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## **Message of the Holy Father on the occasion of the conference “Promoting child safeguarding in the time of Covid-19 and beyond”**

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the conference “Promoting child safeguarding in the time of Covid-19 and beyond”, organized by the Pope John XXIII Community with Italian Catholic Action and the Italian Sport Centre, in collaboration with the Centre for Victimology and Security of the University of Bologna, which is taking place today in Rome, in the Saint Pius X Hall:

### **Message of the Holy Father**

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet all of you who are participating - in person and remotely - in the Conference “Promoting child safeguarding in the time of Covid-19 and beyond”, organised by the Pope John XXIII Community with Italian Catholic Action and the Italian Sport Centre, in collaboration with the Centre for Victimology and Security of the University of Bologna. I greet with gratitude the representatives of the European and Italian Parliaments and other Institutions, in particular the Postal Police.

As I said in my Letter to the People of God (20 August 2018), “Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated”. Today you are reflecting together and reaping the fruits of two years of listening, research and training. This work started “from grass roots”, as an expression of the active participation of the people of God in the journey of personal and community conversion. As a Church, we are called to go down this path together, driven by the pain and shame of not having always been good guardians, protecting the minors entrusted to us in our educational and social activities.

This process of conversion urgently requires renewed formation of all those who have educational responsibilities and who work in environments with minors, in the Church, in society, and in the family. Only in this way will it be possible to eradicate the culture of death that every form of abuse, whether sexual, of

conscience or of power, brings with it.

If abuse is an act of betrayal of trust, which condemns those who suffer it to death and causes deep fissures in the context in which it takes place, prevention must be a permanent process of promotion of an ever renewed and certain reliability towards life and the future, on which minors must be able to count. And this is what we, as adults, are called upon to guarantee them, rediscovering our vocation as “artisans of education” and striving to be faithful to it. This means fostering the expression of the talents of those we accompany; respecting their time, their freedom and their dignity; opposing with all means the temptations of seduction and inducement, which only seemingly facilitate relations with the younger generations.

I look with confidence and hope, in particular, at the many young people who have been formed in your Project. It is they in particular who are asking us to take a decisive step of renewal in the face of the wounds of abuse encountered in their peers. I am reminded of Saint Paul VI’s expression: “young people who are ... the apostles of youth”. (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 72) comes to mind, and I think it can also be implemented in this sense, as fraternal closeness and solidarity. The contribution of young people, then, will be valuable in recognising situations at risk and in courageously calling the whole community to its responsibility for the protection of minors, to review its way of relating to the younger generations, so that they can once again be assured of the beauty of meeting, talking, playing and dreaming.

I hope that the adults who have shared this journey with young people may continue to be credible, that is, responsible in their care and consistent in their witness. May they be promoters and custodians of a renewed educational alliance between the generations and between the different contexts in which minors grow up, capable of stimulating between them a generative and protective connection, especially in this complex time of the pandemic.

Finally, as lay associations, I urge you to continue in this action of training in co-responsibility, dialogue and transparency. May the protection of minors increasingly become an ordinary priority in the Church’s educational activity; may it be the promotion of an open, reliable and authoritative service, firmly opposed to every form of domination, violation of intimacy, and complicit silence.

Dear brothers and sisters, I wish you a fruitful conference, which will be a solid basis for continuing together our service to children and young people, to families and to the entire ecclesial and civil community. I assure you of my prayers and I cordially bless you.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 21 October 2021

FRANCIS

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