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Third-party reporting hotline for sexual abuse involving bishops launched for U.S. dioceses

OKLAHOMA CITY – In May 2019, Pope Francis released his apostolic letter, *Vos estis lux mundi* – You are the light of the world – to address the issue of sexual abuse and bishop accountability in the global Catholic Church. *Vos estis* calls upon the metropolitan archbishops to undertake the responsibility for receiving and assessing reports involving bishops that pertain to sexual abuse and related misconduct.

In June 2019, one month after Pope Francis issued his order, the bishops of the United States convened for their general assembly in Baltimore and approved the implementation plan for carrying out the directives of the Holy Father here in the United States.

As part of this ongoing commitment to carrying out *Vos estis*, the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting service (CBAR) was established. The service is operated by Convercent Inc., an independent, third-party entity that provides intake services to private institutions for reports of sensitive topics such as sexual harassment through a secure, confidential and professional platform. Individuals may go to **reportbishopabuse.org** to make a report or call toll-free **(800) 276-1562**.

The reporting service does not take the place of reporting abuse to law enforcement, and all civil child abuse reporting laws must be followed.

The Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting service (CBAR) is for reporting allegations of sexual abuse involving bishops only. To report sexual misconduct by anyone in diocesan ministry who is not a bishop – such as priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters or lay persons working or volunteering for the Church – contact the proper civil authorities and call the Abuse of Minors Pastoral Response Hotline at **(405) 720-9878**.

Under Oklahoma law, all individuals must report an incident or suspicion of sexual abuse of a minor (person under age 18) to civil authorities immediately. If a child is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

When a report is received through the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting service, it will be forwarded to the local metropolitan archbishop and a designated lay staff member who will

assess the report. In the province that includes the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, the Diocese of Little Rock and the Diocese of Tulsa, the metropolitan archbishop is Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley, Archbishop of Oklahoma City.

In the event a report is received concerning the metropolitan archbishop, the report will be forwarded to the senior suffragan bishop, Most Rev. Anthony B. Taylor, Bishop of Little Rock. The report also will be sent to a member of the bishop's staff.

The Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting service allows for individuals to relay to Church authorities any reports of a U.S. Catholic bishop who has:

- Forced someone to perform or to submit to sexual acts through violence, threat or abuse of authority;
- Performed sexual acts with a minor or a vulnerable person;
- Produced, exhibited, possessed or distributed child pornography, or recruited or induced a minor or a vulnerable person to participate in pornographic exhibitions;
- Or, a diocesan or eparchial bishop, or a cleric overseeing a diocese/eparchy in the absence of a diocesan or eparchial bishop, who has intentionally interfered with a civil or Church investigation into allegations of sexual abuse committed by another cleric or religious.

Pope Francis has structured the handling and investigation of the complaints using the metropolitan archbishops. The Catholic Church in the United States has 32 provinces with each province having one archdiocese plus several dioceses. The head of the archdiocese (the archbishop) is also known as the "metropolitan," and he presides over the province. The other dioceses are referred to as "suffragan" dioceses.

While the mandate by Pope Francis in *Vos estis* echoes many of the practices that the Catholic Church in the United States already has implemented since 2002 with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, this new order applies to the bishops and to the Catholic Church worldwide, making clear the pope's concern of the issue of sexual abuse in the Church at a global level.

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