



N. 0108

Lunedì 09.02.2015

Press Statement of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

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The members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors gathered in Plenary Assembly February 6-8, in Rome.

The members who took part in the Assembly are: Cardinal Seán O'MALLEY, OFM Cap. (United States), President; Mons. Robert OLIVER (United States), Secretary; Rev. Luis Manuel ALI HERRERA (Colombia); Catherine BONNET (France); Marie COLLINS (Ireland); Gabriel DY-LIACCO (Philippines); Sheila HOLLINS (England); Bill KILGALLON (New Zealand); Sr. Kayula LESA, MSC (Zambia); Sr. Hermenegild MAKORO, CPS (South Africa); Kathleen MCCORMACK (Australia); Claudio PAPALE (Italy); Peter SAUNDERS (England); Hanna SUCHOCKA (Poland); Krysten WINTER-GREEN (United States); Rev. Humberto Miguel YÁÑEZ, SJ (Argentina) and Rev. Hans ZOLLNER, SJ (Germany).

This year's meeting was the first opportunity for all 17 members of the recently expanded Commission to come together and share their progress in the task entrusted them by the Holy Father, namely to advise Pope Francis in the safeguarding and protection of minors in the Church.

During the meetings, members presented reports from their Working Groups of experts, developed over the past year. The Commission then completed their recommendations regarding the formal structure of the Commission and agreed upon several proposals to submit to the Holy Father for consideration.

The Working Groups are an integral part of the Commission's working structure. Between Plenary Sessions, these groups bring forward research and projects in areas that are central to the mission of making the Church 'a safe home' for children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults. These include: pastoral care for survivors and their families, education, guidelines in best practice, formation to the priesthood and religious life, ecclesial and civil norms governing allegations of abuse, and the accountability of people in positions of responsibility within the Church when dealing with allegations of abuse.

The Commission is keenly aware that the issue of accountability is of major importance. In its Assembly, members agreed on an initial proposal to submit to Pope Francis for consideration. Moreover, the Commission is developing processes to ensure accountability for everyone in the Church - clergy, religious, and laity - who work with minors.

Part of ensuring accountability is raising awareness and understanding at all levels of the Church regarding the

seriousness and urgency in implementing correct safeguarding procedures. To this end, the Commission also agreed to develop seminars to educate Church leadership in the area of the protection of minors.

Following on from the Holy Father's Letter to Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and to Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, dated February 2, the Commission looks forward to collaborating with churches on a local level in making its expertise available to ensure best practices in guidelines for the protection of minors.

The Commission is also preparing materials for a Day of Prayer for all those who have been harmed by sexual abuse. This will underscore our responsibility to work for spiritual healing and also help raise awareness among the Catholic community about the scourge of the abuse of minors.

Pope Francis writes in his letter to Church leaders "families need to know that the Church is making every effort to protect their children". Conscious of the gravity of our task to advise the Holy Father in this effort, we ask you to support our work with prayer.

Rome February 8th, 2015

[00233-02.01] [Original text: English]

[B0108-XX.02]
