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**NEWS RELEASE**

**Pope Francis Issues Global Mandatory Reporting Law  
for Sexual Abuse and Cover-up**  
***Vos estis lux mundi***

ALBUQUERQUE – Thursday, May 9, 2019—IMMEDIATE RELEASE— As part of the Catholic Church’s commitment to transparency and the protection minors and vulnerable people, the Holy Father has established a universal Church law by a *motu proprio* (an edict issued by Pope Francis) *Vos estis lux mundi* (“You are the light of the world”), which creates new requirements for reporting, handling and investigating sexual abuse and the mishandling of such misconduct, including cover-up, to and by Church authorities. This universal law goes into effect June 1, 2019 and includes measures already in effect in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

*Vos estis lux mundi* is among the concrete measures called for by the Holy Father at the February 2019 Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church. The first was Pope Francis’ March 26 *motu proprio* and related documents, which made the reporting of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults in the Vatican City State and the Roman Curia mandatory for all officials. *Vos estis lux mundi* extends that obligation worldwide.

The *motu proprio* does not directly name penalties, as those are already regulated by canon 1389 and canon 1395, yet the said *motu proprio* calls on the Christian faithful to observe Canon Law as a concrete expression of their faith and of their active membership in the community of faithful, without fear of prejudice, retaliation or discrimination.

In light of Pope Francis’ promulgation of *Vos estis lux mundi*, Archbishop John C. Wester said,

*The motu proprio is one more concrete step by the Holy Father to create channels and mandate obligations for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults. This motu proprio reaffirms the steps that have already been taken in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe over the last two decades through the establishment of the office of Victim Assistance and Safe Environment Coordinator, as well as delineating proper reporting procedures, publication of the list of the credibly accused, background checks, and training programs for every minister, volunteer and employee working in the archdiocese and its parishes, schools and other Catholic offices. I endorse this new universal law which strengthens what has been our first priority: protecting and aiding victims of the heinous scourge of sexual abuse. This law helps to ensure that abuse is prevented and that victims are cared for and will be assisted in their healing.*

**The *motu proprio* legislates:**

- All dioceses must have a public, accessible and reliable system for reporting: the sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults; possession or distribution of child pornography; use of violence or intimidation (whether with minors or adults) to engage in sexual acts; and the cover-up of such conduct. Dioceses without a current system must establish one at the latest by June 1, 2020 and must, by that date, notify the appropriate pontifical representative that the system has been put in place. *Any personnel or volunteer of the ASF having knowledge or information concerning alleged incidents of sexual misconduct or abuse by personnel or volunteers of the archdiocese is to comply with the provisions of New Mexico law, and shall report the same immediately to the Victim Assistance Coordinator (VAC) of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe at the Catholic Center in Albuquerque, 505.831.8144. Notably, sexual abuse by any personnel or volunteer of the archdiocese must be immediately reported to a local law enforcement agency or the Children Youth and Families Department (CYFD) office in the county where the incident is alleged to have occurred or the tribal law enforcement or social services agencies for any Native American child residing in Indian country. There are posters in every parish within the ASF listing the name and contact number for the VAC at the archdiocese; the information on how to report sexual abuse is detailed on the archdiocesan website, [www.archdiosf.org](http://www.archdiosf.org); and local clergy will refer the victim to the ASF and/or local authorities. The reported incident will be processed according to established archdiocesan procedures, including immediate and appropriate investigation and reporting.*
- All clerics and members of religious orders (priests, deacons, brothers, sisters) and bishops (including Cardinals), whether of the Latin or Oriental Church, are required to report sexual abuse and any cover-up to Church authorities, including when committed by bishops or religious superiors.
- Reporters of sexual abuse are protected from prejudice, retaliation or discrimination for reports made in good faith.
- The reporting requirement does not change or interfere with any existing duty to report under local civil laws.
- After receiving the mandate, the Metropolitan archbishop, or whomever has been placed in charge of the investigation by the Holy See, must investigate allegations of sexual abuse and cover-ups by bishops or provincial superiors in a timely and effective manner, with participation by lay experts provided for under these norms.
- The Roman Curia must act promptly with respect to reports received.

**What are the provisions of this law?**

- This law requires Church leaders throughout the world to offer spiritual, medical and psychological support to victims and their families as appropriate. Since the establishment of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has offered psychological, spiritual and medical support to all victims. Counseling sessions are arranged through therapists, recommendations are given for anyone seeking spiritual direction and medical evaluations will be respected when referred by a licensed physician.
- Dioceses must establish publicly accessible systems for reporting sexual abuse and other sexual misconduct, as well as for dealing with the mishandling of such misconduct, including cover-up, before June 1, 2020 and inform the papal nuncio that this has been done. As stated above, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has a long standing system for such reporting.
- *Vos estis lux mundi* mandates that all clerics and members of religious orders within the global Church report clergy sexual abuse and the cover-up of such misconduct to Church authorities,

including when these offenses were committed by bishops or religious superiors, regardless of when they occurred.

- *Vos estis lux mundi* confirms the *duty* to follow the reporting requirements of local civil jurisdictions. The ASF complies with local and civil reporting laws, including cooperating with law enforcement, regardless of whether the accused is deceased or a diocesan clergy person or a member of a religious order.
- Sexual acts carried out through violence or use of intimidation, including offenses against seminarians or novices, are subject to mandatory reporting and investigation.
- This law protects those who report abuse from recriminations of any kind.
- *Vos estis lux mundi* requires metropolitan bishops to investigate allegations of sexual abuse and the mishandling or cover-up of such misconduct by bishops and religious superiors in a timely and effective manner. It also requires the Holy See to act in a timely manner with set deadlines.
- The mandate encourages the inclusion of lay people in the investigation of allegations. This has already been ASF's practice for many years. For example, the ASF relies upon the expertise of lay persons on its Independent Review Board (IRB)--whose members are trained in law, psychology, law enforcement, medicine, education, and canon law--to review the findings of professional investigations and reporting by the archdiocese's office of victim assistance.
- Investigations of accused bishops or leaders of religious orders are to be carried out at the local level, whether by archbishops or superiors of religious orders, unless there are conflicts of interest. In such cases, the law provides for an appropriate alternative.

#### **How does this law work?**

- Anyone can forward an allegation against a diocesan cleric and/or member of a religious order to the relevant bishop and/or religious superior for investigation.
- Once a bishop or religious superior receives an allegation, he must forward it to the relevant local Church authority, the metropolitan archbishop of a given region or the superior general ("supreme moderator") of the religious order. The allegation also must be forwarded to the Holy See.
- The metropolitan archbishop or supreme moderator must then investigate the allegation in a timely manner. If the metropolitan archbishop or supreme moderator is accused or subject to a conflict of interest, another person, who is not in a conflict, is chosen by the Holy See.
- Those tasked with carrying out such investigations are encouraged to engage the help of lay experts — including, for example, members of the existing review boards of many dioceses. Our conference can adopt guidelines to standardize the use of lay people in the process throughout the dioceses of the United States.
- Once the investigation is complete, the results are forwarded to the relevant office of the Roman Curia, which must act promptly in accord with set time lines.

If you or anyone you know has been the victim of sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, please immediately contact a local law enforcement agency and our Victim Assistance Coordinator, Annette Klimka at 505.831.8144 or [aklimka@archdiosf.org](mailto:aklimka@archdiosf.org).

To read the entire *Vos estis lux mundi*, please visit [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) --END