



DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

14 May 2019

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

On May 7 Pope Francis issued a *motu proprio*, “Vos Estis Lux Mundi”, “You are the Light of the World”. In this action, the Holy Father has modified Church law that mandates every diocese in the Catholic Church follow the outlined procedure regarding allegations of abuse by a bishop, clergy or member of an institute of religious or apostolic life.

This decree is a result of the gathering of representatives of Catholic Bishop’s Conferences from across the world that was convened by Pope Francis in February 2019. Our Holy Father has taken sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults very seriously.

The Diocese of Fairbanks has had a very sad history of abuse of minors which resulted in a bankruptcy process. While abuse survivors were compensated, this in no manner addresses the profound wound of the evil perpetrated against them. These innocent victims daily live with the effects of such crimes committed against them.

As our Holy Father has indicated in this document, “We are the Light of the World.” We includes each one of us. Yes, each and every person is created in the sacred image and likeness of God. No person can ever take this away. We as a diocese, and particularly as priests, religious and Church personnel are committed to accompanying abuse survivors. I know our Church personnel in the diocese regularly accompany abuse survivors helping them see that they are “The Light of the World.” This prayerful accompaniment brings hope and healing.

On May 1, I was invited by two clergy abuse survivors who work with Spirit Fire, to attend a gathering of bishops and survivors in Washington, D.C. The gathering was most powerful. We heard some horrible stories of abuse. The pain and suffering casts a long and dark shadow that affects people to this day. I was deeply touched by the fact that clergy abuse survivors wanted to dialogue with bishops, and truly want to be part of a solution bringing healing and hope to other abuse survivors who are in our communities. Also, they want to proclaim the sacredness and holiness of the priesthood of Jesus Christ because in their words, “they experienced the worst.” I truly saw the power of the Holy Spirit working to bring hope and healing as it pushes against the darkness and evil of our Church and world.

The Diocese of Fairbanks takes most seriously our Safe Environment Policies, but in order for these protections to be implemented and effective it requires the cooperation of all the faithful in their respective parishes. I thank you for your concerted efforts to make this a priority. Our children and vulnerable adults need to know our churches and schools are safe places where their sacred dignity is honored and protected.

I truly believe that as the Catholic Church addresses its own failures of negligence of leadership, crimes committed by Church personnel and becomes more proactive promoting safe environment, we can be a “light in the world.” It is most sad to see more abuse stories surface in the news from various sectors of society. There is a wound in our world that is calling out for the light of Christ and the protection of our children and vulnerable adults. While laws to address abuse are necessary, more importantly, we need to announce to our world that beauty, goodness and truth of God lives in every person and that all of us have a responsibility to honor and protect it.

Sincerely in Christ,



†Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
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