

Holy See: Curial departments sign new agreement on child protection

With this new agreement, the Commission for the Protection of Minors and the Section for the First Evangelization and New Particular Churches of the Dicastery for Evangelization will be working together at the service of the particular Churches in the area of prevention of abuse of the most fragile persons.

By Vatican News

Cardinal Seán O'Malley and Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle met together on Friday, 21 April, in the offices of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors to sign a memorandum of understanding between the Commission and the Dicastery for Evangelization's Section for the First Evangelization and New Particular Churches.

The new agreement helps the two Vatican departments work together in service of the particular Churches in the area of prevention of the abuse of the most fragile, and follows from Pope Francis' reform of the Roman Curia with the Apostolic Constitution [*Praedicate Evangelium*](#).

Speaking with Vatican News immediately after the signing ceremony, the two Cardinals emphasized that the enhanced collaboration aims at promoting concrete structural change to build a culture of safeguarding, with service to victims, the local Churches, and the Bishops at the heart of the initiative.

Read the interview with Cardinal O'Malley and Cardinal Tagle with Vatican Radio's Christopher Wells (full audio below):

Vatican News: Thank you very much, Cardinal O'Malley. Can you tell us a little bit about this memorandum agreement?

Cardinal O'Malley: Well, obviously, the Dicastery for Evangelization is so important and a major part of their responsibility is working with the Churches in the traditional mission countries and the emerging nations and the new Churches. And very often

where there's a lot of activity and a lot of growth on the part of the Church, but sometimes limited resources. I began as a missionary bishop myself, and was running a diocese for a couple of thousand dollars a year. So I understand what it's like.

So certainly we hope to be able to work with the dioceses that the congregation, the Dicastery is involved with to help them to be able to develop programs, to be able to receive victims and have a pastoral care for them, to make sure that the guidelines that they're using are not just about juridical practices, but also have a very strong pastoral outreach to those who have been harmed and an element of safeguarding and prevention, which is very important to make sure that our Church, churches and schools and communities, will be safe places for children and young people.

We also will be working with the bishops' conferences when they do their ad limina visits to make sure that part of the Quinquennial report will be about safeguarding and what have been the challenges and the successes, and give them an opportunity to come and talk about that here.

And of course, another responsibility [of] the Dicastery is what we used to call the Montessori school for bishops. You know, all the new bishops are brought to Rome for training, and this is a very valuable exercise. As I always tell people, when I was named a bishop almost 40 years ago, there weren't any 'baby bishop' schools. And the only training I got was when the cardinal, who was the archbishop, said, 'Well, you wear the ring on the right hand and carry the crozier and the left hand.'

But as I always tell the new bishops, you know, if we had had the opportunity to hear about safeguarding, and *understand*, the history of the Church would have been different. We always try and take a survivor, a victim with us too, so that the new bishops can hear firsthand just how dramatic the effect of this terrible crime has been on their lives and their families and their communities.

So we hope to be involved going forward with the training of the new bishops, which is such an important feature...

Vatican News: Can you speak a little bit about the specific areas for cooperation between the Dicastery section and the Commission?

Cardinal O'Malley: Well, our commissioners and the staff will be involved in the various regions. And that's one of the good things that have come about since the publication of *Praedicate Evangelium* and the input that Pope Francis has had, asking us to go out and work with the bishops' conferences to make sure that they have the capacity to be able to accompany the victims and to work with them. And so it will be a partnership.

And of course, the Dicastery has so much contact with all of these dioceses and the Dicastery has a very broad mandate. So we would help them with that because they also oversee the seminaries and the religious and so many other things.

Vatican News: And Cardinal Tagle, can you talk about specifically how this agreement, this memorandum of understanding, will affect the work that you do in your Dicastery?

Cardinal Tagle: Well, it's a welcome development. First, internally, you know, with Pope Francis's *Predicate Evangelium* also in the spirit of synodality. The offices in the Roman Curia are asked to work together in an interdicasterial manner so that we could learn from each other, we could provide information and then also support each other. So this is one big exercise of this interdicasterial working together.

And the other thing is we can offer, we can open to the commission the many so-called ecclesial spaces that the Dicastery has been handling, you know, in the area of the Dioceses and the Vicariates, apostolic Vicariates, under their competence, especially in the area of formation. This is what I see, the formation of the bishops, the clergy, the seminarians, the religious in this area. At the same time, to assist – the Commission could assist the Dicastery and the episcopal conferences in understanding better, you know, the impact on human lives and on communities, of abuse, abusive behavior. And we also hope – because in the territories, in most of the territories, under our responsibility, the Church is a small minority – but we hope that through this initiative, you know, the local Churches could be a leaven, you know, to the wider society, you know, of course, with God's grace, because sometimes the voice of the Church in those areas very like a whisper, you know. But it is much needed. You know, this is a contribution of the Church to the wider society.

Vatican News: Cardinal O'Malley already kind of alluded to some of the challenges that face the Church in the ecclesial spaces that your Dicastery deals with. Can you talk about some of the challenges for the Church in the parts of the world that you're most concerned with? Especially with regard to safeguarding...

Cardinal Tagle: Yes. Yes. The... I have some ideas, but not necessarily in the order of importance, you know. Like, for example, I see a need for a cultural, a cultural reassessment, you know, because I noticed that even if there is legislation or guidelines now, sometimes my impression is [that] the guidelines are clear for those of us who have been formed in a particular culture, and we tend to presume that what is clear to us is clear to other people now. So this is one challenge, you know, so do we... Even simple things like a human being. I mean, what is a human being? Who is a human being, you know, or we talk about the rights of a human being... But if a person is not seen as a human being, so all the talk about rights just collapses. So this is one concern that we have, not only in the area of safeguarding, but *especially* in the area of safeguarding. We deal with, the Dicastery deals with, the situations where the cultural modes, you know, are so diverse that even within the Church, you know, we have the what do you call this, the call to really bring in the gospel values into these. So respecting the culture, but at the same time, the purification of culture. This is one big, big area that I see.

Vatican News: Thank you. And coming back to you, Cardinal O'Malley, you had already mentioned formation and training. Can you talk about how the work of the commission has changed since the reform six months ago? Especially I understand you're focusing a little bit more on the implementation of policy. Can you talk about some of the projects that you've begun to implement?

Cardinal O'Malley: Yes. Well, originally the commission was set up to advise the Holy Father, and we were basically a group of volunteers from around the world who involved ourselves a lot in consciousness-raising, reaching out to victim survivor groups, trying to be involved in some educational efforts. But with the publication of *Praedicate Evangelium* and our meeting with the Holy Father, he has asked us to concentrate on the guidelines and to help the Churches throughout the world to make sure that they have structures in place for safeguarding.

And so we have been able to, through some wonderful grants, hire people, and we've set up a sort of a regional structure and hopefully that will allow us to have more impact on the ground, to be able to have more interaction with the various bishops conferences. And so we are very excited about all of these possibilities that are developing.

Vatican News: And I want to ask a, perhaps, more difficult question. Recently we've seen some criticisms of the work of the commission in various news reports. And I think from the beginning, the Church has faced an uphill battle dealing with concerns about how the church is dealing with abuse and making sure that minors and vulnerable persons can be protected. Can you talk a little bit about how do you respond to the criticisms that we've seen recently?

Cardinal O'Malley: Well, first of all, I would say in the Commission, we're used to criticisms. When the commission was established, there were all kinds of, I think, unrealistic expectations as to what this group of volunteers would be able to do to solve all the problems of sexual abuse in the Church and the world.

But we've learned a lot from those criticisms. And I think the Holy Father, in inserting us into the Curia with this relationship with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, gives us an opportunity to be at the service of the Curia and to build a culture of safeguarding within the Curia. I mean, a lot of people were disappointed with that decision, and many of us were surprised. But the more that I come to experience this, I think this is an opportunity for the commission to really have an impact and to help bring about more communication within the entire Curia in the area of safeguarding.

Now, Father Zollner, who enjoys such goodwill among all the members of the Commission, for whatever reason, has not participated much in the life of the Commission in the last year. So we were unaware of his concerns or the depths of his concerns and ... I'm just sorry that he didn't choose to come to our plenary, which is coming up very shortly, and share with all of us what those concerns were rather than to resign and call a press conference, which I don't think has been terribly helpful. But we will certainly try to address all of this in our upcoming meeting with the commissioners.

Vatican News: You're already preparing some steps forward in light of the criticisms that you've heard?

Cardinal O'Malley: Well, we will certainly discuss this. This will be on our agenda.

Vatican News: And speaking specifically to the memorandum that we've seen you sign today, just now, is there anything else you'd like to add? Any specific points that you want to highlight?

Cardinal O'Malley: No, just that we are so happy for the opportunity to work with this Dicastery, which is such an important... I mean, I think half of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions in the world come under, the pastoral care of this Dicastery. And so we're very enthused and grateful for this opportunity to work with them.

And as I said, now we see our new role as to promote a culture of safeguarding in all the dicasteries of the Curia. And this is what the Holy Father has asked us to do in this new mandate.

Vatican News: So this will be the first step in building that culture, not just with Cardinal Tagle's Dicastery, but throughout the Roman Curia

Cardinal O'Malley: Yes, and we'll be working with other dicasteries in a similar fashion.

Vatican News: Thank you so much.

And Cardinal Tagle, I'd like to give you the last word. For your Dicastery, is there anything in particular you'd like to highlight about this agreement and about moving forward?

Cardinal Tagle: Just maybe to single out one part of the agreement. There's a mention here of the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood... Because, you know, this is one of the four pontifical societies. And that exists not only as a society of mission, in the territories under the Dicastery, but it's a universal thing now. So, we are very happy that, through this agreement and this powerful and very productive mission society, dealing with the formation of the youth or the young people in prayer, in mission, you know, would be receiving with the help of the commission this initial formation.

And my hope also is you know, not only the Commission, but even in dioceses, the past years, our efforts towards building a Church that protects the young people seem to

have focused – and rightly so – focused on the ordained, ordained. And we hope that through this more... this *broader* approach, which is a bit more cultural building, a culture of safeguarding in the Church. And we can not abandon the concern regarding the clergy but also expand. You know, for example, the dicastery for families, youth, etcetera. Because we know for a fact that, especially with the use of social media, much of the abuse happens in the homes and [is] perpetrated by by parents, you know, and sometimes the reason is poverty. So the dicastery for human development.

How, for example, would the dioceses include something of this in our pastoral, care for the families, in our, like the preparation of couples for marriage, you know, or the youth ministry for those preparing for confirmation? So I see the expansion of this culture.

Vatican News: Cardinal Tagle, thank you. Cardinal O'Malley, thank you.

The transcription of the interview with Cardinals O'Malley and Tagle has been edited for clarity.

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