

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

Mar 14, 2017

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## Exclusive: Marie Collins responds to Cardinal Müller's allegations about abuse commission

by Marie Collins

***Editor's note:** Marie Collins of Ireland is a clergy sexual abuse survivor who resigned March 1 from Pope Francis' Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. Cardinal Gerhard Müller, the head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, gave an interview shortly following Collins' resignation. Collins has written an open letter to Müller in response to that interview, which she asked NCR to publish below.*

Dear Cardinal Müller,

I read with interest the answers you gave to the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* March 5 in reply to items in my statement following my resignation from the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. There are some things you say in this interview to which I feel I need to respond.

1. You state you "**cannot understand the talk of lack of cooperation**" between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and the pontifical commission.

Maybe I can help with an example. In 2015, invitations went to your Congregation from some of the commission's working groups asking that a representative attend their upcoming meetings in Rome to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The invitations were declined and then the members were informed by the Commission Secretary, Msgr. Robert Oliver, that face-to-face meetings would not be possible and any communication with dicasteries must be done in writing.

Things changed eventually, but this took over a year. It was September 2016 before a representative of the CDF was made available and attended Commission working group meetings. The discussions which ensued were very helpful, hopefully for your Congregation as well as the Commission.

1. You say that "**in recent years there has been a permanent contact**" between the commission and the CDF.

I don't know what form this permanent contact took. All I can say is the members of the Commission did not receive any formal reports or see any positive results generated by such contact.

1. You continue with the comment that "**one of our staff is part of it** [*the Commission*]."

Indeed, one of your CDF staff was a member of the Commission. It is surprising though — as you say you had permanent contact with the Commission — that you are not aware that this staff member,

Claudio Papale, ceased active involvement with the Commission in 2015 (although members were not notified of his resignation until May 2016).

The last meeting he attended was the October 2015 plenary. With that meeting being held four months after the announcement of the pope's decision to create a new tribunal to judge bishops' negligent in responding to abuse, Papale was in an excellent position to update commission members on the response within the doctrinal congregation to that initiative.

1. About the new tribunal, you say an "**intense dialogue between various dicasteries involved in the fight against pedophilia in the clergy**" took place following the pope's decision and that the tribunal was only considered a "**project.**"

It was a project you say, only a project? Rereading the Vatican's June 10, 2015, public announcement, it appears to be far more. Very specific actions had already been authorized by the Holy Father, including:

- "The establishment of a new Judicial Section in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith;"
- "Appointment of stable personnel to undertake service in the Tribunal," and;
- "Appointment of a Secretary to assist the Prefect with the Tribunal."

The Holy Father also had already "authorized that sufficient resources will be provided for this purpose."

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Despite the close collaboration you say existed with the Commission, it was not included in this discussion among Vatican dicasteries. Would this not have been a good idea as it would certainly be correct to categorize the Commission as being part of the "fight" to which you refer as well as the originator of the initiative?

You state that the conclusion reached was that the tribunal was not necessary as any negligence could be addressed through the "competencies," "tools" and "legal means" already in place in the Congregation for Bishops. And if in a "special case" this was not sufficient, the Holy Father could always entrust it to your Congregation. So no change was found to be necessary and no implementation took place.

I would like to thank you, Cardinal, for confirming by your words that my statement on the tribunal was true. The pontifical commission recommended it, the Council of Cardinals and the Pope approved it, and then it was rejected by your congregation.

A question comes to mind. If all necessary means have been in place to address the case of a bishop negligent in respect of protection of children from abuse, why then has no bishop been officially, transparently sanctioned or removed for this negligence?

If it is not lack of laws, then is it lack of will? I am sure many survivors, myself included, would be interested, Cardinal, in the answer to this question.

1. In reference to your congregation's refusal to both cooperate with the Commission's work on the Safeguarding Guidelines and to acknowledge letters sent to the Vatican by abuse survivors, you state: "**I know nothing about these two alleged incidents.**"

If you are in doubt about what these "incidents" were, you might refresh your memory by looking at the formal letter of response sent from your Congregation to the Commission Dec. 15, 2016. In its very first

paragraph, that letter lists the two requests as being in regard to "guidelines" and "sending of acknowledgment letters."

In the latter case, the Commission's recommendation [see its Feb. 8, 2016 press statement] that went to the Holy Father and which he approved was that all Vatican dicasteries would acknowledge directly letters sent to them by survivors.

When this recommendation was discussed with the official representative of the CDF at a working group meeting in September 2016, he saw no difficulty in it being done. Yet two months later in the formal written response from your Congregation it was refused.

In any area of endeavor it is difficult to work with a body which is inconsistent in its approach, as you do not know where you stand at any particular time.

The reason given for rejecting of the Commission request, as you confirm in this interview, is respect for "subsidiarity." This emphasis on subsidiarity shows that within the Church, respect for the hierarchical system and its participants still outweighs respect for the individual human person.

I was taught to believe that all are equal in the sight of God, but it seems there is a different view in your congregation when it comes to the local bishop and a victim of abuse. It appears that for you the concern that the local bishop might feel disrespected far outweighs any concern about disrespecting the survivor.

How many much more fundamental measures in regard to justice for survivors and the prevention of abuse are being hidebound by anachronistic, bureaucratic, internal hierarchical considerations?

You might check the aforementioned letter to refresh your memory in regard to the other deeply troubling "incident:" the refusal of cooperation on the Safeguarding Guidelines which are being recommended by the Commission and which the Congregation seems particularly reluctant to discuss.

It may be that it is felt a group of what are seen as "outside" experts are encroaching on what the dicastery views as their area of responsibility. If this is the case, could there not be some way to overcome this by frank discussions of the problem?

The safety of minors in the future is too important for an impasse of any sort to be allowed to stand. Surely every effort must be made to resolve whatever difficulties there are.

1. You say "**the complaints are based on misunderstanding**" about the task of the CDF.

As a former Commission member I am very clear on the function of the CDF and have no misunderstanding in regard to its responsibilities (it would be odd indeed if members of a papal commission were ignorant in the way that is suggested).

The Commission had not expected the Congregation to send anything other than a confirmation to the correspondent that their letter had been received and would receive attention.

This would be pastoral in the sense only that the writer would know they were not being ignored. I am sad a misleading impression has been put into the public domain about this.

1. Lastly, a more personal comment in regard to myself, you state "**I have never had the chance to meet her.**"

Cardinal, it seems you have forgotten the evening we spent seated together at a small dinner in Dublin

after my appointment to the Commission?

During the meal we discussed together the new Commission, my appointment to it and in general the issue of abuse in the Church. Also present were other CDF officials, including Msgr. John Kennedy and then-Fr. Robert Oliver, who before his appointment to the commission was serving as your congregation's Promotor of Justice.

Finally, with respect, Cardinal, I do not know what the motivation is in regard to any difficulties put in the way of the pontifical commission. All it wishes to do is bring better protection to children and vulnerable adults wherever in the world the Catholic Church is present. If there are problems, nothing is gained by maintaining a pretense that all is well.

I would ask that instead of falling back into the Church's default position of denial and obfuscation, when a criticism like mine is raised the people of the church deserve to be given a proper explanation. We are entitled to transparency, honesty and clarity.

No longer can dysfunction be kept hidden behind institutional closed doors. This only succeeds as long as those who know the truth are willing to remain silent.

Yours sincerely,

Marie Collins

Former member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

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**Source URL (modified on 06/06/2022 - 5:33pm):**

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