

Sheila Hollins member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

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This week I met up with Baroness Sheila Hollins from the UK. She is a member of the House of Lords and has been appointed to Pope Francis' Commission for the Protection of Minors. She is a very accomplished and eminent person, former president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and part of the Vatican team sent to Ireland to inquire into the Diocese of Armagh.

Baroness Hollins speaks gently and frankly about the enormous task facing the global Catholic Church to address child abuse and to prevent it happening again. She acknowledges that some, like Pope Francis "get it", and others don't.

Ever the realist she knows that real change takes shifts in culture as well as practice. For the Church, that means understanding the impacts of clericalism and the abuse of power. It means having a deep appreciation of how entrenched, defensive institutional attitudes pervade across the life of the Church. It means being explicit about how victims and survivors are placed first in every consideration.

Practical steps are required to bring compliance with safe guarding up to best practice. This is at the heart of the Royal Commission's agenda. It is also deeply sought after by victims who repeatedly ask that every measure is taken to prevent the abuse ever happening again.

Our Council has recommended a new oversight regime be instigated in the Church to such an end. Ideally governments would set up structures for all institutions that provide services for children. But governments are slow to move. Just look at how long they are taking to get their collective act together on national redress!

The Church needs to move now and hopefully governments will catch up.

Just as Baroness Hollins, and our Australian appointee to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, Kath McCormack, toil with great purpose to provide the value-added advice the Holy Father desperately needs, our Council continues to prepare for a comprehensive analysis of the cultural and other factors that led to the emergence and management of the sex abuse scandal.

This is essential and urgent work.

Our Church must look at itself and honestly appraise where change is needed. To do otherwise will let everyone down.

Francis Sullivan
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