

***The Church Being a Safe Place for Children.  
Opportunities and Challenges for the Ministry of Safeguarding***

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Your Eminence, your Excellences, dear Fr. Rector, dear colleagues, dear students and guests!

It is an honor and great privilege for me to be invited to speak here today on the occasion of the fifth graduation of the Diploma in Safeguarding. The fifth graduation calls for is a special moment to celebrate, to give gratitude, to take stock and to see which challenges lie ahead.

***Words of Gratitude***

*Father Hans Zollner SJ*

In celebrating this special occasion it is appropriate to begin by expressing in particular a word of gratitude to Jesuit Father Hans Zollner, the president of the Centre for Child Protection. He is the initiator, the driving force, the motivator of this extremely important and wonderful educational opportunity and he is the face of the Centre for Child Protection. No words can better express his engagement in the area of child protection and safeguarding than a phrase from his native German language: *unermüdlich reist er durch die Welt*: tirelessly he travels through the world. It would seem, that nothing can stop him from bringing the message to all corners of the world. That message is that children have a right to grow up in a safe place and that we must do everything to provide for and secure this. Zealously he follows his mission, to assure, that *also* the church- so say it bluntly – “gets it” – that child protection is not something “nice to have”, but a right of children from which flows an obligation of adults as much as institutions and their leaders to implement that right.

I am sure, wherever, he goes not *all* people do welcome him with open arms. That is not because of his person or personality, but it is because of the topic. The abuse of minors, the abuse of powers, the covering-up are subjects that not all people want to hear about let alone want to do something about. Safeguarding is a serious matter because it touches on sexual abuse. Some people rather keep silent hoping that, therefore, one can pretend abuse does not occur or does not occur that often. However, wherever Hans Zollner goes he gets people on board and wins them over for the good course.

Time zones, language barriers, cultural differences, visa requirements, probably missed planes and sleepless nights in airports do not stop him. He is a driven missionary in the area of safeguarding. Thank you, Father Hans Zollner, for your engagement to make the church - and with it the world - into a safer place for the most vulnerable among us.

### *Safeguarding in the Pontifical Gregorian University*

The setting up of the study program “Diploma in safeguarding” required not only the engagement of Father Zollner. He could not have accomplished this if the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Society of Jesus would not have stood and indeed continues to stand behind him and behind this vision of a different world, a different church. On the occasion of the fifth graduation of the Diploma in Safeguarding it is, therefore, more than just fitting to congratulate as well the leadership of the Gregorian University for having set up this Diploma. With the simple fact that this study program exists the university makes a strong statement how it values the need to protect the most vulnerable in our church and in society, namely the children, the youth as well as those adults who find themselves in a vulnerable situation.

As a former vice-president of my own University of Erfurt I know what it takes to set up such a program: the need to develop a solid study program, to find the best professors, convince a senate and most importantly find the financial resources to run it, which not seldom implies that one has to let go of something else. Hence often a balancing of what is considered to be *also* important has to occur. That balancing might have taken place in light of the charism of the Society of Jesus and how that unfolds in its apostolic works.

### *Safeguarding and the Apostolate of the Jesuits*

The Gregorian University is an apostolate of the Society of Jesus. The courses that the University offers give expression to two major commitments for what the Jesuits are known and stand for: education and social justice. Indeed the two go together in this study program on safeguarding.

The Latin term *educatio* does not only refer to teaching, it also refers, for example, to raising of children. *Educatio* in the wider sense means attending to the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, physical and moral growth of a person (cf. GE 1). For any of these aspects to develop and flourish in a person - no matter what age - a safe environment is an indispensable condition. Hence, the commitment of the Jesuits to education unfolds here as a training of those who will be engaged in the ministry of safeguarding and who thus help to secure the fundamental condition for a fruitful *educatio* - in the wider sense of the word – of those who are most vulnerable. It is a service and ministry to “the little ones”.

The Society of Jesus also commits itself to social justice. Any engagement in social justice must begin with an attitude to care for the other person resulting in treating that person with dignity and respect. These are conditions that awaken the capacity to listen and to hear. Safeguarding touches on issues of social justice. It attends to the weakest in society and in this case also to the weakest in the church; it looks to human dignity and to the participation of the weak and wounded in society and the church; it attends to good legal structures that support and enhance the exercise of rights. It gives voice to those who cannot speak and it calls the issues by name. That means one speaks the truth. It calls for accountability and for structures to secure an effective accountability. It attends to provisions that prevent people from getting into situations where they might get harmed, badly treated and where justice according to contemporary understanding is insufficiently administered. To engage in the ministry of safeguarding is to engage in issues that relate to social justice. Or, to put it the other way around: those who advocate social justice cannot ignore safeguarding.

Hence the leadership and professors of the Gregorian University are thus to be thanked as the commitment of the Society of Jesus to both education and social justice find an encouraging expression in the study programs that prepare people to enter into the ministry of safeguarding and - as it is as important - allows and encourages its professors in the different faculties to engage in relevant research on the topic. On the occasion of the fifth graduation of the Diploma in Safeguarding there is, therefore, ample reason to be grateful to the Jesuits and the Gregorian University. Thank you Father Rector!

### *Graduates Apply Insights to their Own Context*

Father Zollner, the Jesuits, the University... it is time to address you the graduates of this Diploma. You have decided to come here and take on this training. Maybe your bishop or superior asked you to take up this study. Maybe you yourself took the initiative and were able to convince the bishop or superior to support you. You have come from all corners of the world and from very different backgrounds. While studying together you probably became aware how in different cultures there is a different understanding of human interaction, of boundaries and crossing boundaries, of handling emotions and talking about them, and what it means to have a close, confidential, trustworthy and intimate relation with another person.

You became aware that the issue of abuse is in some cultures and societies now a topic about which people might be able to talk, whereas in others this is not the case yet. The same goes for the church: in some local churches the topic can now be spoken about, but in others this is still a taboo not only with church leaders but also with the faithful themselves. In sharing with each other you observed that in virtually no local church the braking of the taboo occurred by the church itself. Seldom do those in leadership in local churches and religious institutes or provinces thereof act, mostly they only react. It would almost seem that each local church has to go through the same painful process in which often – if not mostly - a change comes about due to an external intervention. This might come from e.g. by way of movies, documentaries or the press. People are then quick to say that the media only intends to attack the church. The truth is, as pope Benedict XVI already said, the media could not have reported if this evil had not existed in the church.<sup>1</sup> It would seem that had the press or movies not supported the victims, they would not have been heard by church authorities.

Hence, questions that deserve research are: Why is it so difficult for the local churches and congregations to learn from each other in these matters? Why did they and do they make the same mistakes in particular in the handling of the allegations of abuse? Why does it seem so difficult to listen to the painful and shameful reports of others? Why not draw consequences

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI said in an interview to Peter Seewald: “There was no overlooking the fact that what guided this press campaign was not only a sincere desire for truth, but there was also some pleasure in exposing the Church and if possible discrediting her. All that notwithstanding, one thing was always clear: insofar as it is the truth, we must be grateful for every disclosure. The truth, combined with love rightly understood, is the number-one value. And finally, the media could not have reported in this way had there not been evil in the Church herself. Only because there was evil in the Church could it be played off against her by others.” Peter Seewald, *Benedict XVI. Light of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010).

from those reports for the way one handles the allegations in one's own church or congregation? Hence, the ultimate question arises: What can be done to change this?

Another area of your study will have been penal law. You probably learned how penal law differs not only between canon law and civil law, but also that the penal law of states with regard to abuse differs from one country to another. The differences concern issues such as the delicts themselves, the time for prescription cq. statute of limitations, mandatory reporting, procedures for trials, the role of victims in the procedures, etc.

Being aware of where your own church is at in the process of acknowledging abuse and thus of the challenges it still needs to meet, of the differences that exists between the contexts in which the churches live and that wat you have learned here over the past few months calls you, graduates, to develop a safeguarding program and process that is fitting for *your* church in *your specific context*. Indeed, whereas, the church universal can and must provide clear guidelines and laws with regard to delicts and procedures that apply to its own "house" so to speak, some of these, nevertheless, need an application in relation to the specific context including the specific state laws in these matters. Decisive criteria for that application are the wellbeing and protection of minors, attending to the truth and administering justice.

You as graduates of this Diploma in Safeguarding will play an instrumental role in the process of applying those principles in the place where you will be working by developing, for example, robust and strong procedures fitting for your context which assist the church in realizing those criteria. And yet, as a canon lawyer I can say to you, procedures and norms alone will not suffice. They are mere ink on paper. They are only tools. Needed are above all person who have internalized those principles and who no matter how good or bad the procedures will be see to implementing them in such a way that they accomplish what they intend. So you must convert the people who have to work with them. There must be an internal disposition to take on these three mentioned values.

At times it will be necessary to evaluate how they are implemented, where the shortcomings are and what needs to be changed. This is a major task to accomplish. And yet you are not and you cannot be alone in accomplishing this task.

### ***Complementarity of Clergy and Laity***

One aspect of your study here has been the encounter of persons of different walks of life. You, the graduates of this diploma, are lay women or lay men, sisters, brothers, or priests be it

religious or diocesan. By having had the opportunity to study together as laity and clergy you might have encountered - maybe even for the first time in life - how it is to learn with, and above all from each other. You might have come to appreciate the complementarity of the talents and gifts of women and men, of laity, religious and priests. This complementarity might well be a key aspect in your future ministry because indeed the time that the clergy alone and among themselves should and can handle the allegations of abuse is over.

### *Personal experience*

I would like to share with you in this regard a personal experience. In the second half of the 1980-s I was studying canon law in Ottawa when the first major abuse scandal erupted in Canada: not only had many children been abused, also the bishop had known about it. He was among the first bishops who had to resign. One of my professors wondered what could be done to help the bishops in the future to better react to information received about a possible abuse. I learned how to write guidelines, but recall vividly that I myself remarked that as a woman I would probably never ever be involved in these procedures, because canon law determines that if the good reputation of a priest can be called into question, all who are involved, even the notary, who does not make any decision but only testifies to the authenticity of documents, have to be priests. (c. 483 CIC/1983). My professor remarked that not only abuse had occurred. The handling of the abuse had caused tremendous harm. The trust of the people in the leadership was shaken. He said that the bishop would be wise to appoint a laywoman at least as the contact person for the victim or who sees to the rights of the victim in the handling of the allegation. If exclusively clergy would handle complaints about clergy and no “outsiders” would be involved, the trust lost in handling the abuse would never be restored. That was 1987.

Since 2002 I have been appointed by several bishops and major superiors in different countries to conduct the preliminary canonical penal procedure (cf. c. 1717 CIC/1983). I was involved in about one hundred cases. The work implies that I listen to victims, hear the accused, collect other relevant proofs, write the report with my findings for the bishop and prepare for him the acts to be submitted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Time and again victims, their families and other faithful have remarked how important it is to them that a woman who is not employed by the diocese, but who due to her profession and studies knows the internal structures and modes of operating in the church well, has been delegated by the ecclesial authorities to do the investigation. They remark that it helps them to

get the feeling that there is some objectivity, because as they say “it is then not only an “in house” matter”.

A Catholic judge in penal matters from a civil court remarked: “When clergy abuse boys and other clergy whom they call “their brothers in the priesthood” investigate this allegation, how can it be objective? How much internal freedom enjoys a fellow priest, who has been commissioned by the bishop to investigate the allegation, to confront that same bishop when he notices how badly the bishop reacted to signs of the abuse or even earlier allegations? Can he speak frankly with the bishop considering that this bishop will also decide about his own future – yes his own career? How difficult is it for an investigating priest to confront the bishop who ordained him and to which he has a filial relationship?”

When I began working as an investigator in the preliminary procedure of abuse cases I was still employed by a diocese, but after I became a professor employed by a state university I noticed within myself how this gave me an internal freedom to speak the truth and verbalize it, of course respectfully, but certainly more clearly in meetings with the relevant ecclesial authority. That authority is not always ready to hear the truth, also because sometimes the accused has been a classmate of the bishop, or the bishop ordained the man against the advice of the rector of the seminary. You, graduates, might encounter as well the difficulty for leadership to hear the truth, but in the long run the independence of the advisor helps the victim, the leadership, the faith community and even the advisor him or herself to address the abuse and the handling of the abuse with clarity.

### ***Canonical Penal Procedures***

In 2019 the Holy See decided that lay persons can be advocates or procurators in ecclesial penal trials. Because of the need of transparency, this really is a step in the right direction.<sup>2</sup> It must be said, however, that before this decision was made, it had already been possible to appoint laypersons even as judges in these penal matters, but the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith needed to grant a dispensation from the requirement of priesthood.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rescriptum Ex audientia SS.Mi of December 3, 2019 and signed by the Cardinal Secretary of State and the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, effective January 1, 2020, Art. 2. §1. Cf. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/2019/documents/rc-seg-st-20191203\\_rescriptum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2019/documents/rc-seg-st-20191203_rescriptum_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Normae De gravioribus, delictis (2010), Art., 15 : [http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources\\_norme\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_norme_en.html) (14.02.2020). The norms determine that also a notary must be a priest. The question may be asked what the theological rationale is behind this provision. Transparency would suggest to have at least the option to appoint “outsiders” for this position, i.e. those who do not belong to the clergy.

There is no reason to believe that this latter provision has been abrogated. It is still valid today. Of course the person appointed should be duly qualified in canon law, but that is also applicable to the judges who are priests. Bishops should feel encouraged to petition for a dispensation in order to appoint in a college of judges of priests also a lay person or deacon; yes, the Holy See should consider lifting the need for a dispensation to appoint lay persons besides priests to these offices precisely because of the need to restore trust in the exercise of leadership. It would seem a key aspect in being transparent.<sup>4</sup>

I mentioned the need that the judges need to be “duly qualified” in penal law. Until recently an ordinary training in canon law did not provide for the specific knowledge necessary for these specific penal trials. Hence, faculties of canon law should be encouraged to train students not only in the meaning and jurisprudence – if it were then available - of the delicts and the procedures of penal trials, but expand that education to determining what might be elements of proof and - rather important - how to obtain the evidence. Who would want to consult with medical doctors who have only attended classes on diseases and their remedies, but have not learned what the specific symptoms are and - rather important - how to conduct a medical investigation on a specific patient leading to a proper diagnosis? In a similar way those engaged in penal trials need to learn and develop skills on how to obtain the relevant evidence. They need to learn how to conduct a hearing in a penal trial which is very different from hearings in marriage cases. How to evaluate, for example, the credibility of the testimony of a seven year old? How to obtain evidence of abuse in relation to a report that the abuse began in the context of confession (the delict of *sollicitatio*) where thus also the seal of confession must be respected? In the civil realm forensic investigations and reports are used. How does the church make use of these and how do they need to be understood and interpreted? Sometimes the question that forms the basis for the forensic report might differ between state and ecclesial penal trials. How to evaluate reports of the civil authorities with regard to child pornography? It must be recalled that the delicts in canon and civil law are not identical and the standard of proof might differ. The simple question: “Did you abuse a child?” is the absolute wrong question. Moreover, the response in the negative would not have

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<sup>4</sup> The Code of Canon law determines that judges need to be “clerics” (c. 1421 §1). Clerics are deacons, priests and bishops. The Code also determines that laypersons can be appointed as judges, but only one person in a college (c. 1421 §2). With regard to marriage cases a change was made: two persons in a college of three can be lay persons. (Cf. Francis. *Motu Proprio MP Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesu*, 107 (2015) AAS 958-967, c.1671 § 3). The third person needs to be a cleric, but this could thus also be a deacon. Theologically relevant is the decision by Pope Benedict XVI that deacons are not acting in *persona Christi capitis* (cf. Benedict XVI, *Motu proprio Omnium in mentem*, AAS 102 (2010) 8-10), because these provisions taken together result in the possibility of having a college of judges composed of two lay persons and a deacon, at least for marriage cases. That then sheds new light on the discussion about the exercise of *sacra potestas* (c.129 CIC/1983) and asks for further research in relation to penal cases.

any value. Sometimes victims will say: “I do not know the name of the priest who abused me.” Judges in canonical penal procedures need to learn that this might be due to the fact that the priest, having been the single priest in the parish, was indeed only known to the children as “father”. The fact that a victim does not know the name does not say anything about the credibility of the allegation. Techniques for interrogating and for asking the right questions can be learned. Police officers and judges in civil courts take regularly trainings in this regard. And you, graduates of this Diploma, might want to remember that by asking the wrong questions or suggestive as someone comes to report to you an abuse, you might preclude a just trial. So it is necessary for all to know what and what not to do when and how.<sup>5</sup>

All those who work in penal trials would need to learn how to evaluate the testimony of all concerned and of the other elements of proof. It would be necessary to study together the jurisprudence on these penal cases, if it were then available. May the lifting of the Pontifical Secret which occurred December 6, 2019 also lead to at least lower level tribunals and advocates having access to the jurisprudence.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, considering that the Gregorian University has a faculty of canon law as well as expertise present in the area of abuse, maybe something similar to a Diploma in Safeguarding could be offered as well. This would be of particular relevance for all those who once studied canon law, but did so at a time when these specific penal matters were not treated extensively in their studies.

### ***The Ministry of Safeguarding***

You the graduates of this course have successfully completed your studies and are now eager to return to your home countries. Soon bishops or superiors might appoint you as a safeguarding officer or as the one who receives complaints. You will be entering in what I would like to call the ministry of safeguarding. And indeed it is a “ministry”. A ministry that is characterized by opportunities and challenges. Opportunities to help make the church a safer place, opportunities to set up trainings and courses and offices to provide for safeguarding.

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<sup>5</sup> In a rather famous process which was heard at the state court in Münster (Germany) in the early 1990-s teachers in a kindergarten had the suspicion that a colleague was abusing children. The teachers began to ask the children questions. They phrased the questions in such a way and asks the children so often that later on the court could not establish the truth anymore, because the memory of the children had been blurred by the way the teachers had spoken with them. Once there is a suspicion that there is an abuse, persons skilled in taking evidence that fulfills the criteria of judicial investigations need to be contacted immediately. Cf. <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montessori-Prozess> (16.02.2020).

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Instruction *On the Confidentiality of Legal Proceedings*, cf. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/2019/documents/rc-seg-st-20191206\\_rescriptum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2019/documents/rc-seg-st-20191206_rescriptum_en.html)

Safeguarding really begins with a capacity to listen, to walk with victims and to see that they are heard. It implies providing for a person or an office where concerns can be expressed or allegations be reported. The person or the institution must be easily accessible also for those who do not have much education or feel great shame to come forward. It might need to be in a building that is not a rectory or a bishop's house as victims might feel inhibited to go there. It helps when the place of encounter is neutral. If abused by a priest, it might be difficult for some to report to another priest or to a group of priest who seat themselves like a tribunal. Required are accessibly, open and transparent procedures that lead and allow for the administration of justice.

### *Parents*

Listening to the painful stories of victims of sexual abuse makes one aware how this impacts not only the victims but their whole family. Often times their parents have tremendous feelings of guilt because they did not prevent the abuse: "Father" was a good friend of the family and dined with them often. Hence parents feel at times tremendously guilty that they themselves "opened the door" to the abuser and provided thus access to their child. Or the parents feel guilty because they did not hear or not believe their child when it tried to communicate to the parents that something was seriously wrong. Crying out loudly a father said to me: "How could I *not* believe my child?" Another father said: "Thirty years ago my son told me he did not want to be an altar boy anymore, because Father had a weird smell and he did not like the way he was touching him." The parent said: "How could I *punish* my child for saying something *I* was not willing to hear? My reaction destroyed the relationship with my son for ever." The abuse impacts as well siblings and indeed it impacts the marital and family life of the victim once that person is an adult. Moreover, the abuse might severely impact the relationship of the victim and others with God for the rest of their life.

### *Victims*

In my work as a canon lawyer when doing the so-called preliminary canonical penal investigations I had to hear and yes indeed tried to listen to both victims and abusers. Victims want to be heard - and rightly so. They are afraid that once more they will not be believed. Sometimes the fact that they were not believed and maybe even punished for telling their story caused even more harm than the abuse itself. They want to hear from the church that

what happened was not “their fault”. They have a need to be told officially - often times by a person who holds authority in the church – such as a bishop or major superior - that they are not responsible for what occurred.

Sometimes victims long for their abuser – and more recently for the responsible bishop or superior who seriously failed in his response to their allegation of abuse - to acknowledge the pain and suffering that was inflicted on them. The sad truth is that very few abusers and bishops who failed in their response are able to do that. In my experience the issue is for many victims not so much - or certainly not only - a matter of money or financial compensation even if this is rather important when people need support to get psychological help, have lost educational opportunities and / or as a result of the abuse are unable to work. The financial aspect is important, but the healing of the emotional and spiritual wounds that were inflicted require a deeper response. An important step, also for you graduates in your ministry in safeguarding, is to help people to speak the truth and to say it out loudly, to put it in writing both for the abuser, the one who covered up and the victim so that victims can read this time and again, when they need it. A victim said to me: “Reading the paper, where it was written in black and white, that the church believes me and that I was not responsible for what Father did to me, I got overwhelmed by emotions and began to cry. That was the moment where healing could begin. It was the moment where my life took a turn once more: From being a victim to becoming a survivor.”

### *Pontifical Secret*

It is for this reason that it is so important that the Holy See recently lifted the pontifical secret for abuse cases.<sup>7</sup> It enables church authorities to share with victims the outcome of a case in a more constructive way. The truth should not be covered by secrecy. Yet, confidentiality - which is very different from secrecy – must be further secured in particular for the sake of victims and their families. Hence the lifting of the pontifical secret does not imply that any person interested can just walk into an office and request that files be handed out. Victims may not be used for one’s own interest: it would be an abuse again.

The truth also calls for justice to be administered. This requires, for example, to see abuse not only as a sin against the sixth commandment – as the 1983 Code of Canon Law does - or against chastity - as the 1990 Code for the Eastern Churches does -, but to see it as delict. It is

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 6 above.

also of extreme importance that the church begins to see the delict as a violation of the *dignity* of another person. Once it is seen in that perspective it is possible to see the need for canonical procedures in which the (advocate of the) victim has a role as well as attend to the question of reparation of damage inflicted on another person.

The administration of justice requires fair and transparent procedures and a trial in which victims have – in one way or the other – a possibility to be involved. This is currently only the case in very limited and specific forms of trials.

Administering justice requires to attend to both rights of victims *and of* accused. The latter would imply accessibility at least for advocates and judges to jurisprudence, which hopefully with the lifting of the pontifical secret, will be possible soon. Accessibility to jurisprudence implies that the chance of applying justice *equally* increases.

### ***Failure of Handling Abuse***

In listening to victims some express that they reported the abuse to a bishop or superior at an earlier time and were not only not believed but at times even scolded at. These victims - it must be said aloud - incurred severe injustice once more. These leaders did not just morally fail in their response, they also failed seriously in the exercise of the office they were holding. They might argue that they did so to protect the reputation of the church, but if this was really the overriding motivating clause, they certainly made a serious mistake in scaling the reputation of the church above the violation of human dignity. Such an outcome of balancing these values is hardly in conformity with the moral teaching of the church itself.

Handling allegations in this way led to an unwritten policy of “covering up” which - it seems - was applied widely in the institution. Consequently, also existing canonical provisions and obligations that come with the offices of a diocesan bishop and of a major superior which did and do prescribe specific actions when allegations become known, were - to say the least - ignored. It is important to note that Pope Francis brought about a major change in this regard when in 2016 he issued the *Motu proprio* entitled *As a loving mother*.<sup>8</sup> The document leaves no doubt that bishops and Major Superiors of Religious Institutes and of Societas of Apostolic Life can lose their office if they “through negligence committed or through omission facilitated acts that have caused grave harm to others” (Art. 1). That harm can be physical,

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_lettera-ap\\_20160604\\_come-una-madre-amorevole.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20160604_come-una-madre-amorevole.html).

moral or spiritual. A further step forward occurred when in 2019 pope Francis issued the Motu proprio *Vos estis lux mundi* through which he also decided on a procedure on where to submit a complaint in this regard.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Abuse Affects those who Engage in the Ministry of Safeguarding***

You, the graduates of this program; will have to be prepared to encounter also the complaints of mishandling allegations of abuse. At times you might be shocked about what you hear about a person whom you thought you could trust. You might have to face information about a person whom you thought would never do such things. It will shake you, as it shook me, when I learned that while sitting in class in Ottawa I had been sitting for two years beside a serious sex offender who later had to serve a prison sentence of several years. I could not have imagined that he had done this. It shocked me when colleagues, who had become judicial vicars, were found guilty themselves of abuse. I too had to learn that my judgment about another person could not be trusted, yes it had failed. When that occurs one becomes more cautious.

And if this occurs to you, dear graduates, I hope that you have a strong support system of friends with whom you can talk about your hopes for a better church and about the dissolutions that you may sometimes encounter. Stay in touch with each other after you leave Rome. Find friends with whom you can pray, laugh and support each other. Learn to distinguish between the offices that the church has and the office holders, because that helps to continue to see that the church is Holy, but that its members including those who exercise the *sacra potestas*, the sacred power, are rather human, make at times serious mistakes and display as well human weaknesses.

### ***Closing remarks***

As I come to a close I wish the professors and the leadership of the Gregorian University all the best for further developing their programs with regard to safeguarding and the administration of justice.

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507\\_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html).

Dear graduates, as you leave this university and return to your countries to enter into the ministry of safeguarding, I wish you all the best for your ministry which is a service to those who are today “the little ones”, but who are the future of our church and society.

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