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PROMOTING THE UNIVERSITY CERTIFICATE IN SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SAFEGUARDING COMMISSION

Following the recommendation of the Safeguarding Commission, the Church imposed a restriction on 4 persons in 2018, and a restriction on one other person in 2019. These involved diocesan priests, religious priests and lay persons, where an allegation of sexual abuse was substantiated. Three other restrictions concerned physical and emotional abuse, and poor practice. Andrew Azzopardi, the Head of the Safeguarding Commission, explained that all these cases were referred to civil authorities.

Whilst presenting the Commission's annual report, Andrew Azzopardi explained that the Church is proactive in reporting cases to the police or social services to ensure that allegations of abuse are also investigated by the competent civil authority.

Andrew Azzopardi said that a new Certificate in Safeguarding of Children and Young People offered by the University of Malta commenced in October 2020. The Safeguarding Commission spearheaded this initiative in order to continue to build a positive safeguarding culture in society. This university course is offered by the Faculty of Theology and the Faculty for Social Wellbeing in collaboration with the Safeguarding Commission.

Besides this initiative which was well received, the Commission continued its safeguarding training for Church personnel. During 2018 and 2019, a total of 966 teachers, catechists, priests, religious, seminarians and volunteers were trained. As part of its vetting process required by Law for any organisations working with minors, the Commission verified that 4,451 people received clearance to work with minors.

Over the last two years, the Safeguarding Commission conducted a review of the Church's safeguarding policy and is in the process of having it published early next year. This follows a thorough consultation with victims, service users of various Church entities, statutory agencies and key stakeholders: the Commissioner for Mental Health, the Directorate for Child Protection, the Malta Police Force, the Office of the Commissioner for Children, and the Social Care Standards Authority.

In 2018, the Safeguarding Commission received 19 new allegations involving **minors** and 10 involving **vulnerable adults**.

The Commission concluded 17 assessments involving minors. Out of these, six were substantiated, one was a matter of poor practice, four were unfounded, two were unsubstantiated, one involved someone who was not Church personnel, and three were referred to a third party as they were not a safeguarding concern.

The Commission concluded 10 assessments involving vulnerable adults out of which seven were referred to third parties as they were not a safeguarding concern, one was unsubstantiated, one was unfounded and one involved poor practice.

In 2019, 16 new allegations were received involving **minors** and eight involving **vulnerable adults**.

The Safeguarding Commission concluded eight assessments involving minors, out of which two were substantiated, two were unsubstantiated and one was not Church personnel. One more complaint involved someone who was deceased and two involved complaints where it was not possible to identify the person concerned due to lack of information.

The Commission concluded three assessments involving vulnerable adults of which two were unsubstantiated and one was unfounded.

Andrew Azzopardi reiterated the call for the setting up of a centralised authority to share information between organisations on people who may pose a risk to children and vulnerable adults. He explained that the experience of the Church over the past few years has shown that the only way to truly support and empower victims of abuse is by facing this scourge in a transparent way.