



Office of the Bishop

June 21, 2019

My dear brother priest:

As you know, the bishops of the United States met in Baltimore last week and adopted overwhelmingly a plan to investigate and sanction bishops who have violated the Charter for the Protection of Minors or committed other sexual offenses, as well as those bishops who have worked to frustrate justice in their handling of cases involving sexual crimes against minors by priests, deacons or diocesan employees.

In accord with Pope Francis' motu proprio "Vos Estis Lux Mundi", the specific plan adopted in Baltimore vests the principal investigative role in the metropolitan Archbishop of each province, while prescribing substantial lay involvement in the investigation. When our own provincial bishops met in Baltimore to design the architecture of this process for the province of Los Angeles, we established a broad investigative and evaluative role for lay experts and members of the local diocesan review boards which will inform the votum of Archbishop Gomez and ultimately the Holy Father, who has jurisdiction in cases involving bishops.

I believe that this plan provides a strong system of investigation for allegations that surface against bishops for sexual misconduct or administrative malfeasance related to sexual abuse. It is clear to us all, of course, that such a system should have been adopted years ago.

"Vos Estis" represents universal law designed to eradicate clerical sexual abuse in every nation, and constitutes a tremendous step forward for the Church throughout the world. But it is particularly important to note that this document represents a call to action that goes far beyond bishops and priests. For Pope Francis says:

*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 mandate for conversion, vigilance and action by all in the Church has led me to conclude that we must bring together all of the employees of the parishes, schools and institutions of the diocese for a substantive presentation on three major issues pertaining to the sexual abuse of minors: 1) the church's response to sexual abuse, particularly by clergy, religious or employees; 2) the specific obligations of mandated reporters; and 3) the mission of awareness and action that fall upon every employee, even those who are not by law mandated reporters.

Thus I will be writing next week directly to every employee of our parishes, schools and institutions in San Diego County, calling them to attend a session which will be held at the Jenny Craig Pavilion at the University of San Diego on the afternoon of Tuesday, August 13th from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Summer Stefan, the District Attorney for San Diego County, will be with us to speak directly to the legal issues pertaining to sexual abuse of minors, while I and others will make presentations on the pastoral dimensions.

This date was chosen because the teachers are already meeting at USD that morning. There will be another meeting at Saint Mary's Parish in El Centro on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 4th for the parish and school staffs of Imperial County.

I understand that this is a major imposition upon the time of all of our employees and the life of the parishes. But I think it is essential for every employee to hear the same message on this immensely critical issue going forward. I understand that there will be some employees and some priests who will be away on vacation at this time. But apart from this group, I expect all employees and non-retired priests to be present precisely because it is essential that we all operate from a common understanding in confronting the sexual abuse of minors in all of its heinous manifestations.

Grateful for all that you do for God and the Church, and regretful that I have to impose this burden on you and the parishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ R W McElroy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy  
Bishop of San Diego