

The ongoing work of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors continues to bring together experts from around the world, providing renewed attention to strengthening the Church's response to the sexual abuse crisis faced in every part of the world.

The most recent contribution to these efforts is the publication of ten presentations offered during a seminar sponsored by the Pontifical Commission in December 2019, "Promoting and Protecting the Dignity of Persons in Allegations of Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults: Balancing Confidentiality, Transparency and Accountability." The canonical journal of the Pontifical Gregorian University *Periodica* 109 (2020) publishes the main presentations from three days of discussion and debate among 37 experts, drawn from the academic world, local churches, and representatives from different dicasteries of the Holy See.

The Commission expresses gratitude to the canon law faculty of the Pontifical Gregorian University for publishing these papers and making translations in Italian available on its website

<https://www.iuscangreg.it/seminario-tutela-minori>.

A Spanish translation of the papers has also been made available by PPC Editorial España in collaboration with the *Centro de investigación y formación interdisciplinar para la protección del menor* of the Pontifical University of Mexico.

As an advisory body, the Pontifical Commission conducts studies in many different areas, emphasizing the Church's outreach to victims, education, and issues in civil and canon law. The "Safeguarding

Guidelines and Norms Working Group” organised the December seminar to examine existing frameworks for ensuring a balancing of confidentiality, transparency and accountability, particularly as stated in the apostolic letters *motu proprio Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* (2001, 2010) and *Vos estis lux mundi* (2019). Firmly established on these foundations, these experts explored new ways forward, agreeing that the ongoing process of renewal rests on *a radical choice to place the dignity of the person at the centre of all responses – whether they be pastoral, juridical or clinical -- to allegations of sexual abuse and the process of on-going formation.*

This publication of these presentations is offered in the spirit of dialogue and a continuing deepening of knowledge and understanding that characterized the seminar. Such a process necessarily includes collaboration between the Holy See, conferences of bishops, conferences of the major superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, universities, and of lay people, religious and clergy working in different cultures and institutions around the world.

Professor Myriam Wijlens of Erfurt University (Germany), Vice-Moderator of the Working Group on Safeguarding Guidelines and Norms remarked: “These presentations raise a series of questions, such as the role of victims in canonical proceedings, access to information, the transparency of processes and the need to provide confidentiality to survivors. Other issues concern a deeper understanding of the sacramental seal and the sacrament of reconciliation, including improved training for priests and seminarians to respond properly and effectively when they learn of sexual abuse from a confession.”

Justice Neville Owen from Australia, Moderator of this Working Group, stated that “the purpose of the seminar was not to provide final answers. Rather, it was to clarify and sharpen the questions, identify those areas and subjects that were in need of further research and propose possible ways and steps forward to respond to them.”

“Our members and the esteemed colleagues who gathered with us these three days continue to explore many areas that are important to all those who wish to make our Church a safer place for everyone. The issues they are raising are all in

service of a fundamental question that each should be asking, especially as Christians – what can I do to better protect and promote the dignity of all people, especially those who have suffered abuse.”

*Cardinal Seán O'Malley, OFM Cap., President
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