

YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

POPE PROMULGATES NEW LAW ON SAFEGUARDING FOR THE CHURCH

The Supreme Pontiff, Pope Francis, promulgated new norms for the Church's handling of abuse on May 9th through a motu proprio ('on his own initiative), titled, Vos estis lux mundi ("You are the light of the world"). He approved its promulgation on an experimental basis for a period of three years. It will enter in effect June 1, 2019.

The Pope wrote: "The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful". The Bishop has the primary responsibility of ensuring that all issues concerning the Safeguarding of children and vulnerable persons, including the processing of any allegations, is handled efficiently with a 'zero tolerance' standard or practice.

Nevertheless, it is also the responsibility of everyone to ensure an environment of safeguarding is maintained and that there is vigilance to report abuses when they occur. It is clear through these norms, that there can be no 'cover-up'. "Therefore, [the Pope wrote] it is good that procedures be universally adopted to prevent and combat these crimes that betray the trust of the faithful".

The norms regard what are called, in canon law, "delicts against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue," consisting of:

- sexual acts with a minor or vulnerable person;
- forcing someone to perform or submit to sexual acts through violence, threat, or abuse of authority;
- and the production or possession of child pornography.

The new law also sanctions any actions intended to cover-up a civil or canonical investigation into accusations of child pornography use, sexual abuse of minors, or sexual coercion through abuse of power. It also emphasizes that "the person under investigation enjoys the presumption of innocence".

Furthermore, it requires that the Church authorities be committed to ensuring "that those who state that they have been harmed, together with their families, are to be treated with dignity and respect," be welcomed, listened to, and supported, offered spiritual assistance, and medical and psychological assistance.

A crucial aspect of the new legislation for the entire Church is that it introduces obligatory reporting, requiring that every cleric or religious

man or woman who has become aware of an accusation of abuse or cover-up report it “promptly” to the proper Church authority.

The motu proprio also states that every diocese in the world is required to create a stable mechanism or system through which people may submit reports of abuse or its cover-up. The exact form of the system, which could also be an entire office, will be left to the discretion of the individual diocese, but must be established by June 2020.

In Gibraltar, a Diocesan Safeguarding Commission was set up in 2018, on the Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels.

A diocesan Policy was also established and appropriate Safeguarding training, beginning with our clergy, is being offered to all the groups and persons helping in any way in our parishes.

As Pope Francis wrote: “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.... 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’ (Jn 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”.

If you wish to learn more about Safeguarding in our Diocese, please visit the pages specifically dedicated to this on our website.

To contact our diocesan Safeguarding Officer or relevant agencies for any concerns you may have, please visit the contact details page.

If you believe that a child or vulnerable adult has suffered or is in immediate risk of suffering significant harm, for example, physical or sexual assault or theft of their property, then you should contact the Police / the Care Agency (Social Services) Department immediately.

DOING NOTHING IS NOT AN OPTION!

In all cases where such a situation arises within a church or church-related context, then the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer should be contacted too.