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Statement

Implementation Directives for Pope Francis's Apostolic Letter, *You Are the Light of the World (Vos Estis Vox Mundi)*

By Archbishop John C. Wester, Metropolitan, Province of Santa Fe

(The Province of Santa Fe includes the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Dioceses of Las Cruces and Gallup, and the Arizona Dioceses of Phoenix and Tucson)

ALBUQUERQUE – Monday, July 1, 2019—IMMEDIATE RELEASE—In 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) enacted the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, commonly referred to as the *Dallas Charter*. The bishops also received authority from the Vatican to make the *Charter* canon law for the Church in the United States. This comprehensive plan for the protection of children and young people includes a zero tolerance policy that requires priests and deacons who have committed child sexual abuse to be removed from ministry.

One criticism of the *Charter* has been that it does not apply to bishops or those equivalent in the law (abbots, for example). Pope Francis has remedied this deficiency with his recent Apostolic Letter entitled, *You Are the Light of the World (Vos Estis Vox Mundi)*. This means that the Pope has enacted universal law that pertains to the reporting and handling of complaints against bishops. Pope Francis has mandated that, starting June 1, 2019, a process be established for Church investigations of complaints against bishops for the sexual abuse of a minor. This process also addresses complaints against bishops for sexual acts involving adults regarded as vulnerable and for the negligent or intentional mishandling of such abuse or harassment cases. The process also mandates the internal reporting of such cases, offers whistleblower protection for those reporting and prohibits any imposition of silence on those reporting.

At the USCCB meeting held in Baltimore, MD, from June 11–14, 2019, the bishops of the United States voted on several action items pertaining to the Pope's Apostolic Letter, all of which received overwhelming approval. The first of these items was the "Implementation Directives." These directives outline the use of lay experts in the entire reporting and investigative process. They also call for a third party national reporting system (this will be up and running as soon as possible but no later than May 31, 2020.) The bishops also approved the "Protocols" for dealing with bishops who are removed or who resign for reasons related to sexual abuse or abuse of power. Finally, the bishops committed themselves to codes of conduct that include prohibitions against sexual misconduct and harassment. Moreover, they renewed their pledge to be subject to the Charter, to promote the ongoing formation for bishops and to include the expertise of lay professionals throughout the reporting process.

Please note that Pope Francis's Apostolic Letter and the measures passed by the United States bishops in Baltimore in June of 2019 refer to Catholic Church laws, policies and procedures.

If you wish to report a bishop or his equivalent in law for a crime, then you must first call your local civic authorities, i.e., the police and the child protection agency in your area. Secondly, please call the third party national reporting system telephone number.

It is important to remember that even though it will take time to establish the national third party reporting system, the universal law is already in effect regarding the reporting and handling of complaints against bishops. Therefore, in the Province of Santa Fe, if you wish to report a bishop for the sexual abuse of a minor, sexual acts involving adults regarded as vulnerable and/or for mishandling such cases, please call the following number during regular business hours:

505.219.8743

If you call outside of business hours please leave a message, including your phone number, and your call will be returned as soon as possible. The layperson who handles these calls will immediately inform the Archbishop of Santa Fe as well as the Apostolic Nuncio in Washington, DC (the Apostolic Nuncio is the Pope's representative in the United States). This will begin the process of investigation, which will result in appropriate measures being taken based on that investigation. It is important to remember that even though the Pope has directed that Metropolitan Archbishops (archbishops of an archdiocese that includes other dioceses in what is called a "province"), are responsible for effecting this new mandate, qualified lay persons are involved in the entire process. These reports will be sent to Rome and action will be taken fairly and conclusively, and in a timely manner. If a report comes in about the Metropolitan Archbishop, then it will be directed to the senior suffragan bishop of the province who will direct the process. At present, the senior bishop in the Province of Santa Fe is Bishop Thomas Olmsted, Bishop of the Diocese of Phoenix. Once the national third party reporting system is in place, then the public will be notified and the Santa Fe Province number shown above will be discontinued.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding Pope Francis's Apostolic Letter or the decisions of the United States Catholic Bishops, please contact the Pastoral Center in your diocese. Please continue to pray for all victims of clergy sexual abuse and for the Church's efforts to provide a safe environment for all children and young people. May the Lord Jesus, who blessed the little children, bless our efforts as well--END