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Meeting on “The Protection of Minors in the Church” – Reflection points

The following are some points drawn up by the various Commissions and Episcopal Conferences as an aid to reflection during the work of the Meeting on “The protection of minors in the Church”:

1. To prepare a practical handbook indicating the steps to be taken by authorities at key moments when a case emerges.
2. To equip oneself with listening structures that include trained and expert people who can initially discern the cases of the alleged victims.
3. Establish the criteria for the direct involvement of the Bishop or of the Religious Superior.
4. Implement shared procedures for the examination of the charges, the protection of the victims and the right of defence of the accused.
5. Inform the civil authorities and the higher ecclesiastical authorities in compliance with civil and canonical norms.
6. Make a periodic review of protocols and norms to safeguard a protected environment for minors in all pastoral structures: protocols and norms based on the integrated principles of justice and charity so that the action of the Church in this matter is in conformity with her mission.
7. Establish specific protocols for handling accusations against Bishops.
8. Accompany, protect and treat victims, offering them all the necessary support for a complete recovery.
9. Increase awareness of the causes and consequences of sexual abuse through ongoing formation initiatives of Bishops, Religious Superiors, clerics and pastoral workers.

10. Prepare pathways of pastoral care for communities injured by abuses and penitential and recovery routes for the perpetrators.
 11. To consolidate the collaboration with all people of good will and with the operators of mass media in order to recognize and discern real cases from false ones and accusations of slander, avoiding rancour and insinuations, rumours and defamation (cf. Pope Francis' address to the Roman Curia, 21 December 2018).
 12. To raise the minimum age for marriage to sixteen years.
 13. Establish provisions that regulate and facilitate the participation of lay experts in investigations and in the different degrees of judgment of canonical processes concerning sexual and / or power abuse.
 14. The right to defence: the principle of natural and canon law of presumption of innocence must also be safeguarded until the guilt of the accused is proven. Therefore, it is necessary to prevent the lists of the accused being published, even by the dioceses, before the preliminary investigation and the definitive condemnation.
 15. Observe the traditional principle of proportionality of punishment with respect to the crime committed. To decide that priests and bishops guilty of sexual abuse of minors leave the public ministry.
 16. Introduce rules concerning seminarians and candidates for the priesthood or religious life. Be sure that there are programs of initial and ongoing formation to help them develop their human, spiritual and psychosexual maturity, as well as their interpersonal relationships and their behaviour.
 17. Be sure to have psychological evaluations by qualified and accredited experts for candidates for the priesthood and consecrated life.
 18. Establish norms governing the transfer of a seminarian or religious aspirant from one seminary to another; as well as a priest or religious from one diocese or congregation to another.
 19. Formulate mandatory codes of conduct for all clerics, religious, service personnel and volunteers to outline appropriate boundaries in personal relationships. Be specific about the necessary requirements for staff and volunteers and check their criminal record.
 20. Explain all information and data on the dangers of abuse and its effects, how to recognize signs of abuse and how to report suspected sexual abuse. All this must take place in collaboration with parents, teachers, professionals and civil authorities.
 21. Where it has not yet been in place, establish a group easily accessible for victims who want to report any crimes. Such an organization should have a certain autonomy with respect to the local ecclesiastical authority and include expert persons (clerics and laity) who know how to express the Church's attention to those who have been offended by improper attitudes on the part of clerics.
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