vulnerable adults, as well as attention to preventing all forms of violence or abuse, are maintained and cultivated among the Consolata Sisters.
 - + Assist Circumscriptions in adapting and implementing the specific guidelines contained in the Guidelines for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults in our works and presences.
 - + Promote information and reflection among the Consolata Sisters on the spiritual and theological implications of abuse and on the paths that Consecrated Life and the Church in general take regarding a culture of care, transparency, and protection of minors and adults in vulnerable situations.
 - + Promote opportunities of formation to ensure safe environments in the sisters' works and presences.
 - + Serve as the spokesperson to ecclesial and civil bodies that concern the protection of minors.
 - + The document titled "Nomina della referente per la tutela dei minori" was reportedly well disseminated via a letter from the General Direction to all the Consolata Sisters.
 - + Safeguarding formation opportunities are offered online and in-person for members across the institution. Formation is offered in English and Italian. All members are subject to some level of mandatory formation. Members have benefited in particular from courses offered in the local Church, including at Tangaza University and the Catholic University of East Africa.
 - + On 9 March 2021, the Mother Superior issued "Orientamenti per la tutela dei minori e degli adulti vulnerabili nelle nostre opere e presenze", with the consensus of her Council.⁶⁶ This document represents the principal safeguarding guidelines for the Consolata Sisters. The members of the Commission for Case Management of Reported Abuse, responsible for developing these guidelines at the national level, include: (1) a Consolata Sister who is involved with educational or pastoral care, (2) another "prudent and wise" sister, (3) a lawyer, (4) a physician, and (5) a psychologist-psychiatrist.
 - + Novitiates are required to attend courses sensitising them to the safeguarding guidelines. These courses are provided at the general novitiate house in Italy, the Consolata Sisters' only novitiate house.

⁶⁵ Sr. Florence Wanjiku Njagi.

⁶⁶ <https://www.missionariedellaconsolata.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Orientamenti-Tutela-dei-Minori-e-Adulti-Vulnerabili-ok.pdf>.



- + A General Councillor oversees the area of continuing formation, and there are sisters who assist in the implementation of the continuing formation programming.
- + The Commission notes a community where sisters are devoted full-time to the ministry of continued formation. These communities offer organised programs for any sisters that require sabbatical time.
- + The Commission notes a provision of psycho-pedagogical accompaniment for victims/survivors.
- + The guideline document outlines a thorough protocol for handling alleged perpetrators.
- + There are provisions for a spokesperson vis-à-vis the media in cases of alleged abuse.
- + Transferring any member implicated in a case of abuse from one country to another is prohibited.

Challenges

- > The General Direction (governing body) does not have a dedicated and ordinary budget for safeguarding.
- > The safeguarding guidelines could benefit from an external review, as requested by the Mother General.
- > The collaboration with diocesan bishops on safeguarding is challenged by varying relationships of trust between the sisters and the bishops.
- > There is a need for greater lay involvement in safeguarding, to accompany the Consolata Sisters.
- > Cultural taboos promote a culture of silence and secrecy surrounding abuse cases.
- > The Commission notes denial of the existence and prevalence of abuse in many countries where the sisters work.
- > There is a lack of personnel and financial resources for a robust safeguarding apparatus at the local level.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that the Consolata Missionary Sisters undertake the following:

1. Consider a grant request to the Commission's Memorare Fund, to build safeguarding capacity in its local communities *ad gentes* (around the world). This grant request should include plans for specific formation that is culturally sensitive, considering the differing challenges in the areas of the world where sisters are present.
2. Demonstrate concerted efforts to disseminate the contact information and availability of the order's safeguarding point person, currently based in Kenya.
3. The sister in charge of safeguarding should be supported by a team, even if on a part-time basis — perhaps dispersed throughout the world, with reference people in each of the various capillary units of the Consolata Sisters. Such a team would represent a network present at the local level, while still maintaining a central and full-time point person.
4. The Commission notes the challenges in capturing cultural differences in safeguarding practices with only one international novitiate based in Rome. Therefore, it recommends that the international novitiate emphasise formation that is sensitive to intercultural competencies in its safeguarding formation. Moreover, the Commission recommends that the formator of this group have a particularly strong background in safeguarding and intercultural competencies.

Profile



Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Male)

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit, or Spiritans (as they are also known), is an international congregation of priests, brothers, and lay associates of Pontifical Right. It is a male religious order self-reporting 2,711 members worldwide, 2,193 of whom are under the age of 70 years old. Of these members, 59 have been consecrated as bishops. They are present in over 60 countries and organised by circumscriptions of two types: (1) provinces, with stable and local membership, and (2) groups, focusing on a specific missionary task. They have ten novitiates around the world. They have a charism that focuses on evangelisation and missionary service in areas of the world where the Church is newly established.

Safeguarding overview

- > The Commission notes a requirement in each of the provinces for a safeguarding official who is not the major superior. In the United States, Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, and elsewhere in Europe, the safeguarding official is nominated at the provincial level itself. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the safeguarding official is nominated at the regional level, which represents a union of provinces. This safeguarding official is responsible for (1) the formation of members, lay people associated with the Congregation, and parishes under the care of the Congregation, (2) assisting the major superior in prevention measures in the province, and (3) assisting the Superior General in specific cases, including adherence to specific civil/state law and preparing the canonical file.
- > In Africa and Latin America, there are six officials who have been trained in safeguarding at the Pontifical Gregorian University's Institute of Anthropology, for a minimum of six months. In the United States and Europe, at least five officials have received various forms of training.
- > It is estimated that there are structured safeguarding formation opportunities in 18 countries worldwide, offered specifically by the Congregation. This formation is offered in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French.
- > The Commission notes a letter written by the Superior General in 2003 on the prevalence of abuse and the general need to be vigilant.
- > The General Chapter in 2012 decided to write safeguarding guidelines for the protection of minors, applicable to the whole Congregation. These guidelines were published in 2013 and updated in 2016. Safeguarding guidelines for the protection of vulnerable adults were published in 2018. In 2021, the General Chapter ordered a revision of the guidelines to reflect changes in universal law. The Congregation reports the planned publication of these new guidelines in 2024, which unite the safeguarding guidelines for minors and vulnerable adults into one consolidated document. The Congregation has shared those new guidelines with the Commission, which is providing feedback in 2024.
- > The Commission notes the adoption of the following by the General Chapter regarding outreach to victims/survivors:
 - + "I responsabili della Provincia forniranno una risposta pastorale alle vittime, offrendo ascolto, sostegno e accompagnamento e ponendo l'accento sulla giustizia riparativa." (Capitolo generale 2021, n° 60).⁶⁷
 - + "Il nostro ascolto delle vittime e il nostro desiderio di agire finalmente in modo equo nei loro confronti raggiunge il carisma della nostra Congregazione che vede nei poveri i primi destinatari del lieto Annunzio." (Capitolo generale 2021, n° 61).⁶⁸
- > Cases are handled at the provincial level in consultation with the General Council. The Congregation

⁶⁷ [Provincial leaders will provide a pastoral response to victims, offering listening, support and accompaniment and emphasizing restorative justice. (General Chapter 2021, no. 60)]

⁶⁸ [Our listening to victims and our desire to finally act equitably toward them reaches to the charism of our congregation that sees the poor as the first recipients of the Good News. (General Chapter 2021, no. 61)]

reports liaising with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith for matters regarding clerics and the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life for matters regarding non-clerics.

- > In the United States and Europe, all members assigned a ministry in a parish are required to follow diocesan formation obligations.
- > A General Council on safeguarding began work in 2022, with members who all have prior experience as major superiors, and some with specific safeguarding training. The General Council includes one member responsible for safeguarding formation. The General Council has engaged a safeguarding expert to evaluate their practices in 2024.
- > The Commission notes novice masters and other formators for ongoing training attend safeguarding courses through the Inter-Congregational Ongoing Formation Program (ICOF).

Challenges

- > The Congregation highlights that in many provinces the safeguarding officer is designated in name only and does not have any specific ordinary functions in practice. Moreover, this is a new position that faces a lack of sensitisation among the members. Notably, this role does not have a specified term limit.
- > The Commission notes a lack of data on formation opportunities available for members worldwide.
- > Many superiors have challenges handling cases in their first year because formation is not offered until the end of the first year.
- > Some cases likely do not arrive at the level of the General Council because of unreliable determinations made at the provincial level. There is concern that this might be in violation of the canonical requirements that clearly dictate specific reporting obligations.
- > The Congregation shared a lack of clarity on the modalities and application of *Vos estis lux mundi* for religious institutes.
- > The Congregation reports 31 cases received and transmitted to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith from 2014 until the beginning of 2024. The Congregation reports one case that was handled by the Dicastery in five months, although most of the cases are reported to take several years. This long turnaround time is of urgent concern to the Congregation.
- > Although some initial safeguarding formation is offered, it is not offered regularly each year. Moreover, ongoing formation is the responsibility of the provinces, which have varying levels of resources. There is no one responsible for safeguarding formation Congregation-wide.
- > Historically, there has been no Congregation-wide requirement for safeguarding formation for all members. However, the General Chapter took specific steps in 2021 toward resolving this shortcoming, although these measures have yet to be realised, including:
 - + “La preparazione dei confratelli come formatori comprenderà la formazione in salvaguardia. Mirerà a dare priorità alla dimensione spirituale e umana nelle fasi iniziali dei programmi di formazione spiritana di tutti i candidati.” (Capitolo generale 2021, n° 65).⁶⁹
 - + “Ogni provincia inserirà nel proprio piano di formazione continua la formazione nella salvaguardia e nella riqualificazione di tutti i suoi membri.” (Capitolo generale 2021, n° 67).⁷⁰
 - + “I confratelli appena arrivati in una Provincia riceveranno un’introduzione alla cultura locale e alle norme di pratica del ministero. Acquisiranno familiarità con il Codice di condotta della Provincia e lo firmeranno.” (Capitolo generale 2021, n° 68).⁷¹

⁶⁹ [The preparation of the confreres as formators will include formation in safeguarding. It will aim to prioritize the spiritual and human dimensions in the initial stages of Spiritan formation programs for all candidates. (General Chapter 2021, No. 65)]

⁷⁰ [Each province will include in its continuing education plan training in safeguarding and requalification of all its members. (General Chapter 2021, No. 67)]

⁷¹ [Newly arrived confreres in a Province will receive an ‘introduction’ to the local culture and norms of ministry practice. They will become familiar with the Province’s Code of Conduct and sign it. (General Chapter 2021, No. 68)]

- + “Verranno create strutture per garantire una formazione adeguata ai superiori maggiori e autorità locali su questioni relative alla salvaguardia, compresa la nomina di persone responsabile della salvaguardia e un comitato consultivo per aiutare il superiore nell’attuazione del politica.” (Capitolo generale 2021, n° 69).⁷²

- > The Commission notes cultural resistance to safeguarding in members’ countries of origin and in contexts where members work — as well as among members themselves, some of whom see safeguarding as an imposed Western ideology. This resistance highlights the challenges in bringing safeguarding guidelines to life, in changing the attitudes of the members, and in building an overall culture of safeguarding in the Congregation.
- > Frequent changes of major superiors at the provincial level make it difficult to dedicate time for their safeguarding training in a sufficient manner.
- > The Congregation reports vestiges of a culture of clericalism with some members.
- > The Commission notes a lack of competencies in administration, civil law, and canon law at the level of major superiors.
- > The Commission notes a lack of knowledge about the mission of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. Therefore, the Congregation does not know how it can seek assistance from the Commission. The Congregation suggests that the Commission meet with the religious Conferences and Unions to make its mission better known.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that the Congregation of the Holy Spirit undertake the following:

1. The General Council, in collaboration with the Commission, should map the state of the practical responsibilities and activities of the safeguarding officers at the provincial level. This mapping will serve as an audit to ensure that these safeguarding officers are engaged in practical safeguarding work and are not just serving in name only.
2. The General Council, with the Commission’s advice and assistance, should design a tool to map safeguarding formation opportunities across the Congregation. This will serve over time as a valuable statistical tool to track the Congregation’s progress in safeguarding formation.
3. The Congregation should commit to training major superiors in safeguarding as soon as they are elected, and not at the end of their first year in the role.
4. The Congregation should apply for a grant from the Commission’s Memorare Fund, to host a centralised training course for all safeguarding officers to provide sensitisation on the canonical reporting requirements. This training might help address concerns about cases failing to reach the General Council due to mishandling at the provincial level. This training could also help familiarise safeguarding officers with *Vos estis lux mundi*’s application to religious institutes.
5. The Congregation should write to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith to express its concern and frustration with the time it takes for the Dicastery’s Disciplinary Section to process a case.

⁷² [Structures will be set up to ensure adequate training for major superiors and local authorities on issues related to safeguarding, including the appointment of persons responsible for safeguarding and an advisory committee to assist the superior in ‘implementing the policy’. (General Chapter 2021, No. 69)]



6. The Congregation should name someone in charge of safeguarding formation worldwide who, with the Commission's accompaniment, can build a formation plan across the provincial level that might be eligible for funding from the Commission's Memorare Fund.
7. The Congregation should fully implement the decisions made by the General Chapter in 2021 on formation (n° 65, 67, 68, 69).
8. The Congregation should require all members worldwide to follow diocesan formation obligations in the diocese where they are assigned.
9. The Congregation should continue to engage with the Commission in the revision of the new guidelines, set for publication in 2024, with a particular focus on building a culture of safeguarding.



Section 2

The Church's Safeguarding Mission in the Continental Regions

Introduction to Section 2

Purpose

This section of the Annual Report is organised and presented in four regions, preceded by a presentation of global trends. Given their vastness, the four regions are often discussed in sub-regions. This analysis is narrative in structure, thereby highlighting the multi-disciplinary perspective of the Regional Groups.



Understanding the Regional Church

The Commission emphasises understanding the regional context of the Church for safeguarding, considering the interconnectedness of local Churches and larger social trends. **The purpose of this section is to explore the intersection between the Church's regional institutional character and its safeguarding ministry.**

Regional trends of abuse

Empirical findings show that abuse has regional variations. **Understanding regional challenges helps the Commission provide guidance to the Holy Father.** This section will focus on regional abuse trends for prevention, response, and accountability.



Regional solidarity

Catholic doctrine emphasises solidarity among national Churches and especially among bishops. The Church's response to abuse is rooted in communion and safeguarding. The Commission aims to collaborate with national Churches to address regional safeguarding challenges and resource disparities. **In this section, persistent gaps in safeguarding will be highlighted so that regional solidarity may be strengthened.**

Methodology

The Commission's Regional Groups

The Commission's Regional Groups possess diverse expertise in legal, educational, mental health, social work, theological/spiritual, pastoral, safeguarding, and cultural domains, enabling them to develop and implement comprehensive and culturally aligned safeguarding strategies to address complex needs within the Church.

Regional Group composition

The Commission has four regional groups: (1) Africa, (2) the Americas, (3) Asia/Oceania, and (4) Europe. Each of the Regional Groups is made up of approximately four of the Commission's members, based on the members' region of origin. Each Regional Group has the support of a regional expert who is a full-time staff member of the Commission. For some regions, there is also a regional advisor, who provides additional support and insight given his or her distinct knowledge of the region.

Participatory methodology

The methodology is based on an integrative approach that leverages both empirical evidence and the specialised expertise of the Regional Group. The methodology is participatory in nature. It is based on review and analysis of available evidence in each region and is especially informed by the Commission members' engagement with victims/survivors at the local level.

Analysis and recommendations from the Regional Groups

The Regional Groups synthesise tailored strategies and recommendations aligned with the region's realities to create a preventive, responsive, and effective safeguarding model for the local Church. This model includes mechanisms for ongoing evaluation that are adaptable to a changing regional context.

Global trends

The Commission notes varying levels of policy development among local Churches in different regions and believes this development to occur in the following progressive order:

- 01 *Establishing policies and accompanying resources in a culturally sensitive way*
- 02 *Implementing these policies through capacity building*
- 03 *Monitoring and evaluating these policies*
- 04 *Reviewing and updating these policies organically through a routine external audit mechanism*

Positive trends

- > Shifting the safeguarding approach to a focus on human rights, liberty, and dignity, consistent with updates to Book VI of the Code of Canon Law
- > The development of robust safeguarding mechanisms, including national and diocesan committees, reporting desks, trained personnel for victim/survivor assistance, case management systems, and independent audit tools
- > Collaboration among bishops' and religious conferences, consistent with the Commission's endorsement of a One Church Approach to safeguarding
- > Formation initiatives such as the Memorare Initiative
- > Partnerships with secular human rights institutions and dialogue with civil society
- > Sensitising local communities to risk factors and implementing acceptable codes of conduct

Challenges

- > Delays in processing cases at the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith
- > Lack of resources (both human and financial) for training
- > Prioritisation of the Church's reputation over victim/survivor support
- > Lack of cultural sensitisation to the phenomenon of abuse
- > Online abuse and lack of comprehensive measures to integrate it in pastoral safeguarding activities
- > Risks in climate change and conflict areas
- > Clericalism and improper exercise of ecclesial authority
- > Alcohol and drug abuse and their significant threats to the prioritisation of safeguarding
- > Linguistic complexities
- > Trans-national religious complexities, with overlapping jurisdictions and varying vetting procedures
- > Inadequate capacity building for clergy
- > Developing victim/survivor-centred and culturally responsive policies



Africa

Positive trends

- > The Commission's Africa Regional Group notes the active general engagement and commitment of bishops and religious leaders in Africa. Most national conferences have policies and designated leaders for safeguarding initiatives. Efforts are being made to provide safeguarding training for all, including clergy and religious leaders.
- > The Regional Group is encouraged by the Commission's allocation of adequate resources to the region through the Memorare Initiative.
- > The Regional Group notes proactive measures through local, regional, and continental episcopal conferences and Church associations that are anchors for safeguarding initiatives on the continent.
- > Support from the Commission and other organisations has been provided to Associations of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMACEA), the Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA), and the Episcopal Conference of the Indian Ocean (CEDOI). CEDOI is collaborating with other African

French-speaking countries under different regional associations. These efforts include raising awareness about existing policies, enhancing existing structures, training on safeguarding, and management of sexual abuse cases.

- > Various religious congregations in Africa are embarking on intensive safeguarding initiatives, benefiting the local Churches.
- > The Regional Group worked in close collaboration with the Commission and episcopal and religious conferences to implement the Memorare Initiative as a way of harmonising safeguarding activities.

- > There is a need to develop a Certified African Training of Trainers Program on safeguarding. Adequate human and financial resources should be allocated with the objective of extensive prevention and sensitisation.
- > There is a crucial need to involve and reinforce the capabilities of parents regarding children's psychosexual development and to allow open discussions on the subject.
- > The Regional Group expresses significant concern about a lack of holistic services for victims/survivors, along with expertise in

treating psycho-trauma.

- > There is a need to accompany and sensitise bishops and religious leaders on matters such as false allegations, case management of allegations, and the importance of trained safeguarding teams.
- > Episcopal and religious conferences must regularly revise their guidelines and protocols to remain aligned with the *Universal Guidelines Framework*.

Americas

Positive trends

- > The Commission's Americas Regional Group notes that safeguarding work in the region began with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1987, followed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1992.
- > The process of creating appropriate policies and structures at the ecclesial level was accelerated after the publication of the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's Circular Letter in 2011.
- > National councils/commissions and lay people — particularly women — have taken a leading role in safeguarding in several countries.
- > The Regional Group notes the development of the Memorare Initiative in the region, with Panama, Paraguay, and Costa Rica already adopting it in their local Churches.

Challenges

- > The culture of safeguarding is a new concept in the region, requiring sensitisation, information, training, and skills development. It is especially important to address the lack of knowledge among Church leadership and the laity.
- > Safeguarding policy development and implementation vary across African countries due to social, economic, political, and cultural complexities.
- > There is a lack of monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of safeguarding systems.
- > There is little data on the occurrence of sexual abuse perpetrated by adults, clergy, religious, and pastoral agents. Reliable and updated data is needed to develop an effective protection strategy in safeguarding.
- > The cultural norms of silence, secrecy, and denial hinder the effective implementation of safeguarding as part of the Church's ministry.
- > There is inadequate funding for safeguarding initiatives, and donor compliance requirements limit funding for specific regions and entities. The Regional Group notes the need for sustainable strategies to ensure long-term funds for safeguarding.
- > There is a need for capacity building to promote a culture of safeguarding for Church leaders and all adults working with minors and vulnerable persons.
- > A clear and comprehensive definition of vulnerable adults is needed to inform a broader understanding of types of abuse, signs, consequences, and support for victims/survivors.

Challenges

- > The Regional Group notes varying levels of safeguarding experience. Some areas have a long history of combating clerical sexual abuse, while others are in the early stages of policy development. The Regional Group is concerned about the number of local Churches where policies are absent or outdated due to social and ecclesial obstacles.
- > High societal risks, especially in Central America, contribute to widespread abuse, exploitation, and violence against children and adolescents.⁷³ UNICEF

reports that two-thirds of children under 15 experience some form of violence, with corporal punishment permitted in homes and schools in 25 countries.⁷⁴ In the different countries of the region, the prevalence of sexual violence in childhood among young women varies notably, from just 1% to 25%. In Central America, one in four young women lives in a union or is married before the age of 18.⁷⁵ Abuse is mostly committed

⁷³ UNICEF, Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia, *Violencia contra niños, niñas y adolescentes en América Latina y el Caribe 2015-2021: Una revisión sistemática* (2021), 3.

⁷⁴ UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund, *Statistical profile of violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean* (2020), 5.

⁷⁵ PROGRAMA REGIONAL DE LA INICIATIVA SPOTLIGHT PARA AMÉRICA LATINA, *La violencia contra las mujeres y niñas en contextos de exclusión estructural múltiple en Centroamérica. Estudios de caso en El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras* (2021), 16.



in the family setting, and in 74% of these cases the aggressor is an immediate family member.⁷⁶

- > There is a lack of systematic data on abuse in the ecclesiastical sphere. The Regional Group attributes this to a culture of secrecy, inadequate reporting structures, and limited resources.
- > In Latin America, initiatives have been slower and less comprehensive than in North America. Some episcopal conferences have been slow to update and establish operational documents since *Vos estis lux mundi* was promulgated in 2019. Therefore, the Regional Group notes the existence of obsolete and in some cases nonexistent policies.
- > Religious congregations at the national level have not taken joint actions with their episcopal counterparts in most countries. However, there are some exceptions, such as Mexico,⁷⁷ Venezuela,⁷⁸ and Brazil.⁷⁹
- > A culture of machismo and violence and a lack of awareness of the rights of children and vulnerable

adults pose challenges in local Churches. Other risk factors affecting Central America include drug and alcohol use, unaccompanied minors, dysfunctional family models, and difficulties within public security and civil justice systems.

- > There are a number of particularly high-profile cases of abuse and negligence that occurred during the Annual Report's reporting period, including in the countries of Bolivia, Mexico, Venezuela, and Chile.
- > The Regional Group also notes with concern the absence of clear policies for religious communities and new Catholic associations. Many of these communities do not disclose their procedures and structures despite having encountered serious cases of abuse and exhibiting negligence in handling complaints.
- > The Regional Group also notes a resource scarcity that limits financial and human resource provisions dedicated to safeguarding.

Challenges

- > The Regional Group notes challenges in accurately identifying and addressing the true scale of abuse within Church institutions due to a pervasive culture of silence, a reluctance to report abuse, and a general lack of education and awareness concerning safeguarding practices. These challenges are compounded by challenges of clericalism.⁸¹
- > As much as there have been some first contributions to the conversional justice framework in the areas of truth-telling, the integral set of conversional justice instruments for the regional Church's safeguarding strategies is still in need of development.
- > In 2017, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse revealed systemic failures across institutions, including the Catholic Church.⁸²
- > Within South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bhutan), the Church has been a force for community support — but there have also been instances of clerical abuse that require careful attention and resolution.⁸³ Unique socio-economic landscapes, with factors such as religious diversity and legal systems, require individualised safeguarding strategies.⁸⁴
- > Within Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, and the Philippines), instances of clerical abuse have been inconsistently reported, often hindered by traditional hierarchical structures, patriarchal values, ineffective legal mechanisms, corruption, and fears of social reprisal.
- > Within Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), the presence of the Church is relatively insignificant, shaped by the region's predominantly Muslim culture and constrained by political and legal factors. Collaboration between the Church and state agencies should be improved, which requires a comprehensive strategy to build trust within local communities, enhance legal and policy frameworks, and invest in community-based interventions.
- > While the Pacific Islands have diverse cultures, they all face issues such as a lack of data, high abuse rates, and a culture of silence. The Catholic Church holds influence but faces complexity in safeguarding. Samoan culture struggles with addressing abuse and the situation calls for introspection, education, and collaborative intervention.
- > Within East Asia (China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, Hong Kong, and Macau), there is a persistent need to develop specific partnerships with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.



Asia Oceania

Positive trends

- > The Commission's Asia/Oceania Regional Group notes that within South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bhutan), commendable safeguarding measures have been implemented in some dioceses, as exemplified by the St. Joseph's Safeguarding Centre in Mumbai, India.⁸⁰
- > A meaningful commitment to the concepts of the conversional justice framework in Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) has been realised through the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Australia) and the ongoing Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions (New Zealand).

⁷⁶ UNICEF, Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia, *Violencia familiar y sexual en la primera infancia* (2021), 13-14.

⁷⁷ <https://cirm.org.mx/2022/06/29/prevencion-de-abusos/>.

⁷⁸ <https://www.conver.org/cuidado-y-proteccion/>.

⁷⁹ <https://nucleoluxmundi.crbnacional.org.br>.

⁸⁰ Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (2017), <https://cbci.in/Page/his-eminence,-oswald-cardinal-gracias,-inaugurated-the-st-joseph-safeguarding-centre.aspx?id=781&type=1>.

⁸¹ GIOLLÁIN, L., *Review of Child Sexual Abuse & the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organisational Culture*, 2012.

⁸² ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, *Final Report. Commonwealth of Australia* (2017). <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/final-report>.

⁸³ United Nations Children's Fund, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2014.; ZA MANG, P., "Christianity and Ethnic Identity in Burma", in *Journal of Church and State* (2019), 61(1), 78-105. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/csy002>.

⁸⁴ MAUL, K. M., NAEEM, R., RAHIM, KHAN U., MIAN, A. I., YOUSAFZAI, A. K., BROWN, N., "Child abuse in Pakistan: A qualitative study of knowledge, attitudes and practice amongst health professionals", *Child Abuse & Neglect* (2019), 88, 51-57, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.10.008>; TAMANAHA, B. Z., "Legal pluralism across the global South: Colonial origins and contemporary consequences", in *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* (2021), 53(2), 168-205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2021.1942606>.



Europe

The safeguarding landscape within the Catholic Church across the European Region exhibits considerable diversity, reflecting varying levels of advancement in preventive strategies, reporting mechanisms, accountability measures, and therapeutic care for victims/survivors in the civil sphere.

Positive trends

- > Adherence to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ratified by many nations in the region has contributed to significant advances. This Convention has been instrumental in catalysing the development of robust safeguarding frameworks, and its implementation has paved the way for enhanced protective measures and a culture of vigilance and responsiveness in several local Churches. The ongoing commitment to these principles is crucial for maintaining the momentum toward comprehensive and effective safeguarding measures within the Church.
- > In nations that have experienced very complex crises or that have developed an in-depth public dialogue on abuses, there is a clear trend toward establishing more structured and responsive systems for dealing with abuse within the Church. Local Churches that belong to this group — including the local Churches of Ireland, France, Italy, and Poland — have developed legal and training frameworks along with active engagement with victims/survivors and collaboration with civil authorities.
- > In some local Churches, collaborations with civil authorities have led to government inquiries that enable victims/survivors to receive meaningful acknowledgement of their abuses and to learn the truth of the scale of abuse within a particular Church — often catalysing greater transparency and accountability measures, including setting up listening centres, training courses, and independent bodies for recognition and reparation.
- > The Regional Group recognises numerous good practices. For example, the Church in France has implemented a mandatory reporting system for all clergy members, ensuring that any suspicion of abuse is immediately communicated to civil authorities. In Belgium, the Church has focused on the creation of specialized pastoral care units, offering support and protection to victims/survivors while also enhancing preventive education within religious communities. In Germany, the Church has introduced a comprehensive vetting process for all individuals working with minors, including clergy and laypersons, to prevent those with a history of abusive behaviour from gaining access to vulnerable populations. In Italy, the Church has established independent diocesan commissions with lay experts to oversee and investigate allegations of abuse, promoting transparency and accountability in handling such cases. In Ireland, the Church has a service to provide pastoral theological support to any victims/survivors who seek to re-engage with their faith. This service is reportedly unique in the world. At the level of dioceses and religious provinces, a number of European bishops and religious superiors have taken initiatives to address abuse within the Church.
- > The differences in response strategies between bishops and religious can present opportunities for growth and improvement. Adopting a One Church Approach, as seen in some local Churches, has proven to enhance outcomes across various dimensions — improving prevention measures,

fostering care and compassion in responses, and ensuring fairness in dealing with accusations.

- > The Region has Church networks such as the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) and the Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE) that are concerned about reforms and the treatment of abuse cases. The Commission has engaged with COMECE to consider the EU's directive on protecting children from online abuse and hopes to develop a collaborative strategy to assist in protecting children in the digital world.
- > In Eastern Europe, a safeguarding network has been established with more than 60 people from 21 countries.
- > The Regional Group notes another good practice, important for the region, in the collaboration protocol between the Portuguese Association for Victim Support (Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima, or APAV) and the World Youth Day Foundation (JMJ), signed on 2 March 2023. The final report on the collaboration protocol focuses on the actions taken to support and protect victims/survivors during the World Youth Day in Lisbon in 2023.⁸⁵ The protocol is based on a multidimensional approach that emphasizes prevention, training, and victim support, with the aim of ensuring the safety of participants and offering specialized support when needed. In the context of prevention, informational and training content was developed that included videos and a manual of good practices.

Challenges

- > The Regional Group notes that while some serious studies of abuse prevalence have been conducted in local Churches with advanced safeguarding efforts, there remains a persistent absence of reliable statistics about the scale of abuse by clerics and religious in several parts of the region.
- > The absence of disaggregated data on sexual abuse in the region is something that is likely to remain problematic in work on the Sustainable Development Goals. The Regional Group notes the UN Special Rapporteur's recommendation for a roadmap for the implementation of Goal 16.2, including reporting and investigation mechanisms, care, recovery, and integration services.⁸⁶
- > The abuse crisis within the Church has significantly affected the ministry of men and women religious superiors. Many superiors in Europe are engaging directly with victims/survivors, offering care and pastoral support. Religious men and women face challenges associated with living with someone accused of abuse in a religious community, whilst at the same time having to accompany the victim/survivor and process the allegation in accordance with civil and canon law.
- > Factors impacting the ability to hold offenders accountable in some countries include social stigma, a lack of accessible reporting mechanisms, and a lack of follow-up by Church authorities.
- > There is frustration among victims/survivors due to the canonical system's handling of their cases. Even in countries with a high degree of civil justice efficiency, the Church's respect for the reserved dominion of states — which involves waiting for the conclusion of a state criminal trial before proceeding with a canonical one, as also explicitly indicated by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in its *Vademecum* of 2022, as a long-established practice⁸⁷ — is seen by many victims as a further silence on the part of the Church. This is even more problematic in conjunction with slow civil processes.
- > There are some local disparities — especially between Western and Eastern Europe — in child-sensitive counselling and care for victims/survivors.

⁸⁵ https://www.lisboa2023.org/uploads/relatorio_final_APAVJMJ_ccc4630163.pdf.

⁸⁶ UN Document A/73/174, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a73174-report-special-rapporteur-sale-and-sexual-exploitation-children>.

⁸⁷ VADEMECUM ON CERTAIN POINTS OF PROCEDURE IN TREATING CASES OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS COMMITTED BY CLERICS, VERSION 2.0 (5 June 2022), art. 26, 27.



- > Groups of victims report that in some countries, preserving the Church's reputation still takes priority over the protection of victims/survivors.
- > The Regional Group notes the ongoing need to address online abuse within the Church, considering international initiatives and debates on privacy and child safeguarding. This is a particular concern in Europe, as its legislation has a standard-setting function globally and many IT platforms and companies have their seat in Europe. Encryption in communications increases risks for children, and grooming and sexual harassment are also concerns. Church leaders need to understand these issues and be trained to support prevention efforts. In light of the extreme importance of this area of protection for the Church and the Holy Father, the Commission is expanding its efforts to facilitate collaboration between the Dicasteries of the Holy See and other strategic international partners.
- > There is a need for improved communication and coordination among services for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults at the national and local level in some parts of the region. At the local level, inadequate coordination can create difficulties in the relationship with victims/survivors and their advocacy organizations. The Regional Group notes that this challenge was often reported in its meetings with the various European episcopal conferences.
- > In some countries, there is a lack of open communication among Catholic communities, lay movements, associations, and religious orders about available services for reporting and accompaniment, which can create the impression of a lack of transparency.
- > The systematic assessment and review of safeguarding practices in Europe is just beginning. Many countries have not yet been subject to independent scrutiny. Therefore, the experience of several bishops' conferences in sharing information and good practices among themselves is of particular importance. The specialised field of prevention and management of abuse within the Church makes the sharing of tested methodologies and resources especially useful because conferences do not have to invent solutions from scratch.
- > The Regional Group expresses deep concerns about the war in Ukraine causing various forms of violence — including sexual violence

and trafficking of children. The Regional Group expresses the hope that Cardinal Matteo Zuppi's continued missions in Ukraine will soon yield results. The Regional Group shares its solidarity and support for local priests and religious who have offered shelter and refuge for those suffering from and displaced by war. The Regional Group shares its willingness to support proactive solutions for safeguarding children through collaboration with ecclesial and civil stakeholders. Indeed, the Regional Group is set to convene a meeting in November 2024 with all stakeholders engaged in safeguarding at the level of bishops' conferences, conferences of religious, religious orders, and dioceses.

- > While episcopal conferences and religious orders have already launched a robust series of safeguarding initiatives, there are some areas of Church activity that are less advanced, notably among pastoral workers who are not clergy or religious but collaborate with dioceses and orders on a voluntary basis. More broadly, lay associations in many cases have only just begun their work of systematic safeguarding. There is a need for the various parts that make up the local Churches to work together to share good practices and solutions that promote uniform standards of protection, while respecting different responsibilities.
- > The Regional Group is concerned about limited economic resources and the reduction in staff engaged in safeguarding activities in some local Churches. The Regional Group recognises that a general lack of financial resources available to some local Churches necessarily impacts their safeguarding efforts.
- > The Regional Group recognises that many local Church authorities, especially those with more experience in safeguarding, have set a clear commitment in their service to victims/survivors and the truth. In some areas, however, there has been a slower conversion away from a resistance to safeguarding and toward an integral approach to child protection that is consistent with the principles of conversional justice. In short, there is still work to be done.



Section 3

Safeguarding Policies and Procedures of the Roman Curia in Service of the Local Church

Introduction to Section 3

Purpose

This section begins with a brief historical summary of the normative and sub-normative safeguarding measures enacted by the various Roman Pontiffs and dicasteries over the past several decades. It then offers a presentation of the dicasteries that the Commission has brought into focus based on its collaborations. This section is organised by each discrete dicastery.



Tracking and promoting safeguarding activities in the dicasteries of the Roman Curia

This section aims to facilitate uniform safeguarding standards and promote relationships between the dicasteries and victims/survivors. In doing so, it hopes to promote an “all-of-government” approach to safeguarding — making it a priority across the Roman Curia.

Safeguarding competencies of the various dicasteries of the Roman Curia

The dicasteries are entities that deal with matters of the universal Church.⁸⁸ Their various competencies are derived from delegated power assigned to them by the Roman Pontiff. Various dicasteries of the Roman Curia have competencies in safeguarding. The Commission has been studying this matter since its creation.



Promoting the Roman Curia’s accompaniment of victims/survivors



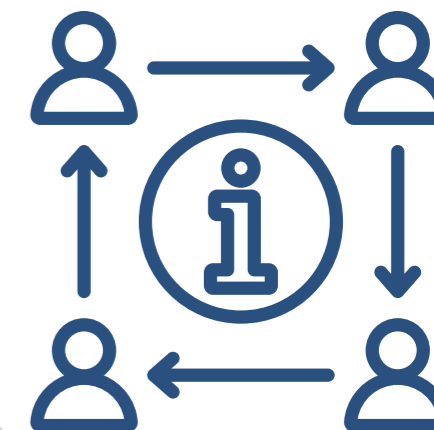
The Commission believes that all procedures and responsibilities performed by the dicasteries in their safeguarding mission should implement a trauma-informed and victim/survivor-centred approach. Since its creation, the Commission’s work has been aimed at facilitating the dicasteries’ interactions with victims/survivors.

The Commission believes that by building a better understanding of the activities of the Roman Curia, a more efficient and accessible way of engaging with these different bodies will emerge for victims/survivors, as well as for individuals accompanying those involved in the process, and the broader public. The purpose of this section is to provide explanations of the Roman Curia’s work toward that end.

⁸⁸ Can. 360 CIC.

Promoting information exchanges among dicasteries

The Commission’s collaborations with the dicasteries is aimed at a systematic exchange of information rather than anecdotal evidence. The various dicasteries of the Roman Curia already collect a wide body of data on a systematic basis. The Commission aims to leverage that data in order to aggregate empirical trends on safeguarding activities.



Promoting service to the local Churches

The Commission notes that there is still substantial variation in the ways in which different dicasteries respond to and guide the local Churches on safeguarding issues. As a “network of networks”, the Roman Curia can uniquely serve as a clearinghouse for good practices in safeguarding.⁸⁹ The Commission believes that the Annual Report can help the dicasteries aggregate and share good practices in safeguarding.

Methodology

Collaboration and Information Exchange Agreements: mutual and stable collaborations

The Commission implements interdicasterial collaborations through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) called “Collaboration and Information Exchange Agreements”. These agreements are established on an ongoing basis between the Commission and the individual dicasteries and are published on the Commission’s website. The Commission receives data in the context of these agreements.

Continuous study of the activities of the various dicasteries

Over its lifetime, the Commission has studied the dicasteries’ safeguarding activities at the specific request of the Holy Father. The Commission has conducted these ongoing studies through in-house conferences, focus group meetings, policy meetings, and the sharing of safeguarding strategies to address issues in the local Churches. This section presents data that has been continuously collected in this manner since the Commission’s creation.

⁸⁹ BISHOP PAUL TIGHE, *National Catholic Reporter* (19 January 2023), <https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/view-vatican/vatican-really-headquarters-catholic-church>.

Safeguarding Initiatives Under the Pontificates of St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis

The pontificates of St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis have witnessed a consistently growing attention to the risks of clerical sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. There has been a trajectory of normative and subnormative developments.

1983

The 1983 Code of Canon Law, promulgated by Pope John Paul II, introduced revised regulations concerning clerical conduct in Canon 1395, §2. It mandates penalties, including possible dismissal from the clerical state, for clerics who commit crimes against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue.

In 1994, the Holy See issued an indult, or special canonical provision, for U.S. bishops, raising the age for the definition of the canonical crime of sexual abuse of a minor to 18 years and extending the statute of limitations to ten years from the victim's/survivor's 18th birthday. The 1994 indult was extended to Ireland in 1996.

1994

2001

Pope John Paul II decided to include the sexual abuse by clerics of minors under 18 in the list of grave canonical crimes reserved for adjudication by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This new law, *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*, was promulgated on 30 April 2001. The statute of limitations was again set at ten years from the victim's/survivor's 18th birthday.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI granted the then-Congregation for the Clergy three Special Faculties related to penal procedures. These are used to impose dismissal from the clerical state due to criminal, seriously unlawful, and scandalous behaviour by clerics, but are considered "extraordinary" measures. They are applied when a local bishop is unable to initiate a judicial process, when there are grave difficulties in doing so, or when the cleric requests dispensation.

2009

2011

In 2011, the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith promulgated a Circular Letter to assist episcopal conferences in preparing guidelines for handling cases of sexual abuse of minors by clerics. Each section of the letter suggested areas for consideration that can assist episcopal conferences in developing uniform guidelines.

In 2014, Pope Francis established the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

2014

2016

In 2016, Pope Francis promulgated the Motu Proprio *Come una madre amorevole*, which establishes a procedure for the removal of ordinaries for negligence.

In 2016, the then-Dicastery for the Clergy issued the updated *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* with a strong emphasis on required safeguarding training for future priests.

In 2019, Pope Francis promulgated the provisional version of the Motu Proprio *Vos estis lux mundi*, which established norms on reporting abuses and transparency.

Also in 2019, Pope Francis promulgated the Instruction on the Confidentiality of Legal Proceedings that established that "reports, processes, and decisions regarding the crimes referred to ... in Art. 1 of *Vos estis lux mundi* [and] in Art. 6 of the *Normae de gravioribus delictis* reserved to the judgement of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith" are not covered by the pontifical secret.⁹⁰

Also in 2019, Pope Francis accepted a proposal from the Commission to convene a Meeting of the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences to address problems of clerical sexual abuse and the subsequent steps to be taken.

2019

2021

In 2021, Pope Francis promulgated an update to Book VI of the Code of Canon Law, establishing that any faithful who holds a dignity or performs an office or function in the Church can be punished with the deprivation of office and with other just penalties — not excluding, if the case warrants it, dismissal from the clerical state.

In 2022, Pope Francis promulgated the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* establishing the Commission within the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Also in 2022, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith presented the latest version of its *Vademecum* on procedures for cases falling under its responsibility.

2022

2023

Pope Francis definitively promulgated an updated version of *Vos estis lux mundi*, following the three-year *ad experimentum* period, and placed particular emphasis on the obligations of reporting and protecting whistle-blowers, on defining updated procedures to judge episcopal negligence, and on an updated definition of a vulnerable adult.



The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

Profile

General

Since its foundation in 1542 and throughout its various reorganizations over the centuries, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has worked to protect, preserve, and promote the Catholic Faith.

The Dicastery is constituted by a College of Members (Cardinals and Bishops), at the head of which is the Prefect. The Prefect is assisted by two Secretaries, the Undersecretary and the Promotor of Justice. The Dicastery's staff is composed of Officials who, under the coordination of the Heads of the respective Offices, attend to various questions to be followed on the basis of their areas of competence and the requirements of the Dicastery.

The Dicastery comprises two Sections, Doctrinal and Disciplinary, each coordinated by a Secretary who assists the Prefect in the specific area of his competence, with the collaboration of the Undersecretary and the respective Heads of Office.

The Dicastery continues to safeguard both faith and morals in numerous ways. With the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Prædicare Evangelium*, the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors has been "established within the Dicastery..., charged with providing guidance and advice to the Roman Pontiff, as well as proposing the most appropriate measures for safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons".⁹¹ Observing their respective competencies as outlined in *Prædicare Evangelium*, the Dicastery and Commission render a collaborative and complementary service to the Universal Church.

Specific competencies of the Disciplinary Section

- > Deals with delicts (crimes) reserved to the Dicastery through the jurisdiction of the Supreme Apostolic Tribunal that has been established therein through the norms of the two Codes of Canon Law [CIC and CCEO] that are in force as well as the rubrics of the Motu Proprio *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*. The rubrics of the Motu Proprio *Vos estis lux mundi* are utilized in cases of reserved delicts in which the Dicastery has competency; importantly, the aforementioned offenses reserved to the Dicastery include "the crime against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue committed by a cleric with a minor below the age of eighteen years or with a person who habitually has an imperfect use of reason".⁹² The law stipulates that the Dicastery "by mandate of the Roman Pontiff, will judge Cardinals, Patriarchs, Legates of the Apostolic See and Bishops, as well as other physical persons, in conformity with canonical provisions"⁹³;
- > Prepares and elaborates the procedures provided for by canonical stipulations so that the Dicastery, in its various instances (Prefect, Secretary, Promotor of Justice, Congress, Ordinary Session, College for the examination of appeals in matters of *delicta graviora*), may promote a coherent administration of justice;
- > Continues to assist Ordinaries in the search for the truth in treating cases of reserved delicts, so that justice can be applied to the perpetrator and Ordinaries can exercise their role to accompany the victims and all those affected by these cases, since a standardized practice will contribute to a better administration of justice. An example of these efforts may be found in the *Vademecum on Certain Points of Procedure in Treating Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Committed by Clerics*, which is now in its second version and which is available for consultation on the website of the Holy See. The *Vademecum* continues to be evaluated for possible updates;
- > Encourages training programs for Ordinaries and legal professionals in order to foster a precise understanding and application of the canonical norms related to its proper area of competency.

⁹¹ Art. 78 PE - §1.

⁹² Norms regarding delicts reserved to the congregation for the doctrine of the faith, Art. 6 § 1

⁹³ Art. 76 PE - §2.

- > From 2011—2022, the Disciplinary Section was consulted with, reviewed, and provided suggestions to episcopal conferences worldwide regarding their respective *Guidelines for Dealing with Cases of the Sexual Abuse of Minors*. This guidance assisted in encouraging good practices in these areas. Since 2022, the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors has assumed this competency;
- > Publishes selected information about its activities through various channels (the online version of the *Vademecum*, conferences, publications, workshops, official and unofficial encounters), to stimulate a broader understanding of its competency and practice.

Challenges

- > Better information and updates for victims/survivors regarding pending cases of reserved delicts:
 - + Waiting without information and updates can be a source of re-traumatization for victims.
 - + The Commission is pleased to note the Dicastery is exploring what steps can be undertaken to help guide this integral part of the local Bishop or Religious Superior's ongoing pastoral care of victims.
- > Need to avoid lengthy canonical proceedings:
 - + Lengthy canonical proceedings can be another source of re-traumatization for victims.
 - + The Commission acknowledges that the Dicastery stands ready to assist and offer guidance, by regularly and swiftly reaching out to local authorities delegated to undertake canonical processes to receive an update on the state of proceedings and progress achieved.
- > Complexity in handling cases and their volume:
 - + The Commission emphasises the importance of adequate resources at the central and local level for the effective management of cases.
 - + At the central level, the Commission recognises how the Disciplinary Section has maintained its personnel, all while seeking to recruit additional staff, to provide more effective service in delivering justice.
 - + At the local level, the Commission notes that the Dicastery regularly encourages bishops and religious superiors to promote a deeper understanding of canon law and, more practically, to select specific members for further studies in the discipline.
- > Develop public visibility in the Disciplinary Section's exercise of its competencies:
 - + The Commission is aware that the Dicastery primarily communicates internally with local Church authorities.
 - + While this communications policy is based on the principle of subsidiarity, it would be beneficial to jointly study how to bring further transparency to the Disciplinary Section's activities.

Recommendations

1. Ongoing and developing engagement between the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors:
 - + This collaboration pursues the objective of assisting the Holy Father in promoting the Church's ministry of child safeguarding, ensuring synergy between prevention and disciplinary efforts.
 - + The Commission encourages this dialogue to enhance the Dicastery's understanding of victims'/survivors' perspectives.
2. Jointly developed guidance for bishops and religious superiors to effectively accompany the local Church authorities' outreach to victims:
 - + The Commission recognises the Dicastery's position that local Church authorities are best placed to engage with victims both linguistically and logistically as well as to approach individuals or groups in a pastorally appropriate manner.



3.

- + Joint guidance around this outreach should identify concrete methods by which Ordinaries may be a source of pastoral outreach to the victims/survivors and all those involved in these cases, and provide public information related to the Church's disciplinary procedures in combatting child sexual abuse.
- + Joint guidance around this outreach should encourage the dissemination of the Dicastery's general position that a serious and credible allegation can be sufficient to provide an Ordinary with the grounds to remove a cleric's faculties and withdraw him from ministry, to minimize the risk of further abuse while the process is ongoing.
- + Joint guidance around this outreach must observe the provisions of *CIC/CCEO, SST*, and the rescript of Pope Francis of 6 December 2019 entitled *On the Confidentiality of Legal Proceedings*, while still encouraging ways of imparting information in a transparent manner.
- + Joint guidance around this outreach should facilitate standard policies and practices.

Ensuring that the search for the truth in each case may be conducted in as just and expeditious a manner as possible:

- + The Commission recommends the Disciplinary Section's expansion of material to help guide local jurisdictions in the administration of justice.
- + Such material of penal and academic interest could be designated for specific groups or purposes such as canon law students, *ad limina* visits, canon law lectures, and conference presentations.
- + The Commission underscores the importance of the apposite training of specialists in the local Churches and recommends the Dicastery and Commission's joint support of educational opportunities.
- + The Commission would also welcome updating the *Vademecum* as a suitable resource in light of changing circumstances.

The Dicastery for the Clergy

Profile

General

According to the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, "The Dicastery for the Clergy deals with all matters relating to priests and deacons of the diocesan clergy, with regard to their persons and pastoral ministry, and everything needed for the fruitful exercise of the latter".⁹⁴

The Dicastery for the Clergy possesses the following mandates relevant to safeguarding:

- > The Dicastery has the competency to approve the *Ratio Institutionis Sacerdotalis Nationalis*, which each bishop's conference periodically updates and which must include elements of screening and formation relating to safeguarding.
- > The Dicastery assists bishops and their conferences to promote the establishment, organisation, and function of interdiocesan seminaries.⁹⁵
- > The Dicastery also exercises the competence to deal with cases of dispensation from the obligations assumed by ordination to the diaconate and priesthood of diocesan clerics of the Latin Church from ecclesiastical circumscriptions not under the competence of the Dicastery for Evangelization; those from the Eastern Churches; and clerical members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.⁹⁶ This includes an exclusive remit for personal prelatures.

⁹⁴ Art. 113 PE - §1.

⁹⁵ Art. 114 PE - §5

⁹⁶ Art. 116 PE.

- > The Dicastery also exercises competencies for certain cases stipulated in *Vos estis lux mundi*,¹⁰⁵ that do not fall under the delicts reserved to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.
- > The Dicastery received three Special Faculties from Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, which were subsequently confirmed by Pope Francis in 2013. The first two Faculties are actual penal procedures to impose an adequate penalty, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state for criminal and gravely scandalous behaviour by priests or deacons.

Safeguarding overview

- > The Dicastery signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commission on 26 May 2023, describing the specific scope of a collaboration on safeguarding activities.⁹⁷
- > The Dicastery has held meetings with members and staff of the Commission to promote cooperation and the exchange of information related to safeguarding.
- > The Commission notes the Dicastery's openness to collaboration, and the sharing of some first national *Ratios*, to be evaluated in terms of their safeguarding elements.
- > The Commission welcomes the attention shown by the Dicastery in the inclusion of safeguarding elements in the updated version of the *Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis (RFIS)*, which shapes the individual national *Ratios*. In particular, the RFIS deals with the entire spiritual life of the clergy, including psychological evaluation and formation. The RFIS promotes a holistic approach to integral human formation, and considers this in the entire formative life of priests, even after ordination.

Challenges

- > The Commission expresses the persistent and urgent challenge for all those involved in seminary formation to receive adequate training in safeguarding in order to help create safe and risk-informed environments. In turn, seminarians might be made better aware of appropriate conduct.
- > The Commission notes a concern that psychological assessments — indicating critical risk issues in candidates for Holy Orders — may be downplayed in the vetting procedures for Holy Orders. The Commission emphasises the importance of strict vigilance on screening procedures, and the involvement of lay professionals.
- > The Commission recognises the complexity of implementing an integral human formation, especially considering evolving understandings and changes in societal norms.
- > The Commission emphasises the absolute necessity for prompt, respectful, and transparent responses to victims/survivors who report their cases. The Commission also reaffirms the seriousness of the harm that victims/survivors incur from non-responses and delays. The lack of knowledge of actions taken in a particular case is often a primary source of re-traumatisation. Meeting the needs of victims/survivors in this way remains a pressing challenge for the Dicastery.

⁹⁷ <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/info/2023/05/30/230530a.html>.



Recommendations

The Commission recommends that the Dicastery for the Clergy undertake the following:

1. In its training activities, the Dicastery should take into account and refer to the safeguarding standards to be defined by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in the *Universal Guidelines Framework*.
2. All staff of the Dicastery should receive adequate training in safeguarding, including in areas such as (1) risk prevention, (2) fostering safe environments, and (3) managing abuse reports.
3. All Dicastery personnel, with priority given to those who may receive reports of reserved delicts, should receive appropriate training on how to treat and respond appropriately to victims/survivors.
4. The standards outlined in the Commission's *Universal Guidelines Framework* should be referenced in all national *Ratios* and shared in preventive and ongoing formation programmes.
5. The national *Ratios* should include specific references to the *Universal Guidelines Framework* and to existing safeguarding standards and policies developed in each territory, especially with regard to reporting mechanisms and victims/survivors accompaniment services.
6. The national *Ratios* should set out clear procedures for screening candidates for Holy Orders, and encourage the existence of audit mechanisms on the effectiveness of these screening procedures.
7. The national *Ratios* should promote training to make it clear that victims/survivors should be not only welcomed, but also sought out with openness, closeness, and compassion.
8. The national *Ratios* should specifically detail which training activities qualify as formation in safeguarding and include their curricula in the *Ordo studiorum*.
9. Seminary formators should receive adequate preparation to accompany all future clerics to recognise the risks of abuse and the appropriate codes of conduct. These codes should be on public display within the seminary grounds.
10. The national *Ratios* should include the need to clearly identify, in each seminary, a trained contact person for suspicions and reports of abuse, guaranteeing the confidentiality of the person(s) reporting.
11. The national *Ratios* should emphasize the Church's mission of prevention, which is primarily directed internally but must also be the basis for a society-wide approach — especially vis-à-vis addressing abuse in the family.
12. The Dicastery should avail itself of the Commission's assistance in developing pedagogical tools to help local Ordinaries better understand the Dicastery's procedures regarding safeguarding issues, including regarding the Dicastery's Special Faculties.



Section 4

The Church's Safeguarding Ministry in Society

Introduction to Section 4

Purpose

Each edition of the Annual Report will consider examples of organisations engaged in the Church's outward-facing ministries, based on the Commission's activities that year. Given the complex and disaggregated institutional configuration of many of these organisations, the Commission's engagement and data collection will necessarily vary. The Commission will develop customised methodologies for each organisation and commits to transparently describing the specific methodology used in the evaluation process.



In this edition of the Annual Report, the Commission presents findings on its engagement with the organisation known as Caritas. Of course, Caritas is only one example of the Church's ministries to society. But because the institutional reality of Caritas rests on an ecclesiastical hierarchy, it is closely aligned to the Commission's more traditional systematic review methodology.

Findings are presented across the various levels of Caritas's realities: diocesan, national, regional, and universal. Due to the ongoing formalisation process of the Commission's data exchanges with Caritas entities, this section presents findings from each of these levels in a "case study" format.

The Church's calling for society: an enterprise of justice

Throughout her history, the Church has sought to advance a vision for the People of God that is not restricted to her internal life but also bears fruit in the broader society. She pursues this accompaniment of humanity through outreach to and advocacy for the vulnerable and needy.⁹⁸ Indeed, the Church, through her prophetic voice, is called to build "an enterprise of justice... [where] peace results from that order structured into human society...".⁹⁹ It would be remiss for the Commission to neglect the myriad of abuses that are inflicted on God's children outside of Church spaces.¹⁰⁰ The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how the Church's safeguarding work in the broader society helps to combat abuse wherever it occurs.¹⁰¹



The Church's service of charity: the dual safeguarding dimension of the Church's work in society

Pope Benedict emphasised in the Motu Proprio *Intima Ecclesiae Natura* that the "exercise of charity" requires "an ordered service to the community".¹⁰² At its best, the Church's organised "exercise of charity" works toward affirming the human dignity that underpins all of its social teachings.¹⁰³ In advancing this

human rights work, the Church also engages new populations to which she must be accountable. These ministries must safeguard against any internal institutional risk factors. The Commission affirms that in the Church's ministries to vulnerable populations, the Church must be a haven for victims/survivors

⁹⁸ FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Come una Madre Amorevole* (2016); "The Church loves all her children like a loving mother, but cares for all and protects with a special affection those who are smallest and defenceless. This is the duty that Christ himself entrusted to the entire Christian community as a whole. Aware of this, the Church is especially vigilant in protecting children and vulnerable adults."

⁹⁹ PAUL VI, Pastoral constitution on the *Church in the modern world Gaudium et Spes*, 78.

¹⁰⁰ FRANCIS, Address to the *Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (5 May 2023); "In the Confiteor, we ask forgiveness not only for the wrong we have done, but also for the good we have failed to do. It can be easy to forget sins of omission, for in a way they seem less real; yet in fact they are very real, and they hurt the community as much as others, if not more so."

¹⁰¹ JOHN XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961); "For true Christians cannot help feeling obliged to improve their own temporal institutions and environment. They do all they can to prevent these institutions from doing violence to human dignity."

¹⁰² BENEDICT XVI, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Intima Ecclesia Natura* (11 November 2012).

¹⁰³ PAUL VI, Message to the *Tehran Conference on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the declaration of human rights* (15 April 1968); "...it would be vain to proclaim rights, if at the same time everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them by all people, everywhere, and for all people".

of abuse in society, while never perpetrating additional abuse against those who seek her refuge. In other words, all of the Church's ministries must function under the trauma-informed principle of "first, do no harm". The purpose of this section is to track the Church's work to ensure that the infrastructure of its ministries to the broader society is itself institutionally safe.¹⁰⁴

Methodology

Caritas's organisational structure

Caritas's work is carried out through a capillary network at the parish, diocesan, national, regional, and international levels. The first (and largest) layer of the Caritas organisation exists at the parish level and is grouped at the diocesan level.¹⁰⁵ The next layer of Caritas functions at the national level and acts as a coordinating mechanism for the various diocesan structures. In this sense, the national Caritas structure, like an episcopal conference, finds its mandate through the delegated power ceded to it by the respective bishops.¹⁰⁶ Caritas entities at the regional level function under a similar premise of delegated authority, with national Caritas organisations joining regional Caritas structures as member institutions. Finally, Caritas Internationalis serves as the universal structure uniting Caritas entities of a lower order.

Data collection from each level of Caritas's organisational entities

The specific data collection conducted through this report's methodology solicits input from each of Caritas's organisational layers. This allows a robust cross-referencing of data, working toward a greater level of reliability and verification. The Commission's formal data exchange agreements with Caritas entities are still being explored. Therefore, the data collected for this edition of the Annual Report is only a first step. The Commission makes use of a standard questionnaire and direct conversations with Caritas officials to help guide contributions from the various Caritas entities.

¹⁰⁴ COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, CRC/C/VAT/CO/2 (24 February 2014); "The Committee urges the Holy See to provide systematic training on the provisions of the Convention to all members of the clergy and members of Catholic orders and institutions working with and/or for children, and to include mandatory modules on children's rights in teachers' training programmes as well as in seminaries".

¹⁰⁵ CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the pastoral ministry of bishops *Apostolorum Successores* (2004); "[The Bishop] seeks to instill in all the faithful — clergy, religious and laity — a genuine attitude of charity and mercy toward all who labour and are heavy laden (Mt 11:28) so that in the entire diocese charity can reign as a way of accepting and witnessing to the command of Jesus Christ".

¹⁰⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Caritas Internationalis for the acquisition of a public, juridic and canonical personality *Durante l'Ultima Cena* (2004); "...the national charitable agencies authorised by the respective Bishops..."

Caritas Internationalis: legal status and mission

Caritas Internationalis is a public canonical juridical person entrusted with the mission of serving, accompanying, and defending the poor and of promoting charity, justice, and integral human development.¹⁰⁷ The specific task entrusted to Caritas Internationalis is to assist the Roman Pontiff and the other bishops in their ministry of charity.

Caritas Internationalis also carries out international advocacy within the limits established by the competent ecclesial authority. Given its universal character and canonical personality, Caritas Internationalis is governed by Canon Law, in particular the General Decree of the Secretariat of State, dated 2 May 2012, by its Statutes and Internal Rules, as well as by the law of the Holy See and of Vatican City State.

Caritas Internationalis Confederation: organisational structure and international profile

Caritas Internationalis is a Confederation of 162 Catholic charitable organisations which, in general, are national Caritas entities (Member Organisations).¹⁰⁸ Each Member Organisation is autonomous and its Statutes are approved by the local episcopal conferences or by its equivalent in law.¹⁰⁹ Caritas Internationalis promotes cooperation among its Member Organisations, without diminishing their natural autonomy, by carrying out tasks of encouragement, coordination, representation, and the development of respective competencies.¹¹⁰

Safeguarding overview

- > In 2020, the governing body of Caritas Internationalis decided to commit all Member Organisations (national Caritas entities) to a credible, robust, and verifiable process for the promotion of integrity, protection, and safeguarding at every level of the Confederation.¹¹¹ This process is now a part of Caritas Internationalis's Management Standards, to which all Member Organisations must adhere.
- > Caritas Internationalis's safeguarding work adheres to rules of confidentiality and the need-to-know approach.¹¹² Negligence¹¹³ of any kind is not to be tolerated.¹¹⁴
- > As a Confederation, Caritas Internationalis states that any abusive behaviour affecting those served by Caritas Internationalis Member Organisations must lead to a prompt and firm response, conforming to the civil and canonical laws that govern the Member Organisation and to the instruments proper to or adopted by Caritas Internationalis.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, Statutes, Art. 1.1. According to Art. 2 of the Statutes: "Caritas Internationalis is a public canonical juridical person (CIC 116-123) erected by Saint John Paul II by means of the Chirograph "Durante l'Ultima Cena" of 16 September 2004. It is a Vatican juridical person registered in the Register of canonical legal persons of the Governorate of Vatican City State. Caritas Internationalis is governed by universal and proper canon law, in particular the General Decree of the Secretariat of State, by its Statutes and by the Internal Rules, as well as by the law of the Holy See and of Vatican City State".

¹⁰⁸ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, Statutes, Art. 4.1.

¹⁰⁹ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, Statutes, Art. 4.2.

¹¹⁰ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, Statutes, Art. 1.5.

¹¹¹ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, 20th Representative Council, 1 December 2020 Resolutions n. 317-320. Following the decisions of the governing body, the President and Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis sent a formal letter to all National Member Organisations to reiterate this commitment (correspondence Prot. SG/2020/170 of 12 December 2020).

¹¹² CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, Caritas Internationalis Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure, August 2023, Art. 1.6 Confidentiality; *Whistleblowing Policy*, 22 March 2023, Par. 5 (Considerations for reporting and guiding principles).

¹¹³ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy* (October 2018), Annex 1. Glossary, 11.

¹¹⁴ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, Pastoral reflection on the introduction of the Management Standard on Safeguarding.

¹¹⁵ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Our Safeguarding and Integrity*; <https://www.caritas.org/who-we-are/ethics/>.

- > In its Strategic Plan 1999–2003, Caritas Internationalis clearly stated that sexual exploitation and abuse represents a betrayal of trust as well as a devastating failure of protection.¹¹⁶ In 2002, Caritas Internationalis initiated a consultation process with regional representatives, expert advisors, and staff to look for ways to better protect its beneficiaries, especially children and youth. Following this consultation process, the governing body issued guidelines and actions to be taken by Member Organisations, and in November 2003 developed and approved the Caritas Internationalis Child Protection Policy Framework.
- > In May 2014, the Caritas Internationalis governing body approved the Code of Ethics for its Member Organisations, as well as the Code of Conduct for staff, which is still in force.¹¹⁷
- > In October 2018, the Caritas Internationalis governing body approved the new Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy.¹¹⁸
- > As an international actor, Caritas Internationalis, alongside the whole international aid and development sector, has fortified its safeguarding standards, policies, and procedures over time, adapting them to the highest ethical standards in this sector, in particular to the Core Standards of the UN Implementing Partner PSEA (Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) Capacity Assessment tool, and to the Global Protection Cluster Principles.¹¹⁹
- > Caritas Internationalis defines safeguarding as the responsibility of Member Organisations to ensure that their staff and programs promote the welfare of all people, especially children and vulnerable adults, and that they do not expose them to harm and abuse.¹²⁰
- > In 2020, the Caritas Internationalis Management Standards were revised to include a Management Standard on Safeguarding,¹²¹ which provides Member Organisations with a clear framework of all key requirements they must meet to be compliant with international and Caritas Internationalis safeguarding standards in this sector.
 - + By decision of the governing body of Caritas Internationalis, beginning on 1 January 2021, the Management Standards, including the Standard on Safeguarding, became a requirement for each Member Organisation. As an essential condition for membership, every Member Organisation is called to be assessed against the Management Standards every four years and, once the primary areas of risk are identified, must develop an improvement plan to reach full compliance with the Standards.
 - o 63% of Member Organisations assessed are compliant with the Caritas Internationalis Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct for Staff, including signature of the document and training with regard to their contents.
 - o 67% of Member Organisations assessed are compliant with the Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy. Most of the Member Organisations have a safeguarding policy in place that covers the key elements of Caritas Internationalis policy; some of them do not have their own policy but apply the policy of their episcopal conference.
 - + In the first half of 2021, numerous webinars and online trainings were provided to update all relevant stakeholders about the new Standard on Safeguarding, its implications, and the process to be adopted. Thirty-one online training sessions were organised by the Caritas Internationalis General Secretariat in close collaboration with the seven Regional Secretariats. One hundred twenty-eight Member Organisations and more than 500 people (including regional coordinators, directors, coordinators, assessors, and safeguarding officers) participated in these sessions.

¹¹⁶ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Caritas Internationalis Strategic Plan 1999–2003*, approved by the Executive Committee, November 1997.

¹¹⁷ Approved by Caritas Internationalis Representative Council, 18 May 2014, <https://www.caritas.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/CodesEthicsConduct.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ <https://www.caritas.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Caritas-Internationalis-Children-and-Vulnerable-Adults-Safeguarding-Policy.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ UN IP PSEA Common Assessment - Final (psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org); Home | Global Protection Cluster.

¹²⁰ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Caritas Internationalis Management Standards, The Standard on Safeguarding Guidance Note* (November 2020), p. 1.

¹²¹ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Caritas Internationalis Management Standards, The Standard on Safeguarding Guidance Note* (November 2020); *Official decision of the Caritas Internationalis 20th Representative Council* (1 December 2020), Resolutions n. 317-320.

- > The Commission notes the following assessment process:
 - + A self-assessment phase, based on the Caritas Internationalis Organisational Review Tool, is conducted by the national Member Organisation through a coordinator of this task.¹²² It must be endorsed by the leadership of the Member Organisation, namely, the Director and the President. Based on the results of the self-assessment, the Member Organisation conducts a risk analysis and prioritisation to identify the highest-risk areas and develop mitigation measures.
 - + An assessment is conducted by an external assessor from another Member Organisation of the Confederation, formed and mandated by Caritas Internationalis. For these purposes, Caritas Internationalis has a pool of assessors with high expertise in different organisational sectors.¹²³ The external assessor issues a final assessment report, which is submitted to the Member Organisation.
 - + Based on the results of the assessment, in cases of non-compliance with the Standards (scoring is based on common guidelines issued by Caritas Internationalis), the Member Organisation is required to develop an improvement plan addressing key areas such as intervention, objectives, expected results, indicators, timeline, responsible persons, and review mechanisms.
 - + The report and the related plan are then validated by a Review Commission nominated by the Caritas Internationalis governing body, which makes final recommendations and releases a certificate of assessment or compliance.
- > Caritas Internationalis has developed and implemented a set of institutional tools for Member Organisations, targeting five pillars for safeguarding: (1) policies, (2) prevention, (3) response, (4) institutional monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL), and (5) structure. These tools work toward compliance with the Management Standards.
- > In May 2023, the 22nd General Assembly approved its Strategic Framework 2024–2030, in which it recommitted to uphold safeguarding as a Confederation priority in view of the need to “increase the effectiveness of the Caritas Confederation”.¹²⁴
- > Once gaps are identified, a Member Organisation can ask for external support by a partner, the Regional Secretariat, and/or the General Secretariat. There are several main ways through which Caritas Internationalis can support its Member Organisations:
 - + Global and regional training sessions organised by the General Secretariat and/or Regional Secretariat, or by a partner organisation, can be attended by staff of Member Organisations, who then transfer knowledge at the national level.
 - + A safeguarding policies and procedures package can be made available by Caritas Internationalis to its Member Organisations as a reference framework to be adopted and adapted to different contexts and national legislation.
 - + Targeted and personalised accompaniment and technical support requested by national and diocesan Caritas organisations based on the principle of subsidiarity are provided by the General Secretariat, Regional Secretariats, and/or partners to a Member Organisation in order to develop and implement safeguarding mechanisms. Especially for Member Organisations in fragile contexts, Caritas Internationalis is progressively adopting a targeted

¹²² CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Caritas Internationalis Management Standards, Organisational Review Tool* (including the following worksheets: Introduction, Input form, Safeguarding Standard, Intermediate results, Final results, Risk and priorities, Risk mitigation, Improvement plan).

¹²³ Caritas Internationalis assessors of the Management Standards are resource persons of the Confederation with high expertise in organisational development and/or in one or more of the fields related to the Standards (e.g., legal affairs, safeguarding, human resources, administration and finance, programming, and risk management). They are proposed by their own Member Organisation (or Regional Secretariat) to become an assessor, and approved by Caritas Internationalis according to the consistency of their CV with the official Terms of Reference for this task. The assessors are mandated by Caritas Internationalis to assess a Member Organisation and act on behalf of Caritas Internationalis in this task. For that reason, they sign the ToR and also the Caritas Internationalis Code of Conduct and Safeguarding Policy, as well as a Safeguarding requirement form. Currently, Caritas Internationalis has 44 assessors (11 from Europe, 8 from Africa, 6 from the Middle East and North Africa, 6 from Asia, 10 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 3 from Oceania, and 9 from North America) who can be deployed in the seven Regions of the Confederation.

¹²⁴ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Strategic Framework of Caritas Confederation 2024–2030: One Human Family, One Common Home*, approved by the General Assembly May 2023; https://www.caritas.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/EN22GA-04_Strategic-Framework-.pdf. Strategic orientation is detailed at page 18, strategic objectives and outcomes on safeguarding at page 19.



approach, particularly when national Member Organisations need support to initiate the assessment process or to start developing a comprehensive safeguarding system. One of the Caritas Internationalis instruments to accompany national Member Organisations in initiating the assessment process is the Caritas Internationalis Organisational Development Solidarity Fund, which provides basic funds to organise the necessary steps of a participatory Caritas Internationalis Management Standards assessment, often conducted through the support of an external facilitator. Through the Fund, a national organisation can be supported not only in going through the assessment process but also in addressing the main gaps identified during the assessment and in implementing a capacity-strengthening plan with the aim of achieving compliance with all aspects of the Safeguarding Standard and, more generally, with the entirety of the Caritas Internationalis Management Standards. The Organisational Development Solidarity Fund is being implemented as a pilot programme of the General Secretariat, in coordination with the Regional Secretariats, to support long-term sustainability of the Member Organisations in fragile situations and help them in building solid systems to accomplish their mission of serving the most vulnerable and protecting and promoting the human dignity of every person.¹²⁵

- > The Commission notes that a group of Member Organisations has come together to work on the implementation of safeguarding principles, called The Safe and Dignified Programming Framework, within the programs and projects they are executing.¹²⁶ The Framework was handed over to Caritas Internationalis in September 2023 to be adopted as a key institutional tool for all projects implemented globally. The effort to make it a global institutional tool is still ongoing.

Challenges

- > The Commission notes that the humanitarian and development activities of Caritas Internationalis Member Organisations can create an unequal distribution of power between those working on behalf of Caritas and the people that they seek to help. This is a risk factor for abuse, violence, and exploitation. In 2019, Caritas Internationalis was confronted with reports of high-profile cases of child abuse in some Member Organisations.¹²⁷ Following these cases, Caritas Internationalis has noted failures in its systems and recognised the need to strengthen and fully update its global efforts in safeguarding.
- > As of January 2024, 106 Member Organisations out of 162 have been assessed. The remaining Member Organisations are currently under assessment or are beginning assessment. Only around 27% of the Member Organisations were assessed as fully compliant with the Management Standard, while all Member Organisations who are not yet in compliance have developed a capacity-strengthening plan and are now responsible for its implementation.
 - + 37% of Member Organisations are compliant with the article relating to complaints handling.
 - + 46% of Member Organisations are compliant with the article relating to investigations procedure.
 - + 44% of Member Organisations are compliant with the articles related to referral systems for victim/survivor accompaniment.
- > The Commission is concerned that the assessment process is ultimately the full responsibility of the Member Organisations, despite being coordinated globally by the Caritas Internationalis General Secretariat. This approach does not provide for an independent audit mechanism.
- > The Commission notes that in 2024, a broad review process of the Caritas Internationalis Management Standards will commence and will also include the Standard on Safeguarding. This review represents a complex undertaking, requiring independent and external experts.

¹²⁵ The Organisational Development Solidarity Fund was implemented in 2022 on a pilot basis. As of now, 12 Member Organisations from five Regions of the Confederation are being supported for the initial assessment (8) and implementing their capacity-strengthening plans (4), for a total budget of around €100,000. Budget foreseen for the next four years is between €100,000 and €150,000 per year. Funds come from the budget of the General Secretariat, contributions of Member Organisations, and external grants from private donors and foundations. For more detailed information about projects and related procedures, see CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Caritas Internationalis Organisational Development Solidarity Fund, Reference Guide* (September 2021).

¹²⁶ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Safe and Dignified Programming Framework*.

¹²⁷ CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS, *Statement Regarding Former Caritas Central African Republic Director Luk Delft*, 21 November 2019; <https://www.caritas.org/2019/11/apology/>.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that Caritas Internationalis undertake the following:

1. Enter into a formal agreement with the Commission to establish a sustained and structured collaboration for information and resource sharing.
2. Integrate the *Universal Guidelines Framework*, once formally adopted by the Commission, into the Caritas Internationalis safeguarding policies and tools.
3. Collaborate with the Commission to study what indicators and criteria can be adopted to verify the implementation of the Universal Guidelines Framework.
4. Share with the Commission the information received from Member Organisations regarding policy developments and emerging safeguarding challenges/trends, locally and regionally.
5. Ensure that locally trained safeguarding experts are present in all Member Organisations and regional offices by expanding its Solidarity Fund, perhaps in collaboration with the Commission's Memorare Fund, to facilitate safeguarding training for under-resourced Member Organisations.
6. Make safeguarding training compulsory for all staff and personnel — at all levels of the Member Organisations — as stipulated in an updated version of the Management Standard on Safeguarding.
7. Continue to develop distance learning tools and certify the delivery of training content to all staff.
8. Develop a risk management tool for the Member Organisations to use during their risk assessment exercises.
9. Promote increased accessibility to the complaints system, in close consultation with the Commission, through targeted awareness-raising programs.
10. Dialogue directly with the Commission regarding the relevant information presented in the Annual Report.
11. Member Organisations that have not yet adopted the new policies promoted by Caritas Internationalis and are not in compliance with the Management Standard on Safeguarding should establish a binding timeline for full adherence, including guarantees of the financial means to assure compliance — and share this information with the Commission.
12. Ensure that Member Organisations continue to promote their collaboration with civil society and safeguarding stakeholders at national, regional, and global levels, to maximise the potential of their safeguarding efforts. Subsequently, Member Organisations should include the Commission in relevant events.
13. Create age-appropriate versions of all policies accompanied by education and awareness-raising programs to promote them.
14. Include provisions for systematic engagement and inclusion of victims'/survivors' perspectives in policy formulation, as part of their Management Standards. This is especially timely given the scheduled review of the Management Standards during the 2024 calendar year and the new Strategic Framework that stresses a victim/survivor-centred approach.
15. Include a provision for a systematic external audit of its compliance assessments of Member Organisations.



Safeguarding overview



Profile

The Caritas Confederation divided itself into regional groupings and Caritas Asia & Oceania was formally established in 1975 as one of those regions. Due to the size and breadth of the region, Caritas Oceania was made a stand-alone region at the 15th Caritas Internationalis General Assembly in 1995.

Once a Caritas organisation in the region becomes a member of Caritas Internationalis, it is automatically granted membership in Caritas Oceania. Caritas Oceania brings together highly diverse members from the larger and smaller islands of the Pacific, including Caritas Australia, Caritas Papua New Guinea, Caritas Samoa, Caritas Aotearoa-New Zealand, CEPAC (Caritas Pacific Islands), Caritas Tonga, and Caritas Fiji. Together, these organisations work on climate change, emergency response, peace building, and development — both in their own countries and in other parts of the world.

- > The Commission notes that Caritas Oceania has been aiding Member Organisations in developing safeguarding policies and procedures and aligning to Caritas Internationalis's Fifth Edition of the Management Standards on Safeguarding, mindful of the cultural specificities.
- > A consultant was hired by Caritas Oceania to provide direct support in developing policy implementation plans and training, and finished this work in early 2023.¹²⁸
- > The Caritas Oceania Regional Secretariat, with the support of Member Organisations, continues to build networks and identify key stakeholders to support their safeguarding initiatives.
- > Caritas Internationalis presented several regional webinars on safeguarding, investigations, and good practice. These webinars were attended by key staff of Member Organisations and the Caritas Oceania Secretariat.
- > A peer-to-peer accompaniment network within the region has been developed. The Region meets virtually at least quarterly and is convened by the Regional Secretariat. This allows for solidarity efforts that include budgeting for capacity building in bilateral and regionally funded programs guided by Caritas Oceania. These programs include:
 - + Mapping of safeguarding growth areas across the region and strategies to address these areas.
 - + A three-year program, developed by Caritas Australia and funded by the Australian Government, includes funding for Caritas Papua New Guinea, Caritas Tonga, Caritas Fiji, and Caritas Samoa in building their safeguarding capabilities.
 - + Bilateral safeguarding-capacity strengthening between Caritas Australia and Caritas Fiji, and between Caritas Australia and Caritas Samoa, including the review and strengthening of safeguarding policies and safe recruitment practices.
- > The Commission notes that a regional Safeguarding Focal Point has been appointed to further support all Caritas Oceania members.
- > The Commission notes certain key strategic safeguarding initiatives planned for Caritas Oceania.

¹²⁸ The consultant had extensive experience working with faith-based organisations in the Pacific region, and over 15 years of experience working toward gender equality and reducing and preventing violence against women and girls. Initiatives included designing and implementing evidence-based strategies to address violence against women, organisational safeguarding reviews, and delivery of training and developing referral pathways for survivors.

- + Safeguarding “Talanoa” (meeting circles) with Catholic-Pacific leaders to develop a common understanding of safeguarding issues in the region and a coordinated approach to strengthening safeguarding practices.
- + The development of easy-to-read communication materials explaining new Church and Caritas Internationalis documents on safeguarding, how they align, and the expectations or obligations that bishops, dioceses, religious, Church agencies, and others have as a result.
- + Capacity-building initiatives such as the further development of training and practical resources (e.g., templates, checklists) in the areas of (1) safeguarding policy and practice, (2) safe recruitment, and (3) feedback handling and complaints mechanisms.
- + Engaging stakeholders at multiple levels within a country to partner with Catholic agencies, local government representatives, NGOs/NFPs, and ecumenical and interreligious organisations.
- + Strengthening abuse response processes — especially to ensure that reports are managed appropriately by Church authorities and adequate support and referral pathways are in place for survivors.

Challenges

- > The Commission notes that balancing the differing expectations of multiple donors, local legislation, and Church requirements is a challenge for many Caritas Oceania Member Organisations and dioceses.
- > Competing interests, time constraints, and varied approaches present challenges to efforts to educate Church leaders on safeguarding.
- > Human resources are often limited in small Member Organisations where a few people undertake multiple roles and are required to have expertise across a broad range of functions and processes. Adding safeguarding requirements to their load has led to challenges in focus, time, and the ability to implement.
- > Similarly, funding is limited and is often focused on more direct aid delivery. However, there is acknowledgement in the sector that safeguarding principles including “do no harm” should be integrated into any project design and implementation.
- > An “us” versus “them” mentality exists, where safeguarding can be seen as a problem only in “Western countries” or “other countries”. As a result, there is cultural resistance to adopting safeguarding practices.
- > There is a lack of commitment to transparency from some Caritas leaders, which results in a failure to put the victim/survivor at the centre of the response.

Recommendations

1.

The Commission recognises the paramount imperative in the region to listen, learn, and discuss issues within “Talanoa” (meeting circles), to allow Pacific leaders the space and control to work through these issues, and to be mindful of cultural practices and be culturally responsive.

2.

The Commission recommends that Caritas Oceania Member Organisations leverage expertise and resourcing at the regional level to support safeguarding initiatives. The Commission would welcome grant applications through its Memorare Initiative.



Profile

Caritas Chile is a private, non-profit charitable corporation founded in 1956 with the aim of developing and promoting solidarity with individuals and communities consistent with the principles of integral human development, integral ecology, and a preferential option for the poor and marginalised. It is part of the Chilean Episcopal Conference (CECh) and serves as the Conference's organisation for social ministry.

Caritas Chile is a collaborative network of diocesan Caritas organisations: local social pastoral ministries in the 26 dioceses of the country, coordinating and promoting the Church in Chile's activities of charity and assistance. As a corporation, Members of Caritas Chile are the diocesan bishops in office in each of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions of the country. Its governance is led by a board of seven people, currently made up of seven bishops.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Monsignor Moisés Carlos Atisha Contreras, Bishop of San Marcos de Arica, President of Caritas Chile; Monsignor Gonzalo Bravo Álvarez, Bishop of San Felipe; Monsignor Jorge Concha Cayuqueo, Bishop of Temuco; Monsignor Galo Fernández Villaseca, Bishop of Talca; Monsignor Tomislav Koljatic Maroevic, Bishop of Linares; Monsignor Julio Larrondo Yáñez, elected Bishop of Illapel; and Monsignor Pedro Ossandón Buljevic, Military Bishop.

¹³⁰ <https://www.iglesia.cl/prevenirabusos/departamento.php>.

Safeguarding overview

- > The Commission notes that in 2018, after becoming aware of the seriousness of the national abuse crisis, the Department for the Prevention of Abuse was created by the Chilean Episcopal Conference (CECh).¹³⁰ Since 2021, the Commission notes Caritas Chile's collaboration with the Department for the Prevention of Abuse of the Episcopal Conference, assuming the mandates and orientations of the Church in Chile.
- > Caritas Chile reports that all secretariat staff have been trained by the Department for the Prevention of Abuse of the CECh. This training is said to be in both prevention and the promotion of healthy and safe environments, and is part of a safeguarding training-the-trainers program.
- > In the context of Caritas Chile's COVID-19 response, training sessions for the diocesan Caritas organisations were held in October and November 2020 regarding safeguarding. This training was carried out in conjunction with the Department of Abuse Prevention of the Episcopal Conference.
- > Following the issuance of the 5th Edition of Caritas Internationalis's Management Standard on Safeguarding, Caritas Chile staff participated in trainings provided by Caritas Internationalis on new safeguarding requirements.
- > In 2021, Caritas Chile partnered with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to participate in its EMPOWER (Empowering Partner Organisations Working on Emergency Responses) program, which promotes the leadership of national institutions in humanitarian response, providing technical assistance for capacity building and organisational development. As part of this partnership, Caritas Chile has made a commitment to make the CRS standards in safeguarding their own and fully integrated by June 2024, which involves:

- + Carrying out a process of self-assessment and external evaluation of its safeguarding systems, according to the parameters established by CRS.
- + Designing and implementing an institutional improvement plan in safeguarding, which takes care of the shortcomings discovered. This effort is currently ongoing.
- + Participation by all Caritas Chile staff in the training itinerary provided by CRS. In June 2023, a CRS advisor travelled to Chile to give this week-long training. The director of the Department of Abuse Prevention of the Episcopal Conference was also involved.
- + Receiving of technical advice in the drafting and design of instruments for Caritas Chile's customisation, including:
 - o Templates and examples of a safeguarding policy
 - o Investigation procedures
 - o Feedback, complaint, and response mechanisms

- > In 2014, Caritas Chile formally committed to and assumed the Caritas Internationalis Code of Ethics and Conduct as its own. This commitment deepened in 2023 when all staff received the document and signed a letter of adherence to it. These letters have been incorporated into all employment contracts.
- > Other policy developments include the drafting of the Safeguarding Policy; Anti-Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace Policy and Feedback; and Complaint and Response Mechanisms of Caritas Chile.
- > Caritas Chile is reportedly working toward universal incorporation of safeguarding clauses in working agreements with all partners and suppliers. The objective is to make adherence to the Code of Ethics and Conduct a mandatory condition for all partners and suppliers, even when already agreed to by the individual local diocesan Caritas organisations.
- > A revision of the Internal Personnel Manual is under way in conjunction with the episcopal Conference. New indications will be incorporated regarding (1) safe hiring, (2) dignified, fair, and equitable treatment, and (3) the new Chilean labour regulations.
- > The Commission notes a dedicated Safeguarding Officer working in the secretariat.
- > The Commission notes Caritas Chile's solidarity with the Latin American and Caribbean Region. Through its Safeguarding Officer, Caritas Chile advises fellow Member Organisations in the region and participates in the Safeguarding Committee and Working Group of Caritas Internationalis.

Challenges

- > The Commission notes that in recent years, the Chilean Church has faced a serious crisis with regard to numerous cases of sexual abuse, abuse of conscience, and abuse of power committed within the Church, especially by consecrated persons. This crisis has reverberated across Caritas Chile, the Church in Chile, and Chilean society.
- > The Commission notes the ongoing challenges of accompanying efforts of the diocesan Caritas safeguarding teams. These teams must develop safeguarding systems that respond to the minimum standards set out by Caritas Internationalis, Canon Law, and the applicable safeguarding guidelines.
- > The Commission notes ongoing confusion on the safeguarding actions required by a private legal entity, such as diocesan Caritas organisations, given national and canonical legislation.
- > The Commission notes that Catholic Relief Services has committed to training one person from Caritas Chile and one person from the Episcopal Conference as investigators for safeguarding cases, thus improving the institutional responsiveness to these situations. However, this training has no guarantee of sustainability beyond the original commitment from Catholic Relief Services.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that Caritas Chile undertake the following:

1. Develop an updated strategic plan in 2024, consistent with the Caritas Internationalis Strategic Framework 2024–2030 and the Caritas Latin America and Caribbean Strategic Framework 2024–2031. Both documents refer to safeguarding. The Commission emphasises the need for Caritas Chile to similarly incorporate safeguarding as a priority in its strategic plan.
2. Develop trainings at the diocesan Caritas level. Such trainings should specifically address the institutional responsibility that diocesan Caritas organisations must assume.
3. Develop a plan for sustainably funding its safeguarding formation. The Commission encourages Caritas Chile to consider this question of sustainability in the context of a grant application to the Commission's Memorare Fund. This undertaking should be in conversation with the Episcopal Conference.
4. Finalise and receive formal approval from the Board of Directors for the safeguarding instruments that have been designed.



Profile

Caritas Nairobi is the aid and development agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, which covers two counties — the City of Nairobi (Nairobi County) and Kiambu county — in an area of 3,721 sq. km., divided into 15 deaneries. There are 119 parishes with over 4,000 small Christian communities. The archdiocese serves an estimated population of well over seven million people, four million of whom are Catholics. Caritas Nairobi is an ordered service to the community and is inspired by Gospel values and Catholic social teachings to respond to disasters, promote integral human development, and advocate on the causes of poverty and conflict.

¹³¹ <https://www.caritasnairobi.org/reports/>.

Safeguarding overview

- > The Commission notes that Caritas Nairobi has aligned its safeguarding policies with the Caritas Internationalis standards, embracing directives and recommendations to work toward a comprehensive approach. This effort demonstrates an important commitment to nurturing a secure and protective environment for minors and vulnerable adults, transcending the diverse spectrum of its programs and initiatives.
- > Caritas Nairobi has embarked on a sustained strategic expansion of its training and awareness initiatives, as documented in its Annual Reports.¹³¹ These undertakings are designed to equip staff working within Caritas Nairobi and the Archdiocese of Nairobi's Charitable Child Institutions with fundamental knowledge and skills in safeguarding.
- > New staff members undergo comprehensive induction training sessions aimed at providing them with an understanding of Caritas Nairobi's safeguarding policies. Additionally, Caritas Nairobi organises specialised workshops focusing on protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH) and safeguarding to further expose staff and board members to these policies.
- > The Commission notes the relevance of Caritas Nairobi's partnerships with local authorities, articulating a proactive approach to navigating legal avenues and establishing accountability, particularly concerning cases of abuse endured by minors. This commitment is aimed to provide a comprehensive array of assistance, including psychological therapy, medical interventions, and adept legal counsel. Caritas Nairobi's collaboration with county legal advisors promises to significantly contribute to victims'/survivors' recovery journey and their ultimate reintegration into society.
- > Certain specific provisions that the Commission notes as key parts of Caritas Nairobi's safeguarding structures include:
 - + Caritas Nairobi Safeguarding Policy
 - + Caritas Nairobi Personnel Code of Conduct, which must be signed by all staff as part of the on-boarding process and is annexed to the employment contract
 - + Four safeguarding staff members who have received training from Tangaza University; three of these staff members are working at Caritas Nairobi headquarters and one is on-site at a specific project
 - + Safeguarding training courses offered each quarter for staff, for a total of four opportunities each year, with a requirement for ongoing training
 - + Monthly meetings of staff and safeguarding officers
 - + Approximately KES 5 million internally budgeted for safeguarding activities
 - + Investigations processes in place for allegations against staff, with accompaniment services provided to victims/survivors
 - + CCTV cameras at the Caritas Nairobi office that are monitored 24/7 and that house a server to safely store information and photos for evidence
 - + An open complaint box for anonymous reporting that is checked regularly

- + A biannual social audit conducted by the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Office, with data from these audits used during the annual organisational appraisals
 - + Caritas Nairobi Zero-Tolerance Policy for corruption and coercion, which explicitly prohibits the offering of bribes or favours to staff, contractors, or those receiving assistance
 - + Annual performance appraisals conducted with staff, utilising the Personnel Code of Conduct; interviews are conducted with those receiving assistance during the review process for staffers working in the field
 - + A vetting process for new hires that includes reference checks with former employers and background checks
- > The Commission notes a collaboration between Caritas Nairobi, the Tree of Life (Italy), the Archdiocese of Nairobi, and Rescue Dada Center (a partnership between the civil government and the Archdiocese of Nairobi), culminating in the establishment of a new Rescue Dada Center dedicated to offering protection and support to girls who have endured abuse in families and on the streets. The Commission recognises the importance of these local efforts. Caritas Nairobi reports that the Rescue Dada Center has reached more than 4,000 vulnerable children since its establishment in 1992.

Challenges

- > The Commission notes a culture of taboo, especially in rural communities in Kiambu County, where abuse remains concealed due to societal shame. There is a persistent need for culturally customised safeguarding policies.
- > Caritas Nairobi's safeguarding efforts are complicated by high poverty rates, a lack of access to quality education and healthcare, political instability, environmental issues such as drought and food insecurity, human rights challenges, gender inequality, and the protection of vulnerable populations (particularly children and women).
- > The Commission notes sharp power imbalances in Kenyan society, and especially in the Church, due to clericalism and benefactor-beneficiary relationships, in Caritas Nairobi's work.
- > The Commission notes a lack of comprehensive safeguarding training for all Caritas Nairobi staff.
- > The Commission notes high levels of drug and substance abuse in the Kiambu jurisdiction. This region has the highest number of family-level substance-related abuse cases, according to the National Agency for the Campaign against Drug Abuse.
- > The Commission notes an insufficient budget to implement safeguarding activities.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that Caritas Nairobi undertake the following:

1. Publish on its website all safeguarding protocols, policies, guidelines, codes of conduct, and agreements with civil authorities.
2. Expand its Rescue Dada Center project, which is a powerful safeguarding initiative. By building partnerships around this project, Caritas Nairobi will better understand current trends and challenges in child protection, learn from international good practices, and forge connections with like-minded organisations and experts in the field.
3. Pursue cooperation among diverse stakeholders, including the Church, civil authorities, NGOs, and community leaders, in order to amplify the impact of safeguarding initiatives by drawing on a wealth of expertise, resources, and perspectives.
4. Consider applying for a grant from the Commission's Memorare Fund for safeguarding formation funding, consistent with the Commission's Memorare Initiative. This application should be in conversation with Caritas Kenya and the Episcopal Conference.

Appendix

Report on the Activities of the Commission

Leadership

The Commission's executive authority is vested in the ordinary powers of its Leadership, including the President, the Secretary, and the Adjunct Secretary, who carry out the daily executive functions of the Commission. Official communications, administrative decisions, and budgetary provisions are all overseen by the Leadership. The day-to-day direction of the Commission's personnel is carried out by the Secretary and the Adjunct Secretary, who report directly to the President.

Plenary Assemblies

The internal life of the Commission revolves around its biannual Plenary Assemblies. The Plenary Assemblies are the Commission's primary deliberative body, with all Commission members gathered in person. During these meetings, members share their broad feedback and evaluate the Commission's workflow according to the Strategic Plan. The Plenary Assembly also gives members the opportunity to review the Strategic Plan itself, consistent with evolving exigencies and priorities.

Regional Groups

The Regional Groups represent the Plenary Assembly's most important subsidiary body. All Commission members are grouped into one of the four Regional Groups — Africa, the Americas, Asia/Oceania, and Europe — based on their country of origin. These groups meet monthly to discuss the Commission's work as it relates to the respective regions. During these meetings, members share their most granular and specific analysis, leveraging their safeguarding expertise in evaluation of the local Churches. Each of these groups is supported by a Regional Expert, who reports the Regional Group's feedback to the Commission's Leadership and Plenary Assembly. The Regional Expert also coordinates and facilitates the Regional Group's engagement with the local Churches, under the direction of the Commission's Leadership, especially as regards communications, events, and in-person travel to the local Churches.

Executive Council

The President delegates certain executive powers to the Executive Council for added transparency and accountability. The Executive Council's members are appointed by the President and consist of a select group of Commission members and partners. The Executive Council is closely supported by senior Holy See officials working for the Commission. These officials ensure the proper implementation of the decisions taken by the Executive Council, according to the protocols of the Holy See. The Executive Council's primary responsibilities include: (1) oversight of the Commission's budget, (2) approval of the disbursement of funds, (3) personnel decisions, and (4) ongoing evaluation of the Commission's workflow according to the Strategic Plan. The Executive Council meets monthly and is chaired by the President.

Grants Committee



The Executive Council delegates the process of reviewing grant proposals to the Grants Committee. To enable a double-verification process, the Grants Committee reviews incoming grant proposals and makes a recommendation to the Executive Council for the disbursement of funds. The Grants Committee's members are appointed by the President and consist of a select group of Commission members and an administrator, who is a senior Holy See Official.

Agenda Committee

The President delegates the agenda-setting power to the Agenda Committee, in order to promote collegiality and accountability in the Plenary Assembly. The Agenda Committee's members are appointed by the President and consist of a select group of Commission members, supported by one of the Commission's senior Holy See Officials. The Agenda Committee's primary responsibilities include: (1) setting due dates for Plenary Assembly documentation, (2) proposing, reviewing, and approving the Plenary Assembly Agenda, and (3) ensuring adherence to the agenda's run-of-schedule during the Plenary Assemblies.

Guidelines Committee

The Plenary Assembly delegates power to the Guidelines Committee to foster specialisation and expertise in the development of the *Universal Guidelines Framework*. The Guideline Committee's members are appointed by the President and consist of a select group of Commission members, supported by one of the Commission's senior Holy See Officials.

Study Groups Committee

The Plenary Assembly delegates power to the Study Groups Committee to formulate proposals for the further study of specific topics that are particularly pertinent to the Commission's work. The Study Groups Committee's members are appointed by the President and consist of a select group of Commission members, supported by one of the Commission's senior Holy See Officials.

Commission personnel

The Commission's personnel see to the smooth advancement of the workflow, according to the Strategic Plan, as directed by the Secretary and the Adjunct Secretary. The personnel are organised by either a geographic or thematic focus. The personnel who are focused geographically are organised into one of the four Regional Groups, while the personnel who are focused on specific thematic areas are organised into one of the following teams: Annual Report Team, Universal Guidelines Framework Team, Memorare Team, and Communications Team.

- **Annual Report Team**
The Annual Report Team oversees the data collection, processing, synthesis, drafting, and editing for the Commission's Annual Report. This function includes: (1) running the Commission's *ad limina Apostolorum* visit program, whereby the Commission regularly hosts local ordinaries at the offices in Rome, (2) collating data from the various religious congregations, (3) collating data from the Regional Groups, (4) collating data from the various dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and (5) collating data from the various social and charitable outreach ministries of the Church. The Annual Report Team meets regularly to discuss the ongoing work of data collection, drafting, and editing. The Annual Report Team is chaired by a member of the Commission, appointed by the President, and supported by thematic personnel.
- **Universal Guidelines Framework Team**
The Universal Guidelines Framework Team oversees the drafting, editing, and implementation of the *Universal Guidelines Framework* document. This function includes: (1) designing and implementing the multi-phased synodal consultation process, involving stakeholders at the levels of the local and universal Church, and (2) planning for the sensitisation and accompaniment campaign of the Framework document. The Universal Guidelines Framework Team meets regularly to discuss its ongoing work. The Universal Guidelines Framework Team is chaired by the Adjunct Secretary and consists of a select group of Commission members, supported by both thematic and geographic personnel.

- **Memorare Team**
The Memorare Team oversees the guidance and strategic development of the Commission's Memorare Initiatives around the world. This function includes: (1) producing guidance and explanatory material for the Memorare Initiative, (2) negotiating the Memoranda of Understanding with the various local Churches, (3) accompanying the local Churches in compiling the necessary documentation for submission to the Grants Committee, (4) verifying the successful delivery of funds to the local Churches, (5) facilitating and enforcing the reporting requirements prescribed for the local Memorare Initiatives, (6) facilitating ongoing advice and guidance for the local Memorare Initiatives, and (7) monitoring and evaluating the local Memorare Initiatives accountable to the Plenary Assembly. The Memorare Team meets regularly to discuss its ongoing work. The Memorare Team is chaired by a Commission member appointed by the President and is supported by both thematic and geographic personnel.
- **Communications Team**
The Communication Team oversees the Commission's strategic communications. This function includes: (1) management of the Commission's website, (2) management of the Commission's social media accounts, (3) engagements with the Holy See Press Corps and Dicastery for Communications, and (4) guidance on flagship publications. The Communications Team meets regularly to discuss its ongoing work. The Communications Team is led by one of the Commission's senior Holy See Officials and is supported by thematic personnel.

Financial Report

The Commission has been financed since its establishment with funds from the Holy See, first as a body attached to the Roman Curia and then as a stable part of the Church hierarchy attached to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. The independence necessary for the Commission's mission, established in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, is reflected in the economic independence accorded by the Holy See, which gave the Commission a separate annual budget.

The main part of the Commission's expenses is financed directly by the Apostolic See within the Holy See's consolidated budget. During each fiscal year (which runs from 1 January to 31 December), the Commission must prepare the budget for the following year, identifying strategic projects and the necessary financial support. In addition to providing periodic reports of expenditures, the Commission reports after 31 December of each year on the annual expenses incurred. These reports are addressed to the oversight, approval, and supervisory bodies established by the Holy See: the Secretariat for the Economy, the Council for the Economy, and the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See.

In 2023, the final budget of the Commission was €491,512, of which €210,000 was spent for personnel and the remainder for operational expenses. These expenses cover all activities such as travel, events, study activities, technological materials, and services. The last few years have been continually marked by serious budgetary difficulties for the Holy See, which — while not resulting in reductions to the support given to the Commission — have prevented a substantial increase in the amount of the Commission's budget borne by the Apostolic See. Given the substantial expansion of the mandate from the Holy Father to the Commission with regard to developing guidelines, capacity building, and the Annual Report, alternative pathways for support have been sought.

The Commission is especially grateful to the GHR Foundation, based in Minnesota (US), which have generously agreed to support the Commission for a three-year period. GHR's goal is to support the Holy Father's reform efforts in the Curia. GHR have a program that provides the Curia with specialised expertise in safeguarding and have provided the Commission with ten experts who work in the local regions and promote the Commission's agenda. These staff, not dependent on the Commission or the Holy See, are administered directly by the Foundation.

The Commission also realises that it is unfair to demand uniformly high standards in ecclesial entities that are financially and structurally constrained. In order to fulfill the mandate from the Holy Father to create centres for reporting and assisting victims/survivors, the Memorare Initiative was created. Since 2022, the



Commission has been collecting earmarked funds donated by episcopal conferences and religious orders to assist the less-resourced Churches of the Global South. In 2023, the Commission received:

- > the first annual donation of €500,000 from the Italian Bishops' Conference (with a commitment of €1,500,000 total) to be allocated to the Memorare Initiative,
- > €35,000 from the religious world, to be allocated to the Memorare Initiative,
- > the first annual donation of US\$100,000 from the Papal Foundation (with a three-year commitment of US\$300,000 total) for training programs in safeguarding,
- > a commitment from the Spanish Bishops' Conference to support targeted projects, chosen directly by the Conference upon the Commission's recommendation, for US\$300,000 annually (for a three-year total of US\$900,000)

The Commission is grateful for this solidarity directed toward its mission, particularly in service of the Churches of the Global South. This support concretely demonstrates the fellowship among the particular Churches in the common mission of prevention and protection.

Report on the Memorare Initiative

The Commission has a specific mandate to assist, accompany, and encourage effective child and vulnerable adult protection in the local Churches within the broader framework of universal law. On 29 April 2022, in his Address to the Commission, the Holy Father instructed the Commission to help with the adequate implementation of his Motu Proprio *Vos estis lux mundi* when he said: "I urge you to assist the Conferences of Bishops — this is very important: to assist and oversee in dialogue with the Conferences of Bishops — in establishing suitable centres where individuals who have experienced abuse, and their family members, can find acceptance and an attentive hearing, and be accompanied in a process of healing and justice". The Holy Father further instructed, "The efforts made on the level of the universal Church and of the Particular Churches will implement the plan of protection, healing and justice, in accord with their respective competences". That is, a sound ecclesiological approach must respect the principle of subsidiarity, positioning the Commission at the service of the local Churches' safeguarding ministry.

The Memorare Initiative is a capacity-building program, designed by the Commission, and responding to this mandate given by the Holy Father. The name for the Memorare Initiative comes from the traditional prayer to the Blessed Mother, whom we petition as a community of believers to ask that no one who is suffering is left unaided:

MEMORARE

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help,
or sought thy intercession
was left unaided.
Inspired by this confidence,
I fly unto thee,
O Virgin of virgins, my mother.
To thee do I come, before thee I stand,
sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions,
but in thy mercy,
hear and answer me.
Amen.

Conceptually, the Memorare Initiative consists of a hub of services offered by the local Church and consisting of three main pillars. The first pillar works toward ensuring that the local Church's system for managing complaints is compliant with the exigencies of *Vos estis lux mundi*, Article 2, to be "easily accessible to the public". This pillar also works to ensure robust accompaniment services for all those affected by the scourge of abuse and allegations of abuse. The second pillar aims to build capacity around the local Church's prevention strategies, primarily through the implementation of its safeguarding guidelines and the formation opportunities that it offers.

The third pillar is to build a network of safeguarding professionals within the Church, locally and regionally, to facilitate, measure, and report on the implementation of professional safeguarding standards and assistance services. The creation of this network is essential to ensuring a long-term culture of care and protection at a local level.

The Memorare Initiative is owned and operated by the local Church through, where possible, a joint partnership between the local episcopal conference and the conference of religious superiors, thus encouraging the One Church Approach that the Commission promotes for an effective safeguarding strategy. To address resource inequalities in safeguarding, the Commission financially supports these partnerships for local Churches that have a demonstrated need. The Commission serves as a conduit of funds between episcopal conferences in the Global North who wish to share solidarity with the safeguarding ministry of episcopal conferences in the Global South. As such, the Commission performs the job of reviewing partnership agreements, grant applications, and candidates for leadership of the local Memorare Initiatives.

The Commission currently has 15 Memoranda of Understanding to support local Memorare Initiatives around the world, with another dozen under negotiation. So far, Memoranda of Understanding have been signed in:

- > Paraguay
- > Panama
- > Costa Rica
- > Venezuela
- > Archdiocese of Mexico City, Mexico
- > Rwanda
- > Central Africa Republic
- > Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA)
- > Zimbabwe
- > Malawi
- > Ecclesiastical Province of Mombasa, Kenya
- > Ecclesiastical Province of Chubut, Argentina
- > Uruguay
- > Caritas Latin America and Caribbean
- > Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA)

Built into the Memorare Initiatives is a regular reporting exercise to the Commission that provides important data from the local Churches about their outreach to victims/survivors and an account of their prevention activities. This data is systematically included in the Commission's Annual Report as a central component of its methodology to promote accountability and transparency.

OCTOBER 2024



TUTELA MINORUM

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE
PROTECTION OF MINORS

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