

## Female victim to join Vatican's child sex abuse commission

Marie Collins one of four women named in an eight-person team



Pope Francis named the initial members of a commission to advise him on sex abuse policy Saturday, signaling an openness to reach beyond church officials to plot the commission's course and priorities: Half of the members are women, and one was assaulted by a priest as a child.

The eight members were announced after Francis came under fire from victims' groups for a perceived lack of attention to the abuse scandal, which has seriously damaged the Catholic Church's reputation around the world and cost dioceses and religious orders billions of dollars in legal fees and settlements.

The Vatican in December announced that Francis would create the commission to advise the church on best policies to protect children, train church personnel and keep abusers out of the clergy. But no details had been released until Saturday and it remains unknown if the commission will deal with the critical issue of disciplining bishops who cover up for abusers.

In a statement, the Vatican hinted that it might, saying the commission would look into both "civil and canonical duties and responsibilities" for church personnel. Canon law does provide for sanctions if a bishop is negligent in carrying out his duties, but such punishments have never been imposed on a bishop for failing to report a pedophile priest to police.

The eight inaugural members include Marie Collins, who was assaulted as a 13-year-old by a hospital chaplain in her native Ireland and has gone on to become a prominent campaigner for accountability in the church.

Also named was Cardinal Sean O'Malley, one of Francis' key advisers and the archbishop of Boston, where the U.S. scandal erupted in 2002.

Two other members are professors at Rome's Jesuit Pontifical Gregorian University, which in 2012 hosted a seminar for bishops from around the world to educate them on best practices to protect children. Several participants from that conference are now founding members of Francis' commission, including Baroness Sheila Hollins, a British psychiatrist.

During that 2012 conference, Collins told the bishops of her own ordeal, of the hospitalizations, anxiety and depression she endured after Irish church authorities didn't believe her when she reported her attacker, and then blamed her for the assault.

"I was treated as someone with an agenda against the church, the police investigation was obstructed and the laity misled. I was distraught," Collins said at the time, calling for bishops to be held accountable when they don't report abusers to law enforcement.

Nicole Winfield for AP/Huffington Post Religion