

STATEMENT FROM THE TRANSPARENCY COMMISSION

Presentation of the Assessment of Institutional Response of the Archdiocese of Panama in cases of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons (2001-2025)

Panama City, 22 September 2026

Today, at the Auditorium of the Universidad Santa María La Antigua (USMA) in Panama City, the Transparency Commission presented its Assessment of Institutional Response (AIR) of how the Archdiocese of Panama handled cases of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons between 2001 and 2025. The event was attended by journalists and by representatives of the Church, the Panamanian State and civil society. The full report is available [here](#).

Sexual abuse causes profound harm wherever it occurs. When it takes place within an institution whose mission includes caring for the most vulnerable, the harm is greater, because it betrays the trust placed in that institution. The Commission wishes, above all, to acknowledge the victims and survivors. It is grateful to those who shared their testimony, and it respects those who have not wished or have not been able to do so: this report is also for them. Its purpose is to help ensure that the harm suffered is recognized and that the Church changes with determination.

A voluntary mandate, with guarantees of independence

In October 2025, the Archbishop of Panama, Most Rev. José Domingo Ulloa Mendieta, asked the Transparency Commission to carry out this assessment on his own initiative, without any court order or request from the Holy See. The Commission accepted the mandate on three conditions, set out in an agreement signed by both parties: full access to information; complete independence in the investigation; and a commitment to publish the findings. Accordingly, the Archdiocese took no part in the investigation, itself, or the drafting or editing of the report. The Archdiocese learned of the report's contents only a few days before its presentation.

The Commission worked with financial independence. Its members received no remuneration from the Archdiocese, and the costs of the assessment were funded by Notre Dame Law School (United States) and the Universidad Villanueva Foundation (Spain). For its part, the Archdiocese covered the team's local transport and accommodation, and provided workspace, during the fieldwork in Panama.

Methodology

The Transparency Commission is an international, independent team of specialists in the prevention and handling of abuse in the Church. Its methodology is grounded in the principles of transitional and restorative justice. It examines institutional management from six complementary perspectives: canonical-legal; clinical;

accountability; theological-pastoral; sociocultural; and communicative. The work included an analysis of the case files held in the diocesan archives, listening to testimonies, a survey of pastoral workers, and a study of media coverage.

During the period under review, the Archdiocese received 37 complaints. The Commission analyzed 24 of them. The remaining 13 fell outside the scope of the study because they concerned events that occurred outside the territory of the Archdiocese or outside the period examined, or because they did not involve abuse of minors or vulnerable persons.

The report finds that case management improved following two initiatives of the Archdiocese: the adoption of its safeguarding guidelines in 2015; and the creation in 2024 of the Pastoral Ministry for Care and Prevention and of the Listening Office.

Five areas requiring action

The report also identifies shortcomings in five fundamental areas.

First, listening to and accompanying victims. In only 2 of the 24 cases do the files record that the victim was heard, compared with at least 8 in which the accused was heard. The path opened in 2024 with the Listening Office must be taken further. Procedures for receiving and accompanying victims are needed that are independent of the canonical-legal process, centered on victims' rights, and designed to prevent re-victimization.

Second, record-keeping. The files show that complaints were received, investigations conducted and decisions taken, but the files do not allow each case to be followed through to its conclusion. A rigorous and complete record is needed, one that makes it possible to reconstruct what happened and to account for the Archdiocese's actions.

Third, prevention. Codes of conduct for interaction with minors and vulnerable persons, rules for the digital environment, and safeguarding clauses for third parties working with the Archdiocese must be put in place.

Fourth, justice. No recorded information was found on the consequences imposed on those found responsible, or on how compliance with those consequences was monitored. The absence of a record does not mean that no sanctions were imposed, but it makes it impossible to verify them or to account for them.

Fifth, reparation. The files contain no record of reparation measures for victims. Reparation requires recognizing the harm, accepting personal and institutional responsibility, and responding to each victim's physical, psychological, moral, spiritual and social needs.

A commitment that must continue

The Commission values the Archdiocese's decision to submit to an external review and to make its findings public. It trusts that the report's recommendations will be translated into concrete measures, with clear responsibilities, timelines and verifiable follow-up.

Anyone who has suffered abuse in a Church setting may, whenever they wish, contact the Listening Office of the Archdiocese of Panama (Gerardo Guerrel, C: 6667-7879) and report the abuse to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

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