
Follow-on from Plenary

Teresa Devlin <teresa.devlin@>
To: Coping International <childrenofpriestsinternational@gmail.com>

11 May 2023 at 14:19

Dear Vincent,

Fr Andrew has written to me and has agreed that as I know you, I should communicate with you. I have tried to capture below what he said and what was discussed at the Plenary meeting of the PCPM.

As you know the Commission's focus is on safeguarding children from abuse, responding to victims and of course advising Pope Francis on developments in relation to the mandate he gave its members.

Before I joined the Commission I believe there was engagement between you and them on the important matter of children of priests and religious. It is fair to reflect that not everyone thought this was a core function of the Commission, whilst recognising the importance of it. You showed me a letter a member sent you; again at the meeting that member voiced his support for considering this important issue again.

As I told you I raised it with the Dicastery for Evangelization when we met them and we received a very open response to recognising the extent of the issue and the need to consider how to support all involved. It was at this meeting that I learned that many Bishops Conferences actually do have guidelines (as do Ireland). The view of the Dicastery is that the priest (or Religious) should leave their ministry in order to support the other parent and child. I know you do not share that view.

What was most successful though in my opinion was the follow-on discussion in the Commission with members, where we've turned our focus on this issue which your deeply and personally held concerns are alive, today, in a critical way.

The Commission has therefore committed to examining the question of vulnerable persons in the Church (and particularly in Canon Law), including all those involved where a child is conceived where the parent is a priest or religious. As already stated this was not seen within the competency of the PCPM, but the Dicastery for Clergy. So the proposal is to now develop a study, consult with the Dicastery for Clergy around vulnerability offer a much more systemic solution to the problems raised and in need of greater treatment by the Church.

My view is that whilst this is a longer term proposal, it will go to the heart of the issue and not simply ask Bishops to issue guidelines – which they may choose to ignore. In my opinion this is a better outcome. I know from discussion, the extent of the issue in Africa of priests having children is great, the solution about acknowledging and supporting the children and parents is more complex.

Next step is to develop a methodology, which one member is taking forward.

Just to be clear this will be a study on vulnerability, not children of priests alone. But its clearly on the agenda.

To quote Fr Andrew

"We're a can-do Commission and we've moved the ball forward on many issues over the past 6 months. I have no doubt we will do so on these issues too, but we need to be smart and strategic if we're going to get the type of change and buy in that we're hoping for.

I'm hopeful, and I hope you can convey this sense to Vincent too and ask not to get discouraged by the pace and the complexity of bringing about real change. It's worth our efforts."

I hope I have relayed this clearly enough to you.

Regards Teresa