

Pope Francis Finally Moves on Clergy Sex Abuse

Pope Francis is to set up a special committee to help protect children against sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, the archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Sean Patrick O'Malley, said on Thursday.

The move is Francis' first major step to address the crisis that has discredited the church, in the face of charges the Vatican has not done enough to protect children or make amends.

"The Holy Father has decided to establish a specific commission for the protection of children," O'Malley told reporters.

"The commission will be able to advise the Holy Father about the protection of children and pastoral care of victims of abuse."

Cases of abuse by clergy have forced the church to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation worldwide, bankrupting a string of dioceses in the United States.

The precise mission and make-up of the committee is not yet decided but its role is likely to involve forming guidelines for child protection, improving screening of priests, examining ways to help victims and coordinating cooperation with civil authorities over abuse cases, O'Malley said.

It is also expected to examine ways to help communities affected by abuse and provide mental health care to victims.

The proposal of a child protection committee was first discussed on Wednesday and Francis immediately approved the suggestion when told of it on Thursday, meaning it could be

immediately announced, O'Malley said.

The Vatican was criticized for refusing to share details of its internal investigations into abuse cases earlier this week and some commentators have faulted the first Latin American pope for not addressing the inherited abuse scandal.

O'Malley pioneered a pro-active response to the issue by publishing a database of Boston clergy accused of sexual abuse of minors online in 2011.

His announcement came on the third and final day of a series of closed-door meetings between Pope Francis and a special commission of eight cardinals who are discussing the Vatican's troubled administration.

The group, named a month after the pope's election, aims to push through reforms of the top-heavy administration and tackle festering scandals like child sex abuse by priests. It will next meet from February 17-19, O'Malley said.

In January the Holy See will be questioned by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on its response to the abuse crisis in relation to the 1990 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the Holy See has signed.

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