

VOS ESTIS LUX MUNDI¹

Apostolic Letter issued motu proprio by the Supreme Pontiff Francis
May 9, 2019

This Apostolic Letter contains the Holy Father's new norms "for the worldwide response to the evil of sexual abuse. These norms add to layers of response already in place in the United States, including the Essential Norms and the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. These new norms affect the global Church and require: easily accessible reporting systems; clear standards for the pastoral support of victims and their families; timeliness and thorough investigations; whistleblower protection for those making allegations; and active involvement of the laity." (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website, USCCB.org) Explanatory notes have been added to this document for clarification.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14). Our Lord Jesus Christ calls every believer to be a shining example of virtue, integrity, and holiness. All of us, in fact, are called to give concrete witness of faith in Christ in our lives and, in particular, in our relationship with others.

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 phenomena, in all their forms, never happen again, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church, so that personal sanctity and moral commitment can contribute to promoting the full credibility of the Gospel message and the effectiveness of the Church's mission. This becomes possible only with the grace of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts, as we must always keep in mind the words of Jesus: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Even if so much has already been accomplished, we must continue to learn from the bitter lessons of the past, looking with hope towards the future.

This responsibility falls, above all, on the successors of the Apostles, chosen by God to be pastoral leaders of his People, and demands from them a commitment to follow closely the path of the Divine Master. Because of their ministry, in fact, Bishops, "as vicars and legates of Christ, govern the particular churches entrusted to them by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power, which indeed they use only for the edification of their flock in truth and holiness, remembering that he who is greater should become as the lesser and he who is the chief become as the servant" (Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution [*Lumen Gentium*](#), 27). What more closely concerns the successors of the Apostles concerns all those who, in various ways, assume ministries in the Church, or profess the evangelical counsels, or are called to serve the Christian People. Therefore, it is good that procedures be universally adopted to prevent and combat these crimes that betray the trust of the faithful.

I desire that this commitment be implemented in a fully ecclesial manner, so that it may express the communion that keeps us united, in mutual listening and open to the contributions of those who care deeply about this process of conversion.

Therefore, I decree:

¹ Latin for "You are the light of the world." It is customary for Vatican documents to be named according to the first few words of the document (in Latin). All Vatican documents are written in Latin and then translated into the major vernacular languages.

TITLE I GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 1 – Scope of Application

§1. These norms apply to reports regarding clerics or members of Institutes of Consecrated Life or Societies of Apostolic Life and concerning:

- a) delicts² against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue consisting of:
 - i. forcing someone, by violence or threat or through abuse of authority, to perform or submit to sexual acts;
 - ii. performing sexual acts with a minor or a vulnerable person;
 - iii. the production, exhibition, possession or distribution, including by electronic means, of child pornography, as well as by the recruitment of or inducement of a minor or a vulnerable person to participate in pornographic exhibitions;
- b) conduct carried out by the subjects referred to in Article 6, consisting of actions or omissions intended to interfere with or avoid civil investigations or canonical investigations, whether administrative or penal, against a cleric or a religious regarding the delicts referred to in letter a) of this paragraph.

§2. For the purposes of these norms,

- a) “*minor*” means: any person under the age of eighteen, or who is considered by law to be the equivalent of a minor;
- b) “*vulnerable person*” means: any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offense;
- c) “*child pornography*” means: any representation of a minor, regardless of the means used, involved in explicit sexual activities, whether real or simulated, and any representation of sexual organs of minors for primarily sexual purposes.

Article 2 – Reception of Reports and Data Protection

§1. Taking into account the provisions that may be adopted by the respective Episcopal Conferences, by the Synods of the Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches and the Major Archiepiscopal Churches, or by the Councils of Hierarchs of the Metropolitan Churches *sui iuris*,³ the Dioceses or the Eparchies,⁴ individually or together, must establish within a year from the entry into force of these norms, one or more public, stable and easily accessible systems for submission of reports, even through the institution of a specific ecclesiastical office. The Dioceses and the Eparchies shall inform the Pontifical Representative of the establishment of the systems referred to in this paragraph.

² A delict is “a crime in canon law, an external violation of a law or precept gravely imputable by reason of malice or negligence.” (http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_glossary-terms_en.html)

³ Latin for “of one’s own right.” It is used in the Code of Canons of Eastern Churches (Church laws) in reference to Eastern Rite Churches that are in communion with Rome—that is, Eastern Catholic Churches.

⁴ An eparchy is a territorial diocese governed by a bishop of one of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

§2. The information referred to in this article is protected and treated in such a way as to guarantee its safety, integrity, and confidentiality pursuant to canons 471, 2° CIC⁵ and 244 §2, 2° CCEO.⁶

§3. Except as provided for by Article 3 §3, the Ordinary⁷ who received the report shall transmit it without delay to the Ordinary of the place where the events are said to have occurred, as well as to the Ordinary of the person reported, who proceed according to the law provided for the specific case.

§4. For the purposes of this title, Eparchies are equated with Dioceses and the Hierarch⁸ is equated with the Ordinary.

Article 3 – Reporting

§1. Except as provided for by canons 1548 §2 CIC and 1229 §2 CCEO, whenever a cleric or a member of an Institute of Consecrated Life or of a Society of Apostolic Life has notice of, or well-founded motives to believe that, one of the facts referred to in Article 1 has been committed, that person is obliged to report promptly the fact to the local Ordinary where the events are said to have occurred or to another Ordinary among those referred to in canons 134 CIC and 984 CCEO, except for what is established by §3 of the present article.

§2. Any person can submit a report concerning the conduct referred to in Article 1, using the methods referred to in the preceding article, or by any other appropriate means.

§3. When the report concerns one of the persons indicated in Article 6, it is to be addressed to the Authority identified based upon Articles 8 and 9. The report can always be sent to the Holy See directly or through the Pontifical Representative.

§4. The report shall include as many particulars as possible, such as indications of time and place of the facts, of the persons involved or informed, as well as any other circumstance that may be useful in order to ensure an accurate assessment of the facts.

§5. Information can also be acquired *ex officio*.⁹

Art. 4 – Protection of the person submitting the report

§1. Making a report pursuant to Article 3 shall not constitute a violation of office confidentiality.

§2. Except as provided for by canons 1390 CIC and 1452 and 1454 CCEO, prejudice, retaliation or discrimination as a consequence of having submitted a report is prohibited and may constitute the conduct referred to in Article 1 §1, letter b).

§3. An obligation to keep silent may not be imposed on any person with regard to the contents of his or her report.

Article 5 – Care for Persons

⁵ CIC stands for Codex Iuris Canonici, or the Code of Canon Law, the body of the Church's laws.

⁶ CCEO stands for Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium, or Code of Canons of Eastern Churches.

⁷ An ordinary is a Church official who by reason of his office has the ordinary power to execute Church laws. Examples of Church ordinaries include the pope, bishops, provincial of religious orders, and abbots.

⁸ He is a bishop in the Eastern Catholic Church.

⁹ It means "by virtue of one's position or office."

§1. The ecclesiastical Authorities shall commit themselves to ensuring that those who state that they have been harmed, together with their families, are to be treated with dignity and respect, and, in particular, are to be:

- a) welcomed, listened to and supported, including through provision of specific services;
- b) offered spiritual assistance;
- c) offered medical assistance, including therapeutic and psychological assistance, as required by the specific case.

§2. The good name and the privacy of the persons involved, as well as the confidentiality of their personal data, shall be protected.

TITLE II PROVISIONS CONCERNING BISHOPS AND THEIR EQUIVALENTS

Article 6 – Subjective Scope of Application

The procedural norms referred to in this title concern the conduct referred to in Article 1, carried out by:

- a) Cardinals, Patriarchs, Bishops and Legates of the Roman Pontiff;
- b) clerics who are, or who have been, the pastoral heads of a particular Church or of an entity assimilated to it, Latin or Oriental,¹⁰ including the Personal Ordinariates, for the acts committed *durante munere*;¹¹
- c) clerics who are or who have been in the past leaders of a Personal Prelature, for the acts committed *durante munere*;
- d) those who are, or who have been, supreme moderators of Institutes of Consecrated Life or of Societies of Apostolic Life of Pontifical right, as well as of monasteries *sui iuris*, with respect to the acts committed *durante munere*.

Article 7 – Competent Dicastery¹²

§1. For the purposes of this title, “competent Dicastery” means the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,¹³ regarding the delicts reserved to it by the norms in force, as well as, in all other cases and as far as their respective jurisdiction is concerned, based on the proper law of the Roman Curia:

- the Congregation for the Oriental Churches;
- the Congregation for Bishops;
- the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples;
- the Congregation for the Clergy;
- the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

§2. In order to ensure the best coordination, the competent Dicastery informs the Secretariat of State, and the other Dicasteries directly concerned, of the report and the outcome of the investigation.

¹⁰ The Latin Church refers to Western Rite Churches and the Oriental Church refers to Eastern Rite Churches.

¹¹ Latin for “while in office.”

¹² A dicastery is a department in the Roman Curia, the administrative institutions of the Vatican.

¹³ The oldest of the nine “congregations” or departments of the Roman Curia (the Vatican’s administrative system), it is responsible for promulgating and maintaining the integrity of the Church’s doctrines.

§3. The communications referred to in this title between the Metropolitan¹⁴ and the Holy See¹⁵ take place through the Pontifical Representative.

Art. 8 – Procedure Applicable in the Event of a Report Concerning a Bishop of the Latin Church

§1. The Authority that receives a report transmits it both to the Holy See and to the Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province where the person reported is domiciled.

§2. If the report concerns the Metropolitan, or the Metropolitan See is vacant, it shall be forwarded to the Holy See, as well as to the senior suffragan Bishop¹⁶ by promotion, to whom, if such is the case, the following provisions regarding the Metropolitan apply.

§3. In the event that the report concerns a Papal Legate,¹⁷ it shall be transmitted directly to the Secretariat of State.

Article 9 – Procedure Applicable to Bishops of Eastern Catholic Churches

§1. Reports concerning a Bishop of a Patriarchal, Major Archiepiscopal or Metropolitan Church *sui iuris* shall be forwarded to the respective Patriarch, Major Archbishop or Metropolitan of the Church *sui iuris*.

§2. If the report concerns a Metropolitan of a Patriarchal or Major Archiepiscopal Church, who exercises his office within the territory of these Churches, it is forwarded to the respective Patriarch or Major Archbishop.

§3. In the preceding cases, the Authority who receives the report shall also forward it to the Holy See.

§4. If the person reported is a Bishop or a Metropolitan outside the territory of the Patriarchal, the Major Archiepiscopal or the Metropolitan Church *sui iuris*, the report shall be forwarded to the Holy See.

§5. In the event that the report concerns a Patriarch, a Major Archbishop, a Metropolitan of a Church *sui iuris* or a Bishop of the other Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, it shall be forwarded to the Holy See.

§ 6. The following provisions relating to the Metropolitan apply to the ecclesiastical Authority to which the report is to be forwarded based on this article.

Article 10 – Initial Duties of the Metropolitan

§1. Unless the report is manifestly unfounded, the Metropolitan immediately requests, from the competent Dicastery, that he be assigned to commence the investigation. If the Metropolitan considers the report manifestly unfounded, he shall so inform the Pontifical Representative.

¹⁴ A metropolitan is the head of a principal or major city (or see) of a Church province.

¹⁵ The Vatican in Rome.

¹⁶ This is a bishop who is subordinate to a Metropolitan bishop and whose diocese is part of a larger Church province that typically consists of several dioceses.

¹⁷ This is an official representative of the Pope.

§2. The Dicastery shall proceed without delay, and in any case within thirty days from the receipt of the first report by the Pontifical Representative or the request for the assignment by the Metropolitan, providing the appropriate instructions on how to proceed in the specific case.

Article 11 – Entrusting the Investigation to a Person Other Than the Metropolitan

§1. If the competent Dicastery considers it appropriate to entrust the investigation to a person other than the Metropolitan, the Metropolitan is so informed. The Metropolitan delivers all relevant information and documents to the person appointed by the Dicastery.

§2. In the case referred to in the previous paragraph, the following provisions relating to the Metropolitan apply to the person charged with conducting the investigation.

Article 12 – Carrying Out the Investigation

§1. Once he has been appointed by the competent Dicastery and acting in compliance with the instructions received, the Metropolitan, either personally or through one or more suitable persons:

- a) collects relevant information regarding the facts;
- b) accesses the information and documents necessary for the purpose of the investigation kept in the archives of ecclesiastical offices;
- c) obtains the cooperation of other Ordinaries or Hierarchs whenever necessary;
- d) requests information from individuals and institutions, including civil institutions, that are able to provide useful elements for the investigation.

§2. If it is necessary to hear from a minor or a vulnerable person, the Metropolitan shall adopt appropriate procedures which take into account their status.

§3. In the event that there are well-founded motives to conclude that information or documents concerning the investigation are at risk of being removed or destroyed, the Metropolitan shall take the necessary measures for their preservation.

§4. Even when making use of other persons, the Metropolitan nevertheless remains responsible for the direction and conduct of the investigation, as well as for the timely execution of the instructions referred to in Article 10 §2.

§5. The Metropolitan shall be assisted by a notary freely appointed pursuant to canons 483 §2 CIC and 253 §2 CCEO.

§6. The Metropolitan is required to act impartially and free of conflicts of interest. If he considers himself to be in a conflict of interest or is unable to maintain the necessary impartiality to guarantee the integrity of the investigation, he is obliged to recuse himself and report the circumstance to the competent Dicastery.

§7. The person under investigation enjoys the presumption of innocence.

§8. The Metropolitan, if requested by the competent Dicastery, informs the person of the investigation concerning him/her, hears his/her account of the facts and invites him/her to present a brief in defense. In such cases, the investigated person may be assisted by legal counsel.

§9. Every thirty days, the Metropolitan sends a status report on the state of the investigation to the competent Dicastery.

Article 13 – Involvement of Qualified Persons

§1. In accordance with any eventual directives of the Episcopal Conference, of the Synod of Bishops or of the Council of Hierarchs regarding how to assist the Metropolitan in conducting the investigation, the Bishops of the respective Province, individually or together, may establish lists of qualified persons from which the Metropolitan may choose those most suitable to assist in the investigation, according to the needs of the individual case and, in particular, taking into account the cooperation that can be offered by the lay faithful pursuant to canons 228 CIC and 408 CCEO.

§2. The Metropolitan, however, is free to choose other equally qualified persons.

§3. Any person assisting the Metropolitan in the investigation is required to act impartially and must be free of conflicts of interest. If he considers himself to be in a conflict of interest or be unable to maintain the necessary impartiality required to guarantee the integrity of the investigation, he is obliged to recuse himself and report the circumstances to the Metropolitan.

§4. The persons assisting the Metropolitan shall take an oath to fulfil their charge properly.

Article 14 – Duration of the investigation

§1. The investigation is to be completed within the term of ninety days or within a term otherwise provided for by the instructions referred to in Article 10 §2.

§2. Where there are just reasons, the Metropolitan may request that the competent Dicastery extend the term.

Article 15 - Precautionary measures

Should the facts or circumstances require it, the Metropolitan shall propose to the competent Dicastery the adoption of provisions or appropriate precautionary measures with regard to the person under investigation.

Article 16 – Establishment of a Fund

§1. Ecclesiastical Provinces, Episcopal Conferences, Synods of Bishops and Councils of Hierarchs may create a fund, to be established according to the norms of canons 116 and 1303 §1, 1° CIC and 1047 CCEO and administered according to the norms of canon law, whose purpose is to sustain the costs of the investigations.

§2. At the request of the appointed Metropolitan, the funds necessary for the purpose of the investigation are made available to him by the administrator of the fund; the Metropolitan remain duty-bound to present an account to the administrator at the conclusion of the investigation.

Article 17 – Transmission of the Documents and the *Votum*

§1. Having completed the investigation, the Metropolitan shall transmit the acts to the competent Dicastery, together with his *votum*¹⁸ regarding the results of the investigation and in response to any queries contained in the instructions issued under Article 10 §2.

§2. Unless there are further instructions from the competent Dicastery, the faculties of the Metropolitan cease once the investigation is completed.

¹⁸ A *votum* is an authoritative opinion.

§3. In compliance with the instructions of the competent Dicastery, the Metropolitan, upon request, shall inform the person who has alleged an offence, or his/her legal representatives, of the outcome of the investigation.

Article 18 – Subsequent Measures

Unless it decides to provide for a supplementary investigation, the competent Dicastery proceeds in accordance with the law provided for the specific case.

Article 19 – Compliance with State Laws

These norms apply without prejudice to the rights and obligations established in each place by state laws, particularly those concerning any reporting obligations to the competent civil authorities.

The present norms are approved ad experimentum¹⁹ for three years.

I establish that the present Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio be promulgated by means of publication in the Osservatore Romano, entering into force on 1 June 2019, and then published in the Acta Apostolicae Sedis.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on May 7, 2019, the seventh year of my Pontificate.

¹⁹ A Latin phrase meaning “to the test.” In other words, these norms are put forth as temporary yet formal acting guidelines. They will, no doubt, be reviewed and changed as needed after three years.