



## Office of the General Secretary

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### MEMORANDUM

To: All Bishops

From: Reverend Monsignor J. Brian Bransfield, General Secretary *JBB*

Date: May 9, 2019

Subject: *Vos estis lux mundi*

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Your Eminence / Your Excellency,

This morning His Holiness Pope Francis released a *motu proprio* to address the ongoing evil of sexual abuse, *Vos estis lux mundi*. Please find the respective translations of the *motu proprio* here:

English: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507\\_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html)

Spanish: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507\\_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html)

Portuguese: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507\\_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html)

Italian: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507\\_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html)

Likewise, please find attached the presidential statement of His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, President, welcoming the *motu proprio*.

Finally, in the hopes that it is helpful to you, please find attached to this memorandum some questions and answers prepared by staff as regards this *motu proprio*.

Thank you for your kind attention to this memorandum.



# NEWS

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## **President of U.S. Bishops' Conference Issues Statement on Pope Francis's Motu Proprio Decree Ordering Worldwide Response to the Evil of Sexual Abuse**

May 9, 2019

WASHINGTON—Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has issued the following statement regarding the release of Pope Francis's Motu Proprio earlier today. The Motu Proprio, *Vos estis lux mundi* ("You are the light of the world"), is a worldwide order to the Church from the Pope, in response to the evil of sexual abuse. The new law comes three months after a meeting in Rome that brought together all episcopal conference presidents from across the globe to discuss the Church sex abuse crisis.

Cardinal DiNardo's full statement follows:

"Today, Pope Francis ordered a worldwide response to the evil of sexual abuse. It calls for the establishment of easily accessible reporting systems, clear standards for the pastoral support of victims and their families, timeliness and thoroughness of investigations, whistleblower protection for those making allegations, and active involvement of the laity. It also leaves latitude for national bishops' conferences, such as the USCCB, to specify still more to account for their local circumstances. We receive the Motu Proprio *Vos estis lux mundi* ('You are the light of the world') as a blessing that will empower the Church everywhere to bring predators to justice, no matter what rank they hold in the Church. It also permits the Church the time and opportunity to bring spiritual healing.

The Holy Father said a 'continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church.' Pope Francis was clear that this responsibility 'falls, above all, on the successors of the Apostles.' As part of this responsibility, bishops also will be held accountable under the authority of this Motu Proprio, which covers sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable persons, sexual acts compelled through the abuse of authority, and any coverup of such crimes.

In publishing this new law, which is applicable to the Church throughout the world, Pope Francis has made clear that protection and healing must reach all of God's children. Following on the meeting just two months ago of all episcopal conference presidents, the Motu Proprio shows Pope Francis expects swift and comprehensive progress. For the Church in the United States, the task before us now is to establish whatever is necessary to ensure the effective implementation of the Motu Proprio. Our committees have already begun the work of preparing implementation measures for deliberation at the USCCB Plenary Assembly in June.

I am grateful for the opportunity to build upon the excellent foundation of the USCCB's *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, the *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons*, and the *Statement of Episcopal Commitment*, all of which date back to 2002. The existing framework in the United States including victim outreach, zero tolerance, reporting allegations to civil authorities, and lay expertise on review boards, among other measures - positions us readily to bring the Holy Father's instructions to action. By embracing the painful experience of survivors and working on these new protections, let us pray we continue to grow into a stronger Church."

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Keywords: Pope Francis, Motu Proprio, *Vos estis lux mundi* (You are the light of the world), Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, clergy sex abuse, worldwide response, conversion of hearts, successors of the Apostles, minors, vulnerable persons, new law, USCCB Plenary Assembly, *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons*, *Statement of Episcopal Commitment*

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**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 *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 others;
    - 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.