

I am very happy to be with you this evening and, as Rector of the Gregorian University, to welcome and to greet all of you at the beginning of this Diploma Program. I wish you a good and fruitful time of formation and I thank especially Professor Demasure for offering such a valuable program, with this seminar method of teaching and taking an interdisciplinary approach.

This one-semester program of a Diploma in the Safeguarding of Minors is a new proposal and a very significant one.

It has been proposed and is under the responsibility of the Centre for Child Protection, as a unit of the Institute of Psychology, and for this reason it is a relevant part of the academic structure of the Pontifical Gregorian University. Why? I would like to share with you some reasons:

1.- First: since 2011-2012, we did our best to confront the sad phenomenon of the sexual abuse of minors – especially within the Church. Responding to Pope Benedict the sixteenth's and to Pope Francis' call to root out this evil, we set up this Center for Child Protection conceived, founded and promoted by Fr. Hans Zollner. In the face of situations and facts that wounded, so deeply, many people but also damaged the Church's witness and credibility, there was a crucial need to address this challenge. The CCP was established in January 2012 in Munich in conjunction with the Symposium "Towards Healing and Renewal" at the Gregorian University in Rome, as a global initiative within the Catholic Church and beyond for the prevention of the sexual abuse of minors. After a first successful stage until the end of 2014, the CCP moved to Rome in January 2015. At the opening of the new location, His Eminence Cardinal Sean O'Malley, OFM Cap, head of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors said: *"The prevention of sexual and other kinds of abuse of minors is of greatest importance for the universal Church. I am confident and pray that the CCP will make a substantial contribution to this long-term effort"*.

The CCP aims at growing into an international and educational facility of excellence in training and education. For this reason, the CCP, in addition to the e-learning training program for the prevention of sexual abuse, conducts interdisciplinary research and a doctoral program, organizes international conferences on abuse prevention and safeguarding, and has developed this program, that is, the "new born" of the Centre. The "Diploma in Safeguarding of Minors and

Vulnerable Persons" is aimed primarily at people who work in abuse prevention or want to specialize in it. You are the first students of this program ... and we are very happy to welcome you and to give you the best of our support.

2. – Second: why did the Gregorian want to give its own response to such a challenge? Because, if the sexual abuse of minors is a sad reality, it's also a complex and many-sided reality. Moreover, it's not only a Church issue: protection of children must be a major concern for our contemporary societies. Therefore, it was obvious that a University such as the Gregorian, which has many intellectual resources that are crucial for coping with this issue, would allow and offer an interdisciplinary approach; such an approach is indeed crucial and decisive.

As you know, there were and there are many people prompt to denounce and to condemn, but there were and there are few to respond proactively to facts which are not only sins but crimes because the wounds caused by such acts run deep. So, the problem was not only: how to help to respond to the tragedy of child abuse? How to study with an interdisciplinary approach?... but also: how to prevent it by promoting a policy and a culture of effective safeguarding?

3. – Third: how can this be done as an academic unit belonging to the Institute of Psychology of the Gregorian University?

- according to a way of proceeding
- and aiming at a specific target

3.1. The way of proceeding is marked by courage – the courage of confronting problems and tragedies - of intelligence in order to understand better the roots of such events – and of humble commitment to get rid of this evil.

3.2. The specific target is to train people who will be promoters of such a policy and of a culture of safeguarding, who will be multipliers because they will transmit to others what they understand and know better.

In conclusion, I would say:

- it's an issue of paramount importance for the Church and for our societies and it requires the best of our human abilities, the best of our hearts and minds.

It will be a long-term task and it's a wonderful commitment. So I wish not only that you would specialize in the field of safeguarding, but also in that of creating, or participating in the creation of, safeguarding strategies.

We share indeed the same desire of moving ahead because the awareness of the crucial needs of the Church and of the world are pushing us to contribute "to this long term effort".

François-Xavier Dumortier

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