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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.

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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.