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An older white man wearing a brown Franciscan habit walks between laity and priests. Some

Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley of Boston, president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, leads a sunrise walk to end abuse, in Baltimore, Nov. 18, 2021. (OSV News photo/CNS file, Bob Roller)

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Vatican City — June 23, 2023
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Emphasizing the responsibility of all Catholics to ensure the church is a safe place, the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors is inviting public comment on a proposed set of principles that church bodies around the world must reflect in their safeguarding guidelines.

Distribution of the draft "Universal Guidelines Framework" was approved by members of the commission at their meeting in May; the framework begins by calling church leaders to "acknowledge and take ownership of their moral, pastoral and governance responsibilities to work for the creation of a 'one church approach' to safeguarding."

The principles, though, insisted guidelines must be tailor-made for different countries and their cultures. And, it said, they should include processes for "regular internal review and external audit procedures."

The framework was sent to the world's bishops' conferences, the heads of religious orders and survivors of abuse for review. But on June 23, the commission also launched a period of public comment, inviting anyone interested to use a survey -- https://www.tutelaminorum.org/universal-guidelines-framework/ -- on the commission's website.

Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley of Boston, commission president, explained in May that the universal framework is meant to update the principles that informed the circular letter by the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2011, which requires bishops' conferences to draft guidelines for dealing with allegations of clerical sexual abuse.

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After consultation "in a spirit of synodality," he said, he hoped the updated framework could be released at the end of 2023. "On the basis of this updated framework, we can develop and finalize an audit tool, also called for by the Holy Father in his audience with us last April, to accompany the guideline framework and to ensure the adequacy of safeguarding policies and procedures within the particular churches."

The commission website said that "while the core principles should apply everywhere, the way those principles manifest themselves will likely differ from one place to another. All church entities will be obliged to ensure their local safeguarding guidelines reflect the general principles" when they are adopted.

The proposed principles included ensuring that "obligations regarding the receipt of reports, complaints and allegations, as well as the procedures governing investigations and case management, are in line with both civil and canon law requirements."

Local guidelines, it said, also should promote a "commitment from each member of the local church, in their own capacity, to work toward the creation of safe environments, under the paradigm of risk management and based on a

comprehensive understanding of the rights of children and vulnerable people."