



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG



www.hbgdiocese.org

Office of Communications

4800 Union Deposit Road
Harrisburg, PA 17111-3710
(717) 657-4804

Immediate Release

March 16, 2020

Contact: Rachel Bryson

(717) 657-4804 ex. 235

(717) 300-0146 (cell)

rbryson@hbgdiocese.org

www.hbgdiocese.org

Nationwide Service to Report Sexual Misconduct Involving U.S. Bishops Launched

HARRISBURG, Pa. – In May 2019, Pope Francis released his apostolic letter, *Vos estis lux mundi* (“You are the light of the world”) to address the issue of sexual abuse and bishop accountability in the global Catholic Church. *Vos estis* calls upon the metropolitan archbishops to undertake the responsibilities for receiving and assessing sexual abuse and related misconduct reports involving bishops. In June 2019, one month after Pope Francis issued his order, the bishops of the United States convened for their general assembly in Baltimore and approved the implementation plan for carrying out the directives of the Holy Father here in the United States.

As part of this ongoing commitment to carrying out *Vos estis*, the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service (CBAR) was established. The service is operated by Convercent, Inc. an independent, third party entity that provides intake services to private institutions for reports of sensitive topics, such as sexual harassment, through a secure, confidential, and professional platform. Individuals may go to ReportBishopAbuse.org or call (800) 276-1562 in order to make a report.

When a report is received, it will be forwarded to the local metropolitan archbishop who will initially assess the report. Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is the metropolitan who presides over the province of Pennsylvania, which includes the Diocese of Harrisburg and the other six diocese in the Commonwealth. In the event that a report is received that concerns Archbishop Pérez, then it will be forwarded to Bishop David A. Zubik, Bishop of Pittsburgh, who is the senior suffragan bishop of this local province.

Pope Francis has structured the handling and investigation of the complaints using the metropolitan archbishops. What does this mean?

- The Catholic Church in the U.S. has 32 provinces.
- Each province has one archdiocese plus several dioceses.
- The head of the archdiocese (the archbishop) is also known as the “metropolitan,” and he presides over the province.
- The other dioceses are referred to as “suffragan” dioceses.

The Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting service allows individuals to relay to Church authorities any reports of a U.S. Catholic bishop who has:

- forced someone to perform or to submit to sexual acts through violence, threats, or abuse of authority;
- performed sexual acts with a minor or a vulnerable person;
- produced, exhibited, possessed, or distributed child pornography, or recruited or induced a minor or a vulnerable person to participate in pornographic exhibitions;
- or, a diocesan or eparchial bishop, or a cleric overseeing a diocese/eparchy in the absence of a diocesan or eparchial bishop, who has intentionally interfered with a civil or church investigation into allegations of sexual abuse committed by another cleric or religious.

The Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service (CBAR) does not replace existing reporting systems for complaints against priests, deacons, religious or laity. CBAR was designed to respond only to complaints against bishops for issues related to sexual misconduct.

The Diocese of Harrisburg has a zero tolerance policy regarding child abuse and has been vigilant in protecting all children in its care. We have an aggressive Safe Environment Program with a comprehensive set of procedures for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy, employees or volunteers, as well as guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability and prevention of future acts of abuse. Every allegation of abuse of a minor is immediately reported to ChildLine and to the local District Attorney's office for investigation.

The reporting of sexual misconduct by anyone in diocesan ministry who is not a bishop, such as priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, or lay persons working or volunteering for the Church, will continue to be handled in accordance with the Diocese's youth protection policy, found at www.YouthProtectionHBG.com. Those who suspect abuse are also encouraged to report it by calling the toll-free PA Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-932-0313. To report suspected abuse of a minor by a church official, employee or volunteer, also please call the Diocesan toll-free hotline at 1-800-626-1608 or email: ReportAbuse@hbgdiocese.org. It is critical that the Church be made aware of any complaints immediately so that we can remove that person from active ministry or service.

While the mandate by Pope Francis in *Vos estis* echoes many of the practices that the Catholic Church in the United States has already implemented since 2002 with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, this new order applies to the bishops and to the worldwide Catholic Church, making clear the Pope's concern of the issue of sexual abuse in the Church at a global level.

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