



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 240307b

Thursday 07.03.2024

Audience with members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly.

The following is the address the Pope prepared for the occasion, which was read out by Msgr. Pierluigi Giroli:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your Plenary Assembly. I offer you my heartfelt thanks for your very important work, and for your personal and collective witness.

Many of you have dedicated your lives to caring for victims of abuse, a courageous vocation that comes from the heart of the Church and helps her to be purified and to grow. Over the last ten years, your task of offering “guidance and advice... as well as proposing the most appropriate measures for safeguarding minors and vulnerable persons” (*Praedicate Evangelium*, Art. 78) has expanded considerably. It has taken on a more defined shape, as I have asked you to focus on helping to make the Church an increasingly safe place for minors and vulnerable adults. I am happy to see that you are here today in large numbers, and to hear the updates on your activities. I encourage you to continue in this service with a team spirit, building bridges and networks that can make your care for others more effective.

You have devoted much time and effort to completing the Annual Report on Safeguarding Policies and Procedures in the Church, which I had asked you to prepare. This should not be just another document, but should help us better to appreciate the work that still lies ahead.

In confronting the scandal of abuse and the suffering of victims, we might well grow discouraged, since the

challenge of restoring the fabric of broken lives and of healing pain is enormous and complex. Yet our commitment must not wane; indeed, I encourage you to move forward, so that the Church will be, always and everywhere, a place where everyone can feel at home and each person is treated as sacred.

To carry out this service well, we must make Christ's feelings our own: his compassion, his way of touching the wounds of humanity, his Heart pierced with love for us. Jesus is the one who drew near to us; in his flesh, God the Father broke down every barrier and thus showed that he is close to us in all our needs and concerns. In Jesus, God has taken our sufferings upon himself and borne our wounds, as we read in the fourth song of the Suffering Servant in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (cf. 53:4). We, too, have come to realize this: we cannot help others to bear their burdens unless we shoulder them ourselves, unless we show genuine closeness and compassion.

In our ecclesial ministry of protecting minors, closeness to victims of abuse is no abstract concept, but a very concrete reality, comprised of listening, intervening, preventing and assisting. All of us, especially Church authorities, are called to acknowledge firsthand the impact of abuse and to be deeply moved by the suffering of victims, listening directly to their voices and showing a closeness that, through practical decisions, can lift them up, help them and prepare a different future for everyone.

Our response to those who have been abused is born of this loving gaze, this heartfelt closeness. These brothers and sisters of ours must be welcomed and listened to, since neglecting to do so can greatly aggravate their suffering. Ours must be a personal commitment to caring for them; at the same time, we need to do so with the help of competent collaborators.

Thank you for all that you are doing to accompany victims and survivors. Much of this service is carried out confidentially, as it should be, out of respect for those involved. At the same time, its fruits ought to become visible. People should know and see how you are accompanying local Churches in their ministry of safeguarding minors. Your closeness will strengthen local ecclesial authorities to share best practices and verify that adequate measures have been taken. I have already asked you to ensure compliance with *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, so that reliable means are in place for welcoming and caring for victims and survivors, as well as for ensuring that the experience and witness of these communities support the work of protection and prevention.

I know that your service to local Churches is already bearing much fruit. I am encouraged to see the *Memorare* initiative taking shape, in cooperation with Churches in many countries around the world. This is a very concrete way for the Commission to demonstrate its closeness to the leadership of these Churches as you work to strengthen existing efforts for prevention. In time, this will create a network of solidarity with victims and those who promote their rights, especially where resources and experience are limited.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your sensitive and important service. Your observations will keep us moving in the right direction, so that the Church will continue to be fully committed to the prevention of abuse, its firm condemnation, the provision of compassionate care for victims and ongoing commitment to being a welcoming and safe place. Thank you for your perseverance and for the witness of hope that you offer. I bless you from my heart, I pray for you and I ask you, please, to pray for me.
