



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS**

*Thursday, 21 September 2017*

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**[Multimedia]**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I extend a cordial welcome to you at the beginning of this Plenary Assembly. In particular, I would like to thank Cardinal O'Malley for his kind greeting, while I express my sincere appreciation of the reflections presented on your behalf by Sr Hermenegild Makoro and Mr Bill Kilgallon. They have explained very well the role that I envisioned for the [Commission when I instituted it three years ago](#) as a service which I trust will continue to be of great assistance in the coming years to the Pope, the Holy See, Bishops and Major Superiors throughout the world.

Today, in your presence, I would like to share with you the profound distress I feel in my soul at the condition of abused children, as I have already had the opportunity to do recently, on different occasions.

The sex abuse scandal is truly a terrible disgrace for the whole of humanity, and affects so many children, young people and vulnerable adults in all countries and in all societies. For the Church too it has been a very painful experience. We feel ashamed of the abuses committed by holy ministers, who should be the most trustworthy. But we have also experienced a call, which we are certain comes directly from our Lord Jesus Christ: to embrace the mission of the Gospel for the protection of all minors and vulnerable adults.

Allow me to say with all clarity that sexual abuse is a horrible sin, completely opposed to and in contradiction to what Christ and the Church teach us. Here in Rome, I had the privilege of listening to the stories that victims and survivors of abuse wanted to share. In those encounters, they openly shared the effects that sexual abuse has had on their lives and those of their families. I

know that you too have had the blessed occasion to take part in similar meetings and that such encounters continue to foster your personal commitment to do everything possible to combat this evil and eliminate this failure among us.

Therefore, today I reiterate once again that the Church, at all levels, will respond with the application of the firmest measures to all those who have betrayed their call and have abused the Children of God. The disciplinary measures that the particular Churches have adopted must be applied to all those who work in the institutions of the Church. However, the primary responsibility belongs to the Bishops, priests and religious, those who have received from the Lord the vocation to offer their life to service, including the vigilant protection of all children, young people and vulnerable adults. For this reason, the Church irrevocably and at all levels intends to apply the 'zero tolerance' principle against the sexual abuse of minors.

The Motu Proprio, *As a Loving Mother*, promulgated on the basis of a proposal by your Commission and with reference to the principle of the Church's responsibility, addresses the cases of diocesan Bishops, Eparchs and Major Superiors of religious institutes who, through negligence, have committed or omitted acts that resulted in serious injury to others, or that affect a community in its entirety (cf. Art. 1).

Over the last three years, the Commission has continuously emphasized the most important principles that guide the Church's efforts to protect all minors and vulnerable adults. In such a way, it has fulfilled the mission which I entrusted to it; as an "advisory body at the service of the Holy Father", to offer its experience "for the purposes of promoting local responsibility in the particular Churches for the protection of all minors and vulnerable adults" (*Statute*, Art. 1).

I was delighted to learn that many particular Churches have adopted your recommendations for a Day of Prayer and for Dialogue with the victims and survivors of abuse, as well as with the representatives of victim organizations. They told us that these meetings have been a profound experience of grace throughout the world, and I sincerely hope that all the particular Churches will benefit from them.

It is also encouraging to know that many Episcopal Conferences and Conferences of Major Superiors have sought your advice regarding Guidelines for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults. Your cooperation in sharing the best procedures is truly valuable, especially for the Churches with fewer resources for this crucial work of protection. I would like to encourage you to continue your cooperation in this work with the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* and the *Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*, so that these measures may be inculturated in the different Churches around the world.

Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation especially of the numerous opportunities for learning, education and formation that you have offered in many particular Churches throughout

the world, and also here in Rome, in the various dicasteries of the Holy See, in the course for new Bishops and in various international conferences. I am pleased to know that the presentation that Cardinal O'Malley and Mrs Marie Collins, one of your founding members, made last week for the new Bishops was favourably received. These educational programmes offer the type of support which will allow dioceses, religious institutes and all Catholic institutions to adopt and use the most appropriate materials for this work.

The Church is called to be a place of piety and compassion, especially for those who have suffered. For all of us, the Catholic Church continues to be a field hospital that accompanies us on our spiritual journey. It is the place where we can sit with others, listen to them and share with them our struggles and our faith in the Good News of Jesus Christ. I am fully confident that the Commission will continue to be a place where the voices of the victims and survivors will be heard with interest as we have much to learn from them and from their personal stories of courage and perseverance.

Allow me to thank you once again for your efforts and your advice during these last three years. I entrust you to the Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother who remains beside us throughout our lives. I impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you and your loved ones and I ask you to continue to pray for me.