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As religious leaders, scholars, experts and abuse survivors come together online to participate in a three-day international symposium on faith, healing and prevention, Pope Francis sent a message as part of a series of opening remarks for the event.

Pope Francis hopes that by bringing together people from "various fields in order to share research, clinical and pastoral experiences and best practices, the symposium will contribute to a greater awareness of the gravity and the extent of child sexual abuse and promote more effective cooperation at every level of society in eradicating this profound evil," said the message, sent on behalf of the pope by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state.

The international and interreligious virtual "Symposium on Faith and Flourishing: Strategies for Preventing and Healing Child Sexual Abuse" was April 8-10. Hosted by Harvard University and its Human Flourishing Program, the symposium was also being sponsored by numerous organizations, including the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and The Catholic Project at The Catholic University of America.

The pope's message was read by Michael Hoffman, a child sexual abuse survivor from Chicago. Hoffman is active in his parish and community, raising awareness about abuse and supporting best practices for child safety as well as promoting survivor-driven initiatives nationwide.

Hoffman thanked the university "for hosting this landmark symposium and for listening to the voices of abuse survivors" and said, "I am honored, deeply honored to have the opportunity to read this message of support from our Holy Father."

In the message, the pope expressed his "gratitude for the continuing efforts being made to ensure the welfare of all of God's children and to restore the dignity and hope to the survivors of abuse."

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The pope sent his "prayerful good wishes," thanked all members of the church, including U.S. Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley of Boston, "who are working so diligently to address the issue of child sexual abuse in the church and the community at large," the message said.

The online event was chaired by Jennifer S. Wortham, a research associate at Harvard University's Human Flourishing Program and executive director of its initiative on Health, Religion and Spirituality.

She is seeking to establish April 8 as World Day for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, Healing and Justice, a proposal she will be launching at the United Nations in September.

"The feeling I got was that it was not really just up to the Catholic Church to establish this day. If it was going to be a day for all survivors of abuse then we needed to work together with other nations and other faith leaders to establish it," she told Vatican News April 8.

April 8 is the birthday of one of her two brothers who were both abused for years by their parish priest starting when they were around 10 years old.

"It was a very traumatic experience for my family," she told Vatican News, "because we were devoutly Catholic" with her grandfather who helped build the parish church

and served as treasurer and her grandmother who sewed for the abusive priest and cooked him dinner.

Wortham and her mother left the church when they learned of the abuse in the 1990s. Wortham later returned to parish life in 2015 and met Pope Francis at the end of a general audience in 2016 to highlight the issue of abuse. "When I met with him, I did see that he was deeply committed to solving this problem."