



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Questions & Answers Regarding Pope Francis's Motu Proprio

Vos estis lux mundi

What does the new Motu Proprio do?

The new Motu Proprio *Vos estis lux mundi* is a significant move forward for the universal Church, one that echoes many of the practices established in the U.S. Bishops' Essential Norms and the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People that have been in force in the United States since 2002. For example, **it affirms the existing:**

- Commitment to provide for the spiritual and emotional well-being of victims/ survivors and their families;

- Duty to comply with all applicable civil laws with respect to the reporting of allegations of sexual abuse of minors to civil authorities;

- Right of any person to report such crimes;

- Guarantee of a prompt and objective investigation;

- Assurance of lay involvement

The Motu Proprio also continues to focus on victims by significantly building upon existing local practices, for example by **expanding:**

The scope of cases to include:

- The sexual abuse of a new classification of “vulnerable persons,”

- The use of violence or other abuse of power to perform or submit to sexual acts,

- Any cover up of such conduct by other;

- Those who are to be reported for such cases, namely, cardinals, bishops, other clerics, religious superiors, and other members of institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life;

- Reporting obligations to include mandatory, internal reporting;

- Safeguards against retaliation or discrimination by mandating “whistle-blower” protections

When do these norms take effect?

They will take effect on **June 1, 2019**;

They will be reviewed by the Holy See after three years and adjusted as needed;

Every diocese and eparchy (either individually or collectively) is to have a publicly accessible means for people to report cases covered under the Motu Proprio by June 1, 2020. In the United States, while this has already been accomplished for cases involving the sexual abuse of minors by priests and deacons, reporting mechanisms will have to be modified to serve the broader categories of the Motu Proprio.

What about cases of sexual misconduct that do not fall under this Motu Proprio?

These are generally already covered by existing diocesan or eparchial codes of conduct. With the help of lay and legal experts, bishops are working on ways to ensure that coverage and enhance awareness and reporting mechanisms for such cases.

How are transparency and confidentiality promoted in this new Motu Proprio?

The Motu Proprio increases transparency by establishing clear procedures that must be followed, reaffirming the obligation to report to civil authorities, providing for lay involvement in internal investigations, protecting from possible conflicts of interest, and ensuring that those who report complaints to the Church are also free to report the same information to others and are protected from retaliation. At the same time, because the Motu Proprio involves the investigation of a complaint, it carefully balances the rights of those involved. Confidentiality is needed for the effectiveness of the investigation. It protects victims and witnesses, as well as the presumption of innocence and the seal of the confessional.

Does this new Motu Proprio interfere or hinder civil law, such as mandatory reporting requirements and civil investigations?

In no way. The Motu Proprio establishes the canonical (Church law) procedures that are to be followed. Included in these procedures, however, is the obligation to comply with all applicable civil laws.

Zero tolerance is not mentioned. Is that no longer the policy of the Catholic Church?

In the United States, zero tolerance has been the policy since 2002, which comes from the Charter and the Essential Norms. The Motu Proprio does not undo this policy. Other episcopal conferences around the world have or will be developing policies appropriate to their legal and cultural situations. The good news here is that what was first thought of as an “American problem” or a “Western problem” is now on everyone’s radar.

Why does the Motu Proprio focus on the role of the Metropolitan?

The Motu Proprio uses the Metropolitan because it is a position in the Church that is grounded in tradition and the teaching of Vatican II and is governed by existing canon law.

This also allows investigations to be carried out on the local level, where the Metropolitan will have more direct access to information, documents, and lay experts to help investigate, and can

collaborate with civil authorities. The Metropolitan, being local, can also take measures to preserve and secure evidence.

Recent investigations of misconduct by a bishop, such as in West Virginia, have successfully followed this practice.

What does this mean for the proposals the U.S. bishops considered last November?

The work of our committees that has already taken place will be examined and adapted to work within the framework of the new Motu Proprio and will be the basis for deliberation over its implementation at the USCCB Plenary Assembly in June.

Source: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops