



Diocese of Austin

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For Immediate Release – May 9, 2019
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Bishop praises pope for taking action on sexual abuse

On May 9, Pope Francis issued a *Motu proprio*, a mandate directed to the Universal Church, as a follow up to the meeting held in Rome in February with bishops from around the world, including Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Archbishop of Galveston-Houston. This *Motu proprio*, *Vos estis lux mundi*, which translates, *You are the Light of the World*, orders a response to the scourge of sexual abuse in the world, and especially in the Church by her clerics. The USCCB issued a statement welcoming the Holy Father’s decree and also provided a list of frequently asked questions.

“I am extremely grateful to the Holy Father for his leadership in promulgating *Vos estis lux mundi*. Pope Francis clearly articulates a sincere desire for complete and true progress in the protection of all God’s people. I join the Holy Father in remaining committed to ending all forms of abuse in our Church and in our society. The Diocese of Austin continues to work to ensure that no one is harmed by its clergy or lay ministers, striving to bring about God’s goodness in our midst. Please join me in praying for all victims of abuse, that God will give them the strength to heal and find peace,” said Bishop Joe S. Vásquez, Bishop of the Diocese of Austin.

In the decree, the Holy Father explains, “The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful. In order that these [abuses] never happen again, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church.”

Vos estis lux mundi is divided into two major parts. The first applies to priests, deacons and religious men and women. The second part applies to bishops. It mandates that every diocese in the world must have a system of reporting abuse claims by June 1, 2020, something that we in the Diocese of Austin already have in place. It also expects that proper civil and Church authorities be notified in accordance with both civil and canon law. It is the practice of the Diocese of Austin to report allegations of abuse to civil authorities in accordance with Texas law.

Also, in the document, the Pope encourages the use of lay experts in Church investigations. In 2001, the Diocese of Austin established the Ethics and Integrity in Ministry (EIM) Review Board which meets regularly. The Board is made up of law enforcement professionals, lawyers, former prosecutors, school teachers, CPS employees, and child counselors.

Vos estis lux mundi also establishes a process by which all abuse, or cover-up of abuse, by a bishop must be brought to the attention of the nearest Metropolitan Archbishop, along with the Holy See. The Metropolitan Archbishop is most often the Archbishop of the nearest archdiocese with smaller dioceses surrounding it, known as suffragan dioceses. The Diocese of Austin is a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

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The Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin includes 127 parishes, or faith communities, in 25 counties in Central Texas. The diocese stretches over 21,000 square miles.