Pope: Protecting minors in the Church involves more than protocols

Pope Francis encourages the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors to continue its precious work to ensure that the Church is a safe place for minors and vulnerable people and emphasizes the critical importance of healing survivors.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors is holding its annual Ordinary Plenary Assembly from 24- 28 March.

Pope Francis has taken the opportunity to express again his gratitude for its "precious service" which, he said in a message addressed to participants,"is like 'oxygen' for local Churches and religious communities, because wherever a child or vulnerable person is safe, there you serve and honour Christ."

Established in 2014, the Commission is responsible for advising the Pope on the protection of minors and developing policies to prevent sexual abuse within Church institutions in collaboration with Vatican offices and local bishops' conferences.

As an independent body of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (which handles disciplinary actions regarding abuse cases), it provides recommendations on best practices, supports survivor outreach efforts, and promotes accountability within the Church.

Integrating education, prevention, and listening to heal

In his message, which he signed on 20 March before he was discharged from Gemelli Hospital, Pope Francis encouraged the Commission in its work, noting that abuse prevention "is not a blanket to be spread over emergencies, but one of the foundations on which to build communities faithful to the Gospel."

He remarked that its mission cannot be reduced to the mere application of protocols but involves advocating for safeguards, integrating education, prevention, and listening to heal. He said that by establishing prevention policies

even in the remotest communities, the Commission contributes to a collective commitment that every child and vulnerable person will find safety within the Church. "This," he said, "is the driving force of what should be for us an integral conversion." "When you establish prevention policies, even in the remotest communities, you are making a promise: that every child, every vulnerable person, will find a safe environment in the ecclesial community."

Three commitments to make the Commission's work more effective

To advance this mission, Pope Francis asked for three commitments. First, he called for increased collaboration between the Commission and the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, implying that systemic cooperation is essential to address the scourge of sexual abuse in the Church.

Second, he urged the Commission to offer hospitality and care for the spiritual wounds of victims and survivors, in the style of the Good Samaritan, a style that moves beyond bureaucratic procedures and instead fosters genuine healing through mercy.

Third, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of building partnerships with entities outside the Church, including civil authorities, experts, and associations "so that safeguarding may become a universal language."

Acknowledging the progress made over the past decade in building a safety network within the Church, he insisted on the importance of listening to the pain of survivors, warning against "the temptation todismiss grief instead of healing it." "May the Holy Spirit, teacher of living memory, preserve us from the temptation to dismiss grief instead of healing it."

Concluding with words of encouragement, the Pope thanked the Commission members for their prayerful closeness as he recovers from pneumonia and assured them of his own spiritual accompaniment in their work.

* *Article published in Vatican News. By Lisa Zengarini. Photo: Vatican Media.*