

1 *Affirming Our Episcopal Commitments*

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3 *Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ*
4 *and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now it is of course*
5 *required of stewards that they be found trustworthy (1 Cor 4:1-2).*
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8 The authority and responsibilities of a bishop arise fundamentally from the grace of the
9 sacrament of Holy Orders. For the bishop to exercise his authority and responsibilities properly,
10 however, he must be conformed to the heart of Christ, who “humbled himself” for our sake (Phil
11 2:8). “In the exercise of sacred power, the bishop must show himself to be rich in humanity in
12 imitation of Jesus, the perfect man. To this end, his conduct should radiate those virtues and
13 human gifts which arise from charity and are rightly valued in our society. These gifts and
14 human virtues bear fruit in pastoral prudence, in wise care of souls and in good governance”
15 (*Apostolorum successores*, 2004, no. 47).
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17 In keeping with the promises made at his episcopal ordination, a bishop is to guide others
18 to holiness, to welcome the stranger, the poor, and all those in need. He is to act as a good
19 shepherd, especially attentive to those on the peripheries. Some bishops have failed in keeping
20 to these promises by committing acts of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct themselves. Others
21 have failed by not responding morally, pastorally, and effectively to allegations of abuse or
22 misconduct perpetrated by other bishops, priests and deacons. Because of these failures, the
23 faithful are outraged, horrified, and discouraged.
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25 We, the bishops of the United States, have heard the anger expressed by so many within
26 and outside of the Church over these failures. The anger is justified; it has humbled us,
27 prompting us into self-examination, repentance, and a desire to do better. We will continue to
28 listen.
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30 Today, in a spirit of pastoral responsibility and contrition, we affirm once more the
31 commitments we made when we were ordained bishops, including the commitments to respond
32 directly and appropriately to cases of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable persons, sexual

33 misconduct, and the mishandling of such cases by bishops. “This responsibility falls, above all,
34 on the successors of the Apostles... and demands from [us] a commitment to follow closely the
35 path of the Divine Master” (*Vos estis lux mundi*, 2019, preamble).

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37 1. We will continue to reach out to the victims/survivors of sexual abuse by the clergy and their
38 families in support of their spiritual and emotional well-being. Realizing that we might not
39 always be the best suited to offer such care, we will do all that is within our authority and
40 ability to help victims/survivors find the care and healing they need.

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42 2. We pledge our full support for and adherence to the provisions outlined in the Holy Father’s
43 Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio, Vos estis lux mundi*, which holds bishops accountable to
44 higher moral standards because the pastoral care of the faithful has been entrusted to them.

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46 3. We will promote and disseminate widely – in our churches, seminaries, diocesan or eparchial
47 newspapers, parish bulletins, websites, social media, and other appropriate venues –
48 information on how a person can report to an independent, third-party entity any instances of
49 the sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable persons by a bishop. While safeguarding
50 confidentiality of all persons involved, every effort will be made toward transparency and
51 keeping the person submitting the report, and when permitted the accused, apprised of the
52 status of the case.

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54 4. We are also committed, when we receive or when we are authorized to investigate such
55 cases, to include the counsel of lay men and women whose professional backgrounds are
56 indispensable.

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58 5. We will amend, where necessary, our diocesan or eparchial codes of conduct for ministers so
59 that they state unequivocally that they apply to bishops as well as to all those serving the
60 Church in our diocese or eparchy.

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62 6. We will also make sure that these codes of conduct contain clear explanations as to what
63 constitutes sexual misconduct with adults as well as what constitutes sexual harassment of
64 adults.

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66 7. Both our Baptism and ordination call us to chaste living. We will be always mindful that
67 there can be no “double life,” no “special circumstances,” no “secret life” in the practice of
68 chastity.

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8. “The bishop cannot ignore or leave undone the task of holding up to the world the great truth of a holy and chaste Church, in her ministers and in her faithful. When situations of scandal [and sin] arise, especially on the part of the Church’s ministers,” we promise to “act firmly and decisively, justly and serenely” (*Apostolorum successores*, no. 44). We commit ourselves “to ensuring that those who state that they have been harmed, together with their families, are to be treated with dignity and respect, and, in particular, are to be: welcomed, listened to and supported, including through provision of specific services; offered spiritual assistance; offered medical assistance, including therapeutic and psychological assistance, as required by the specific case” (*Vos estis lux mundi*, art. 5, §1).

We understand “scandal” not only in terms of how such allegations damage the image of the Church, but more so in how such sinful behavior injures the victim and causes others to lose faith in the Church. Our first response will be to provide for the pastoral care of the person who is making the allegation, as well as follow the established church and civil procedures to investigate. This will be done in cooperation with lay experts and civil authorities.

9. We will “participate, whenever possible, in formation gatherings arranged by various ecclesial bodies” (*Apostolorum successores*, no. 54), especially those offered by the USCCB, in regard to best practices in preventing and dealing with sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons, and sexual misconduct with or sexual harassment of adults, seeking the help of experts in these fields.

10. Finally, when proposing names for the office of bishop, we will offer candidates truly suitable for the episcopacy. “For a bishop as God’s steward must be blameless, not arrogant, not irritable, not a drunkard, not aggressive, not greedy for sordid gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, temperate, just, holy, and self-controlled...” (Titus 1:7-8).

In his personal letter to the U.S. bishops in January 2019, Pope Francis reminded us that the consequences of our failures cannot be fixed by being administrators of new programs or committees. They can only be resolved by humility, listening, self-examination, and conversion. It is our hope that by obeying the Word of God and embracing what the Church expects of us, we will imitate Christ, the Good Shepherd.