

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and Insights from the Vatican

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Augustine of Hippo wrote that 'Hope has 2 beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that that they do not remain as they are. ' Keeping a balance between anger and courage is hard given so many reports of clerical sexual abuse.

I know that there are people here tonight whose lives have been affected by abuse or by allegations of abuse. Your anger is understandable.

My heart goes out to you and I wish you the courage to continue your search for truth and peace- both for yourself and for those you love.

How do we help children and adults who *have* been abused? The first thing is to talk about it, recognising that it is endemic in our world. The second is to be clear that it isn't the victims fault - that any shame they may feel is misplaced, that abuse is always an abuse of power and that it can destroy lives.

Tonight I am going to talk about the importance of listening to victims, and the importance of training church leaders. But also about the importance of authentic leadership, transparency and truth- and about not covering up abuse when it happens.

On his way home from Bahrain, Pope Francis was asked about the latest abuse scandal in France- a Cardinal who had admitted abusing a 14 year old girl when he was a young priest.

Pope Francis responded by speaking about the work of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors of which I was a founder member, He said: "..... we are carrying it out with courage, and not everyone has courage; sometimes there is the temptation to compromise....., but the will of the Church is to clarify everything."

My journey to becoming a Commission member began in 1970 when, as a young doctor in a Children's hospital in London, I read Kempe, an American pediatrician's description of the battered child syndrome. His work led to the formation of the NSPCC in the UK, and a growing awareness amongst doctors and social workers that has helped to challenge the secrecy around child maltreatment. It was a decade later before the impact of sexual abuse, including incest, on people's mental health began to be talked about.

And as an academic and clinical psychiatrist in the 80's and 90's, I worked with victims of abuse, especially victims with learning disabilities and autistic people. Knowing of my work, Cardinal Cormac asked me to assist him - (alongside- now Archbishop- Mark O'Toole) in a Vatican Visitation - to the Diocese of Armagh in 2011. He was looking for a suitably qualified female mental health professional to help him to listen. The task was to investigate the Irish Church's response to a seeming tsunami of Clerical Abuse scandals.

What an eye opener my visit to Ireland proved to be. It was a demanding visit, meeting individuals and groups- morning, noon and night, for about 3 weeks. We agreed our ways of working - including that neither the Cardinal nor I would see anyone alone, and that we would all help to write his final report to the Vatican.

There was one occasion when the Bishops asked the Cardinal for a private meeting. But +Cormac kept his word and I went too.

The Vatican had strong views about what we should and shouldn't do.

Despite their strong discouragement, we held 4 public meetings, 2 in the North and 2 in the South of Ireland.

We respectfully listened to the anger that was expressed, there were no riots, no adverse Press comment - just appreciation that we had listened, and *more* insights for ourselves.

My main task was to summarise what I had heard people say, and ask if I had missed anything out. In my summing up I included their challenges, such as 'if Jesus came into Rome or Armagh on a donkey today, would he go inside the palatial Bishop's residence or stay outside with those who are homeless or survivors of abuse?'

When the report was written, there was only one point that we disagreed on. I suggested that the Cardinal should recommend independent lay-led governance of the local Church rather like happens for doctors. I argued that doctors and clergy have similar responsibilities with respect to standards, ethical practice and confidentiality. And a similar need to be well trained.

That sooner or later, one government or another would impose a General Faith council or Faith professions Council or similar governance framework - like the GMC.

Perhaps you would expect me to have these views - I have been a senior medic, teacher and researcher. And now I am a legislator.

Why wouldn't I expect Church leaders to be accountable to the wider society that church members also belong to - as well as being accountable to God!

I felt comfortable having a robust discussion with Cardinal Cormac, in the same spirit of openness as is being encouraged through the synodal process, and so ably led in Rome by Sr Natalie- a French religious sister.

The new Vatican Constitution does introduce some "lay governance", although media reports suggest that not all cardinals at their August consistory liked the idea of separating the exercise of Church governance from sacramental ordination.

- Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/rome-on-mission/16015>

Going to Rome

A few months after the Vatican Visitation to Ireland, I was invited to address the 2012, Towards Healing conference in Rome for representatives of Bishop's conferences worldwide. I was asked to speak about the impact of abuse on victims. I recommended that this talk should be given by a survivor of abuse.

Rather hesitantly, the organisers asked me to invite someone to present jointly with me. That's when I first met Marie Collins, a prominent victim survivor from Dublin. After several hours discussion we decided we could work together.

Around this time, I had also begun to correspond with Sr Pauline Quinn- an American nun who had been abused both in childhood and as an adult in the Church.

She copied her letters to Pope Benedict and to Fr Timothy Radcliffe, former Master of the Dominican order, who recently mentioned her in an article in the Tablet on the subject of forgiveness. Back in 2012, Sr Pauline was understandably angry and told me that she was planning to chain herself outside the conference venue to try to ensure that at least one survivor's voice would be heard. I discussed the preparations that Marie and I were making with her and she was hugely reassured. At the conference, I spoke from my clinical experience of working with both victims and perpetrators in therapy and about the Vatican Visitation to Armagh. This was interspersed with Marie's personal experience of years of cover up following her own abuse by a priest; the way in which the Pontifical secret had been used as an excuse for refusing to communicate with her; and the *mental health* consequences of being sexually abused as a teenager. And also, the spiritual harm done - unique to abuse in a faith setting and yet rarely considered.

The talk that Marie and I gave, as the only lay speakers- had quite an impact both inside and outside the venue. The media waiting outside wanted to talk to Marie - not to any Bishops.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM)

Marie and I were then invited to become founder members of a new Pontifical Commission -the PCPM, proposed to Pope Francis by Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, who had a track record of trying to turn things around in Boston after the Boston Globe's Spotlight investigation. The film, Spotlight, about this investigation is essential watching.

I had some conditions before I felt that I would be able to join the Commission- the first was that at least 50% of the members must be lay, and 50% female, that it should be multidisciplinary and that there should be victim survivors as full members. These requests were all met and in theory continue today

The Commission's first 4-year term began in March 2014. To begin with, we stayed and worked in the same residence as Pope Francis. Yes, there is security at the front door but inside, Domus Santa Marta was rather informal and we felt welcome.

Some of the Cardinals and Bishops who knew our business would come and sit with us in the dining room to share their experience. Eventually we got our own office in the Vatican and our lodging and meetings were moved to a more spacious Domus elsewhere in Rome.

We had an induction from the Secretary of State's office explaining the dual role of the papacy, firstly the Pope as spiritual leader of the worldwide Church, and secondly as head of the Vatican City state, a small state with about 800 citizens. 5000 more people work there, mostly priests or nuns - many Italians, the majority international.

And in the global Church there are 3500 dioceses, each headed by a Bishop, each a chief executive, individually responsible for his own diocese-, an extraordinary delegation of power by the Pope who appoints each and everyone.

The new apostolic constitution, Praedicate Evangelium, intends the Vatican's role to be more supportive than disciplinary in nature. But the various Vatican dicasteries or departments still wield considerable influence, with funds being available to support evangelisation and other initiatives around the world.

The PCPM

During the first term the Commission was concerned by the way in which anyone making an allegation of abuse was ignored as canonical processes got underway. The PCPM statutes did not grant us competency to deal with cases - a case is not a victim, but a priest who has been accused.

The competent authority, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, did not see itself as having any responsibility for the alleged victim, just for the canonical investigation and for discipline with respect to the priest.

We discovered that someone writing to the CDF to inquire about the progress of their complaint would not receive a reply, their letter usually being sent to their Bishop, even if their complaint included that the Bishop had failed to take action or was covering things up.

Frustratingly attempts to work with the CDF seemed to be blocked at every turn. There was a lack of transparency, and their own approach was uni-disciplinary unlike that of the PCPM.

With the new constitution the Commission has recently been moved into the DDF administratively, so initial hopes for independence have gone, although just as in

the beginning it retains some autonomy, being in theory still directly accountable to the Pope.

In my view it's anomalous to put a safeguarding commission into the department that deals with allegations against priests given that its brief is to prevent abuse and to address the care and healing of victim /survivors? The Dicastery for Family and laity seems much more in tune with the overall goals of the Commission.

Marie Collins agrees- she was quoted by Christopher Lamb in the Tablet last week. She said, ' Child abuse should not be seen as simply a disciplinary matter as though it was just about rooting out bad apples,'. "It is a cultural and systemic problem within the Church and needs to be addressed as such. If you are putting the commission in with the disciplinary section of the Curia, then what about the preventative side

Healing and Care

One early Working group addressed the Healing and Care of survivors; initially chaired by Marie Collins and then by me after Marie resigned in 2017. We started by looking at any barriers in canonical processes that might make the victim survivors journey more painful- we wanted to hear from more survivors

We supported 6 victim survivors from 3 countries to spend a weekend in Domus Santa Marta - the Pope's home in the Vatican. The Holy Father came to our table at dinner to introduce himself the day they arrived. Later he spent several hours listening to each of their stories for as long as each person wanted, and celebrated Mass with us in his private chapel.

The Holy Father has welcomed many other survivors since our initial 6, including 3 from Chile after his eyes were opened to the injustices taking place in that country. One of these, Juan Carlos Cruz, is now a member of the PCPM, his original nomination in 2015 having been rejected- apparently on the advice of Bishops who were later discredited. He was even described as a snake in a leaked email correspondence between the then Cardinal and the Cardinal Emeritus. In 2017 Juan Carlos had written to Pope Francis to explain what was happening in Chile but hadn't received a reply. So, he asked Marie and the Healing and care WG to personally deliver the letter to Rome for him. We did.

Cardinal Sean assured us that he had given the letter to Pope Francis - we can only conclude that the letter was not read by the Pope but given to his staff to open for him because it seems he remained unaware of its content.

Cardinal Sean phoned me the day before Pope Francis went to Chile in January 2018. I asked if he had advised Pope Francis well - he said he hoped that he had been well briefed. This was surprising as he usually accompanied the Holy Father on his visits to Central and South America.

What happened next is on the public record. There were vociferous protests - partly because the Holy Father was accompanied on his visit by the Bishop of Osorno, a protegee of the convicted priest Karadima.

Pope Francis said it was a calumny to accuse this Chilean Bishop of covering up abuse. But on his plane journey back to Rome, he promised to look more deeply into the allegations. He sent one of the brightest and wisest of his investigators, Archbishop Charles Scicluna, to Chile.

The resulting report supported the allegations made by Juan Carlos Cruz.

Pope Francis immediately made a public apology, saying that he had made "serious mistakes". He said he had misjudged Barros and the events in Chile because he hadn't been given "truthful and balanced information."

He summoned the 34 Chilean Bishops to Rome who all offered their resignations - and over the next few weeks, he accepted 8 of them including the Cardinal.

We had discovered early on that there was no mechanism in place to discipline a Bishop - a lot of work was done by one of the Commission's working groups, trying to find a canonical process which would hold bishops accountable.

A few days after a new tribunal was announced by Pope Francis in 2016, the then Bishop of Kansas offered his resignation. But the tribunal proposal wasn't robust enough in practice to deal with resistance from the Congregation of Bishops.

In 2019, Pope Francis tried again, with the Motu proprio: Vos estis lux mundi- 'You are the light of the World'- mandatory reporting for any allegation of abuse or cover up of abuse would be overseen by the Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops.

Vos Estis requires compliance with civil laws, including all reporting obligations, and says that "The person who files the report, the person who alleges to have been harmed and the witnesses shall not be bound by any obligation of silence with regard to matters involving the case".

These were such important changes and I credit Marie Collins with having had considerable influence in these matters.

But after 3 years on the Commission, Marie had resigned. In her resignation letter she said: *"I find it impossible to listen to public statements about the deep concern in the church for the care of those whose lives have been blighted by abuse, yet to*

watch privately as a congregation in the Vatican refuses to even acknowledge their letters.”

Marie suggested that there were three things that would make a difference: that the commission be given the power to implement their recommendations; that it be given more funds to do its work; and that the ban on recruiting professional staff from outside the church to work on the issue should be lifted. She continued to help Cardinal Sean at the annual course for new Bishops for a while and many of the original Commission members are still in touch with Marie and each other to think about progress or the lack of it.

In response to Marie’s resignation, we surveyed members and stakeholders about developing a strategy for the implementation of the Commission’s proposals. This was not fully accepted, although perhaps it helped with the thinking for the global meeting of Bishops that was held by Pope Francis in 2019 with strong leadership from Fr. Zollner. Rather unrealistically, the PCPM in October 2022 says it will publish an annual report of progress made by every Bishops conference - all 114 of them. Of course, this is important but culture change is needed as well as statistics.

Pope Francis points to clericalism as the larger part of the Church’s failure to set up transparent processes to prevent abuse, and to respond to abuse when it happens. And the POWER in our Church is still in our clerical hierarchical system

Christopher Lamb writing in the Tablet this month said ‘The focus of the clerical sex abuse crisis is now squarely on the Church’s hierarchy, not only in its mishandling of cases but in the emergence of allegations of abuse perpetrated by bishops’. And he said that ‘The credibility of the Church hinges on how its central government responds.’ He quoted one recently retired member who said that the Pontifical Commission ‘realises the depth of organisational transformational change that needs to happen,” and “Key to this is for the commission to model a collaborative, synodal style of working, which was not evident in my last few months on the commission.” A direct and critical comment on the current leadership.

Training

Denial and fear so often arise out of ignorance.

The truth is that it’s easy to blame members of the hierarchy but as the film, *Spotlight*, shows, most of us have been blind to risk in our communities.

Until 1970 child abuse was not suspected, thought about, talked about anywhere although we now know that it was present in the church in the 3rd century. It’s not a new phenomenon. But it’s recognition as something that happens in all parts of society and all cultures is gradually growing

The belief that 'it could never happen here' is deeply embedded and the shame and lack of competence to deal with it when abuse is uncovered, provides no remedy. I have met a number of Bishops in the Vatican and elsewhere - who admit to being inadequately equipped to provide the professional and accountable leadership expected and needed.

They may have had little mentoring or supervision in their new management role. They may be brilliant pastors but just not have the experience for a new lonely role in charge.

They may lack the skills to listen to disclosures of abuse, or to understand at a personal level how to deal with an accused priest.

They may not have had a good role model- perhaps having seen other Bishops seek refuge in their position, and their hierarchical authority. They may have worked for a Bishop who took notice of the Diocesan financial advisors, but less note of specialist psychologists or spiritual advisors. They may have witnessed a loss of moral authority.

I co-led a working group on formation with Fr Hans Zollner. We were particularly concerned about the formation and support of Church leaders with respect to protecting children and vulnerable adults but made very slow progress in even being allowed to contribute to the annual so-called 'baby' Bishops course for newly appointed Bishops.

I began teaching priests and religious from around the world at the PUG in the CCP which had also been launched after the 2012 Rome conference Towards Healing*. I went on to chair the Scientific Board of the CCP for 6 years until it became an independent Institute of the PUG - now the IADC, in 2021.

In 2019 Cardinal Vincent asked me to provide some training at the seminary in Valladolid where the Bishops of England and Wales were having their biannual conference. 6 of my team were victim survivors. The detail of what happened is not in the public domain - just to say that there were some profoundly moving moments. Our focus was on learning to listen.

Pope Francis has been a key inspiration throughout my work with the Church. In 2016 on World communications Day, he said:

"Listening means paying attention, wanting to understand, to value, to respect and to ponder what the other person says. **Knowing how to listen**is a gift which we need to ask for and then make every effort to ***practice***.

I answered questions about the training when I gave evidence to ICCSA, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, chaired by Professor Alexis Jay. You can read what I and others said on the Inquiry website. The Catholic Church had a tough time responding to the Inquiry's questions, and the final report, just published will take some digesting.

As an aside, this training was the first time I had been able to raise money to pay a fee to everyone on the training team - my 4 years membership of the PCPM WAS ENTIRELY VOLUNTARY WITH EXPENSES PAID IN ARREARS. This had proved a problem for some members with one needing to go to a charity shop to buy suitable clothes to work in Rome, and another being unable to afford to eat outside of the actual meetings.

We were often told that lay people should offer their time, talent and treasure - at times in the past this does seem to have placed more value on monetary donations rather than on talent- I think this is slowly changing.

Media and communications and inquiries

The Commission worked on a media strategy. One draft stated that “by mandate of the Holy Father, the President speaks on behalf of the commission. The President can delegate the secretary or mandate another member as spokesperson”. And another proposal was that “members are encouraged to engage with media and social media; be the news good or bad.

Even “bad“press was to be seen as an opportunity to raise awareness of the Commission’s central role in safeguarding and preventing the abuse of minors.”

The President did on occasion ask me to speak on his behalf- but it certainly wasn’t always a comfortable experience especially if my news was more bad than good!

This was the case when I represented him at the Royal commission into institutional abuse in Australia. I had submitted a statement in advance which he had approved. During my oral evidence session, I was asked if the commission was adequately resourced- I had to say that it was not and that we were sometimes told that something couldn’t happen because of limited resources. I was unpopular with the employed staff, although I did say they were doing a good job with the resources and skills available to them.

The PCPM recommended that it’s work should always be on the agenda at World meetings. But it took some persuasion for the WMOF organisers to agree to a session at the gathering in Dublin in 2018. It was to have been chaired by +Sean but a few days beforehand he delegated the role of chair to me. My other panel members included Marie Collins, Dr Gabby Dy Liaco, a senior Filipino psychologist and member of the PCPM, and Barbara Thorp from America.

There were approaching 4000 attendees - the largest of all the sessions and it was live streamed.

The organisers wanted to have increased security in case anyone was disruptive. I advised against and instead opened with an acknowledgement that there were probably 7 or 800 people present whose lives had been affected by abuse, and who may never have told anyone - that if they were distressed by what we were going to share, then there were counsellors available at the back of the room.

At the press conference immediately afterwards the first assertion by an American journalist was that abuse was caused by homosexuality. None of the panel agreed. The usual myths and facts were explored including that:
Abuse happens in all cultures and all walks of life - yes even in Africa.
It is usually committed by someone known to the individual
All abuse is an abuse of power
It is neither more nor less frequent in the Church than elsewhere.

What are the implications for the local Church.

In 2021 Cardinal Sean opened a conference in Italy saying:

“We cannot repair what we do not recognise. We cannot restore a broken trust if we do not address the heart of the matter. This requires honest investigation, independent inquiry, and informed action.”

After Marie’s resignation, we also explored different models of survivor engagement by Church authorities . In most countries this was non- existent. But the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales had set up a Survivor Advisory Panel (SAP).

I hosted a meeting of SAP and the Healing and Care WG at Worth Abbey in Sussex. Then the Survivor Advisory Panel members were invited to Rome to present to the whole PCPM. And later they were invited back to do an induction for the members appointed in 2019 for its second term. Since then, at least 3 other countries have developed their own versions of SAP.

Forgiving

Timothy Radcliffe recently wrote beautifully about forgiveness. He said : ‘.becoming forgiving people is not about being forgetful. It is opening the door for God’s creative grace. It is inseparable from learning to talk to the person who has hurt you’. That’s what Sr Pauline who I mentioned earlier, was doing - talking to people in the church who would listen. The Church - we as members of the Church - need priests and prophets who are leading us towards the truth- Pope Francis is just such a leader and inspires hope for the future of the priesthood. He is a wonderful role model and is widely recognised far beyond the Catholic Church. Just as the UK’s soft power is diminishing, the Pope’s is growing - something pointed to by Archbishop Welby during the visit of the Filipino Cardinal, Cardinal Tagle.

There are laypeople too who inspire hope as they lead us towards the truth. Marie Collins is one of the leaders that I have met during my work in the Vatican.

Sometimes the people we need to listen to are not the ones with the trappings of position and power but those on the margins.

If my work with the Vatican has taught me one thing, it’s that listening to victim survivors matters more than anything - and that also includes members of the clergy

some of whom may themselves have been abused as a child or during seminary formation.

The effective Grief to Grace retreat is survivor-led. They are a professional team which includes clergy and therapists. It's a retreat originally founded by Dr Theresa Burke in the USA, who also founded Rachels Vineyard. Southwark Diocese is one of the early adopters of this programme with 2 priest survivors seconded to work full time.

Usually, I try to speak alongside victim survivors as equals. And although I was asked to talk about my personal insights from working with the Vatican, I feel uncomfortable having spoken for so long without introducing a survivors voice. So I will give Fr Andrew Browne the last word- he is a priest of Hallam Diocese and a survivor of abuse. I have learnt that it's people like Andrew who hold the key to healing our Church.

Fr. Andrew is chair of Directors of the newly formed Survivor Training - Beyond Words Community Interest Company - a charitable safeguarding training organisation of which I am an associate. All of the Directors are victim survivors- some of them are former members of the survivor advisory panel -it was discontinued in the reorganisation of the Church's safeguarding structures- even though IICSA had praised the panel's contribution.

Fr. Andrew began his letter of introduction to one Diocese about the training the new charitable organisation can offer like this:

'Thinking about how I feel with regards to the Church's approach to Safeguarding, I find myself hurting from within. Why? The simple fact seems to come across that victims/survivors are not seen as human beings, but a menace to be held at a distance because of what they are 'alleging', and not to be trusted.

It is the fact that the 'Church' comes across as harsh, scary, and unable to converse with us. I know this can be an injustice, as there are some very good and caring people in the church - clergy and laity. It is this goodness that we need to tap into for a healthier and more compassionate people of God.

We, all of us, need to stop seeing Safeguarding just as an activity of the head - procedures, policies, actions to be done, forms to be filled in, boxes to be ticked. Why?

Because we are dealing with hurting, broken, lost human beings. We need to start to give them their humanity back, on their terms of understanding and care. We cannot have a 'one fits all' system. Each person, each human being, is a child of God- a hurting child of God - who cries out for care, support, love, and patient understanding."

Fr Andrew is a man of extraordinary courage and too few people listen to him.

The questions asked after the talk included one about the recommendation of the Jay Report that Mandatory reporting should be introduced and the questioner asked for clarification with respect to the sacrament of confession. I responded briefly but the answer I gave to the Australian Royal Commission into Abuse in Institutional settings is added here for clarity.

' The Church believes as a matter of sacramental doctrine that the seal of Sacramental Confession is inviolable, that is, the information learned within the celebration of the sacrament cannot be shared with third parties in any way. To do so would incur an automatic excommunication for the .priest concerned (canon 1388§1)

The Priest needs to ensure that an abuser to assuage his or her guilt for any abuse that may have been committed does not manipulate the Sacrament of Penance. This is an area where there need to be clear guidelines for priests, so that they are aware of the manipulative behaviour of abusers and know what to do in cases when someone confesses an act of abuse under the seal of confession. The most powerful action the confessor can take is to refuse absolution to a person .confessing to the abuse of a minor

Priests can't "break the seal," yet within the confession there's freedom to urge an abuser to speak to him or someone else outside that forum so as to be able to bring it to the statutory authorities. Outside of the confessional situation, priests are not bound by confidentiality in cases of the abuse of a minor or vulnerable person. Confessors should try to find ways to get the perpetrator to share this information outside the context of confession and then they would be in a position to act upon it without danger of breaking the seal. The situation is different when a person gives information within the Sacrament concerning abuse, which they have suffered, or knowledge of abuse that someone else has suffered. The confessor should encourage and even .assist them to pass that information on to the appropriate authorities

It should be noted that the absolution of an accomplice (canon 1378) and the solicitation of a penitent by a priest within the sacrament (canon 1387) are both offences, which are punished .severely in canon law The teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* covers professional confidentiality, which is different from the seal of confession (art 2491). It is very clear that information must be kept confidential unless "keeping the secret is bound to cause very grave harm to the one who confided it, to the one who received it or to a third party, and where the .very grave harm can be avoided only by divulging the truth