



PONTIFICIA COMMISSIO
PRO TUTELA MINORUM

From the Vatican, 27 May 2022

Prot. N.: 158/2022

Mr. Vincent Doyle,
Greetings to you!

As will be discussed later, the current iteration of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors is coming to an end and a newly constituted membership will shortly take office in a revised structure. I write to you today on behalf of the Commission to acknowledge the work of COPING International on behalf of the children fathered by men who are priests in the Catholic Church and the mothers of these children.

First, I would also like to thank you for your constant companionship in the first years of life of the Commission. These were necessarily years of study and discernment for our members, as they familiarised themselves with the global reach of the Catholic Church as an institution, its articulation at a local level, and insertion into diverse social, juridical and cultural contexts. There has been a vast array of subject areas, relationships and challenges which the Commission has encountered and confronted. In this formative period, the Commission has been focussed on garnering knowledge and applying it to the issue of safeguarding all children and vulnerable people from abuse in a diverse range of situations.

You have been in contact with our experts to bring attention to the particular issue of the many challenges facing children who have been fathered by priests, and the impact on the mothers of those children, and you have called for a conversion in how the Church and its leadership approach this delicate and important issue.

More than anyone else, you know that the many and diverse circumstances in which a child may be fathered by an ordained minister demand focused and case appropriate attention. As is the case in so many areas of life, one size seldom fits all.

The Commission accepts that the Church's approach to these questions has not been adequate. Children and their parents should not feel any pressure from the Church to disown or in any way reduce the joy that the new life of a child should bring to the world, despite any difficulties arising at the time because of the status of the father as a priest.

As the work of COPING has highlighted, and as the Commission has observed in its studies, the tendency to protect the institution of the Church or the priesthood can at times prevail over the primacy of the good of the child. This often results in the perpetuation of a false notion of stigma and scandal linked to the child's very existence.

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Mr. Vincent Doyle
Founder of COPING International

As Pope Francis has recently said, children are not a matter of reproductive biology, much less their parents' possession. Children are a giftⁱ. They are a joy. Always and in every circumstance.

The Commission – as an advisory body – envisions its contribution in this context. It has worked to foster the conversion you call for: that every child is seen as a joy and gift for the parents, the Church and society, regardless of the circumstances of their birth. The Commission is committed to establishing an environment and structure that safeguards and protects this joy from the crime and evil of all forms of abuse and that creates an environment in which the dignity of the child is paramount, and the child can flourish.

This process of conversion naturally follows from intense work in the areas of formation, education, awareness raising and policy review at a local leadership level, carried out by the designated Vatican offices. The Commission has supported this work and will continue to do so.

There are two matters of practical significance that will affect the work of the Commission in all of its activities, including the dignity of the children of priests.

First, the term of office of this iteration of the Commission is coming to an end. In a recent address to the Commission, Pope Francis indicated how the Commission is now entering a new phase of its journey and how he is preparing to renew our membership. We all are looking forward to the possibilities this new phase may bring.

Secondly, in addition to the renewal of membership, the Commission will take on a new form as indicated in *Predicate Evangelium* Article 78. While retaining its “independence and autonomy, as the Holy Father recently underlined in an audience with the Pontifical Commission, it will become part of the Roman Curia a move that should facilitate working relationships with colleagues who have competencies related more closely related to the matters you have brought to our attention, most especially the Congregation for Clergy.

The working materials of the Commission to date on the issue of the dignity of children of priests and of their mothers will be available to the reconstituted Commission and they will be able to discern how best to liaise with entities in the Roman Curia and local Churches with appropriate competencies into the future. In the meantime, the Commission acknowledges and expresses its gratitude for your courageous witness and reiterates its commitment to support the wellbeing of children in our Church always and everywhere.



The Hon Neville Owen

For and on behalf of the Pontifical Commission of the Protection of Minors

Mr. Vincent Doyle
Founder of COPING International

ⁱ — General audience, St. Peter's Square, Feb. 12, 2015