PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITÀ GREGORIANA

Centre for Child Protection

Press Release
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Culture: An Enabler or Barrier to Safeguarding

From 18 to 21 June 2018, nearly 80 delegates of bishops conferences and conferences of religious major superiors gathered at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome for the 15th consecutive Anglophone Safeguarding Conference. The conference, which was jointly organized this year by the episcopal conferences of Australia and Papua New Guinea-Solomon Islands and by the Centre for Child Protection (CCP), considered the theme "*Culture: An Enabler or Barrier to Safeguarding*" from the different perspectives of a variety of contexts.

Keynote speakers and respondents highlighted the dire situations in which minors find themselves in countries around the globe and the impact of cultural elements on their safety, offering theoretical reflections and practical suggestions for societal and church renewal.

Three points summarize the thoughts, work, and research shared by delegates.

1) **Culture has many facets (e.g. geography, structures, customs, language) which can also be found in the Catholic Church.**

Fr. Tim Brennan MSC, chair of the conference, reminded participants of the conference charter: "*The purpose of the Conference is to enable the representatives to learn together and to learn from each other in order to better respond to victims and to respond sensitively to those affected by abuse and to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from abuse within our church communities.*" He pointed out that even though great cultural differences exist there is much we can learn from one another's experiences in the Church—both what works and what doesn't—in responding to and in the prevention of abuse.

2) **Understanding of the differences within the worldwide Church is generally limited and perceiving how culture contributes to helping or hindering safeguarding is key to implementing lasting change.**

Commenting on her experience of the conference, Sheree Limbrick, CEO of Catholic Professional Standards Ltd, said, "*At the Anglophone 2018 Conference I have witnessed all of these elements in action – commitment to protecting children and vulnerable adults; shared learning and knowledge exchange; and frank and fearless conversation about tackling the structural, social, governance and cultural issues which need to be reformed to create child safe environments within the Church globally.*"

3) **We need to advance the Church community's awareness about new challenges for safeguarding minors brought on by the changing world of digital media.**

Fr. Hans Zollner SJ, president of the CCP, stated that "*the 'culture' created by the internet permeates the lives of almost every person on the planet.*" To keep children safe, "*we need to work together with all parties involved.*"

The interactive way in which this conference was organized is an attempt to enter into a real and effective dialogue about good practices. President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Archbishop Mark B. Coleridge asserted, "*The meeting is not theoretical but intensely practical. It's all about keeping children and vulnerable people safe in every way, which means cultural change in the Church. That's a large and complex task, but the Anglophone conference has become a key part of helping us meet the challenge.*"

During the event, conference leadership gave special consideration to the future of the conference, talking about increasing participation of membership beyond the English-speaking, or Anglophone, world.

The conference represents an important, annual event, which gives the chance to bishops conferences' delegates and child protection officers from local Churches to gather and learn from each other, with the aim of improving and making always more effective the Catholic efforts to create a safer world for children.