



FACT SHEET: *Motu Proprio* “*Vos Estis Lux Mundi*”

Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio* by the Supreme Pontiff Francis “*Vos Estis Lux Mundi*”

What is a *Motu Proprio*?

In canon law, *Motu Proprio* (of his own accord) refers to a document issued by a Pope on his own initiative and signed by him. The document generally has the form of a decree. It begins by stating the reason the Pope has decided to act and then states the law or regulation made or the favour granted. The Pope as supreme executive and legislator of the Church signs it. When the Pope issues a *Motu Proprio* in his capacity as legislator, he typically revises, modifies or clarifies the Church’s canon law.

Canon 9 states “laws concern matters of the future, not those of the past, unless provision is made in them for the latter by name.” Therefore, the *Motu Proprio* comes into force on the date specified and applies from that date, and not retrospectively, unless it is specifically stated in the *Motu Proprio* otherwise.

Vos Estis Lux Mundi (VELM)

VELM was issued by Pope Francis on 7th May 2019 and became effective law for a three-year experimental period. Following this period, VELM was evaluated and updated and came into force (universal law operative) on 30 April 2023.

The purpose of this legislation is to require allegations of sexual abuse occurring from 1 June 2019 against minors and vulnerable adults committed by: clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life (priests, sisters and brothers), members of societies of apostolic life (lay and ordained), as well as Bishops and other leaders, to be reported to the proper authorities and to be dealt with according to due process in order to ensure justice for the victims and safeguarding of the common good.

VELM is an indication of the seriousness with which Pope Francis is seeking to bring about change in the way allegations are managed, to provide care for complainants of abuse, and to ensure accountability on the part of Church leaders.

VELM is divided into two sections referred to as Titles:

Title I (Articles 1-5) provides the general provisions of the law, outlines the nature of the crimes involved, defines the terminology used and is inclusive of both Minors and Vulnerable adults (Children and Adults at Risk).

It also sets out the delicts that VELM covers. Delicts are defined as ‘crimes in canon law, an external violation of a law or precept gravely imputable by reason of malice or negligence’. As outlined in canon 1311, ‘The Church has its own inherent right to constrain with penal sanctions Christ’s faithful who commit offences’. This is done through investigations and procedures outlined in Title I and Title II.

Title I contains content from five articles that details the scope of application, reporting, protections of the person submitting the report and the care of persons

Title II (Articles 6-20) provides details of the procedures to be followed and the actions to be taken when the person at the centre of a report is a Bishop or someone who in canon law is considered to have a responsibility equivalent to that of a Bishop.

Whom does VELM apply to?

VELM applies to reports regarding all clerics, members of Institutes of Consecrated Life (priests, sisters and brothers) or Societies of Apostolic Life (clerics and lay members) and Bishops and other leaders.

What crimes are covered in VELM?

Delicts against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue consisting of:

- Forcing someone by violence, threat, coercion or through abuse of authority to perform or undergo sexual acts;
- Performing sexual acts with a minor or a Adult at Risk;
- The production, exhibition, possession or distribution including by electronic means,

of abuse material depicting Children or Adults at Risk, as well as by the recruitment of or inducement of a minor or a Adult at Risk to participate in pornographic exhibitions.

When committed by clerics (Bishops, priests or deacons) or by members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic life as well as the cover-up of such crimes when committed by a Bishop or a Supreme Moderator of a religious congregation.

Reporting process

VELM is designed to facilitate reports from clerics and members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life regarding crimes of sexual abuse committed by clerics and members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the concealing of crimes of sexual abuse by Bishops and their equivalents. Other people can complete the attached reporting form, but are encouraged to first [review this page on the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference website](#) about reporting allegations of abuse.

Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference documents:

- [Vos Estis Lux Mundi full document](#)
- [Implementation of Vos Estis Lux Mundi in Australia](#)
- [Vos Estis Lux Mundi -- Summary and Reporting Process](#)
- [Diagram for Reporting -- Vos Estis Lux Mundi](#)
- [Report of Canonical Crime Form](#)
- [A Complaint Concerning Bishops and Supreme Moderators of Congregations](#)
- [Contact details for Bishops](#)

If you reside in NSW/ACT and are submitting a Report of Canonical Crime Form, you must:

1. Send a copy of the Form to the Arch/Bishop where you reside
2. Send a copy of the Form to the Arch/Bishop where the Respondent resides

AND

3. Send a copy of the Form to [the Bishop of the Diocese, Eparchy or Ordinariate](#) where the crimes are alleged to have occurred

A report may be sent directly to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Holy See, addressed to:

*Prefect: Card. Víctor Manuel Fernández,
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Palazzo del Sant'Uffizio 00120, Vatican City, Italy*

OR to the Apostolic Nuncio in Australia addressed to:

Apostolic Nunciature (Embassy for the Holy See), The Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn, 2 Vancouver Street, Red Hill ACT 2603.

If a person is unable to notify a complaint due to their age, a language barrier or a disability, another person may make the notification on their behalf.

Who must report?

All clerics and religious must report when they have “notice of or well-founded motives to believe that” sexual abuse or a cover-up has been committed. In addition, VELM encourages all laypersons to report clerical sexual abuse and its cover-up to the Archdiocese.

VELM does not remove lay or religious personnel's obligations to report under state legislation and the Archdiocesan Policy and Protocols.

Reports against Bishops

Allegations against Bishops, if not manifestly false, will be conducted by the Metropolitan Archbishop once approval from the competent dicastery has been given.

Protection for the accused, victims and whistle-blowers

Whoever reports a case of sexual abuse or cover-up will not be subjected to “prejudice, retaliation or discrimination” because of what they report. All those involved must be treated fairly and with respect. The innocence of the accused must be presumed and the accused must be given the chance to defend himself and to receive legal counsel.

Definitions

Minor means: any person under the age of 18, or who is considered by law to be the equivalent of a minor

Adult at Risk¹ means: any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence.

Abuse Material² means any representation of a minor or Adult at Risk, regardless of the means used, involved in explicit sexual activities, whether real or simulated, and any representation of sexual organs of minors and Adults at Risk for primarily sexual purposes.

Delict means crimes in canon law, an external violation of a law or precept gravely imputable by reason of malice or negligence.

Competent Dicastery means the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, regarding the delicts reserved to it by the norms in force, as well as, in all other cases and as far as their respective jurisdiction is concerned, based on the proper law of the Roman Curia:

- The Congregation for the Oriental Churches;
- The Congregation for Bishops;
- The Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples;
- The Congregation for the Clergy;
- The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

VELM means *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (You are the light of the world)

More Information

If you have any questions about the implementation and/or application of VELM in Australia, please [email the Bishops Conference's Secretariat for Canon Law](#).

Further Resources

Visit the Archdiocese's Safeguarding website to access the Archdiocesan Policy and Protocols including:

- **Protocol:** Managing Safeguarding Complaints
- **Fact Sheet:** When is a Child at Risk of Significant Harm?
- **Guidance Document:** When is a Child at Risk of Significant Harm?
- **Protocol:** Reporting a Child who is at Risk of Significant Harm to the Department of Communities and Justice

¹ The term **Vulnerable Person** has been replaced with **Adult at Risk** to align with the Policy and ACBC.

² The term **Abuse Material** replaces **Child Pornography** given the non-consensual nature of the abuse and to include Adults at Risk.