

**Pastoral Letter
of the Synod of the UGCC for 2019
to the clergy, monastics, and faithful
regarding safeguarding from various incidents of violence
toward children, handicapped, and vulnerable people**

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free (John 8:32)

Reverend Fathers!
Venerable Brothers and Sisters monastics and religious!
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Our world which God created is beautiful. Yet, at the same time, it is stricken by sin. St. Paul tells us: “All have sinned and have been deprived of God’s glory” (Romans 3:23). Murder followed as immediate result of Adam and Eve falling into sin: Abel died at the hand of Cain (Genesis 4:8).

Brutal manifestations of power are often signs of fear. By force, we protect ourselves from our own fear, we make up for our own infirmity by the dominance of others, we compensate the traumas we have experienced with our own power — whether the scope of domination is large or small. It is important for me to be “a prince,” a “master” over something or someone. Unfortunately, this defines life in our world. And, at this time, when we are being called – especially in the Church – to acknowledge one Almighty Lord (cf. Eph. 4: 5-6). To be true disciples of Jesus, we must not only avoid violence but also bear one another's burdens, obeying the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

The Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, in acknowledging the painful topic of violence, seeks to promote awareness and comprehension – theological, psychological, sociological and historical. Together with all people of good will, we seek ways to treat the phenomenon of violence with justice – from pastoral, moral, psychological and legal perspectives. We want to be resolute in saying no to violence in all its manifestations. Only thus can we truly build up the Body of Christ and move toward holiness and “a portion of the full growth of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:12–13).

Pope Francis calls us to acknowledge this reality. He constantly encourages us to persevere in prayer, in deep solidarity with victims, in a thorough understanding of the issue of violence, in pastoral conversion, with concrete steps to healing and cleansing the Church community – to “live in truth and love, growing in the One who is head– in Christ ”(Eph. 4:15).

In society, cases of psychological and emotional abuse occur against people, physical violence, manipulation, etc. Violent environments include the family, formative and educational institutions, health care facilities, and even church communities. Among the victims of such acts are children, young people, the elderly, people with illness or disabilities, as well as others who are vulnerable or dependent for some reason; laity, consecrated persons and clergy; women and men. In a post-

genocidal society, which has already been wounded by the systematic violence of totalitarian regimes, wounded by war or the cult of “gratification at all costs, with minimum responsibility,” human beings become the bearers historical and new traumas, and are especially vulnerable and defenceless against abuse.

With this synodal message, we affirm the desire of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church throughout the world to progress to the next stage of understanding, healing, and preventing all forms of violence against human dignity in the church environment and in the community at large, “working not for the sake of appearances, to please men, but as Christ’s servants, who fulfil the will of God from the heart.” (Eph. 6:6).

As noted, we are aware that the spectrum of violence is not limited to sexual crimes against minors. However, we have to speak of these atrocities first, in connection with a crisis concerning exposure of cases of sexual violence by clergy and consecrated persons, and which has caused tremendous shock to the Universal Church. In various countries, the facts of these horrific sins, sometimes hidden in silence for decades, have come to light. The unspeakable pain, fear, and shame of the victims is now known, and many members of the Church as well as other people of good will are frustrated and shocked.

Our efforts are aimed at protecting children, minors, and vulnerable persons from sexual abuse in various settings, including in the church. At the beginning of 2019, the Synod of Bishops of the Kyiv-Halych Major Archbishopric of the UGCC, together with the Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine, promulgated “Basic Provisions for the Treatment of Sexual Abuse of Clergy Minors.” Another significant step for the Universal Catholic Church was the publication, on 7 May 2019, of Pope Francis’ *motu proprio Vos estis lux mundi (You are the light of the world)*. According to this document, all eparchies and dioceses of the Catholic Church are required to implement an internal system for reporting sexual abuse by May 2020, and bishops are required to investigate every suspicion. In addition, according to the decision of the Synod of Bishops of the Kyiv-Halych Major Archbishopric of the UGCC (13–14 February 2018), the faithful of our Church are required to follow the guidance of the document “Norms and Principles for the Protection of Children and Youth in Pastoral and Monastic Activities the clergy of the UGCC in Ukraine.” It contains clear principles for the organization of pastoral work with minors. In different countries, eparchies and exarchates of our Church, we have created or are developing similar provisions, in collaboration with local Roman Catholic bishops’ conferences. We regard these documents as necessary and as important steps to protect children and young people in the church environment, and we are committed to combating any manifestation of violence in our church structures.

The members of the Synod of Bishops express their sincere solidarity with those who have been victims of violence. We pray for them and seek to listen to them. Christ and His disciples are always on the side of victims. We are ready to listen to everyone, and above all to those whose pain remains unspoken and whose concealed wounds have festered for years or decades, causing multi-generational traumas. We want to state, loudly and clearly: no one has the right to silence or justify wrongdoing, pain, sin, and crime. Victims must be heard, especially by the Church.

Recognizing that abuse can occur in all environments of human society, in this letter we ask forgiveness on behalf of our Church. If someone has suffered sexual, physical, psychological, emotional, financial, or other forms of violence or abuse in our parishes, dioceses, monasteries, schools, seminaries, or other church structures; if anyone was confronted with indifference and insensitivity to these evil deeds, by silencing or covering them up; if anyone was offended or

disappointed by the unworthy behaviour of Church representatives; If someone's good name was tainted by someone else's abuse, we all apologize. If we – bishops, priests, religious superiors, other church officials, and lay leaders – have failed to fulfil our pastoral duties properly, and have offended or permitted to offend one of our sisters or brothers, we ask forgiveness for this.

We affirm once again that we will listen to anyone who may have been a victim or witness of violence in any environment, including the church. At the same time we urge them: do not keep silent! For “whoever proclaims righteousness does righteousness” (Proverbs 12:17). Everyone has the right to speak, to be heard, attention, and to a thorough investigation of alleged crimes. Attentiveness, tact, confidentiality, sincere empathy in this process of hearing are necessary to begin healing the wounds that have been inflicted.

We understand that not every victim of violence is ready or able to forgive the perpetrators. Therefore, we want to create conditions for reconciliation through spiritual-pastoral and psychological care. May repentance, the basis of Christian spiritual life, be the beginning of reparation for the harm done. And we will make every effort to follow the Good Samaritan in showing mercy (Luke 10: 25–37).

Besides consolation, however, victims of violence also need justice. Overcoming this problem has both a pastoral and a legal dimension. The clergy and other members of the Church are not exempt from the rule of law, and crime remains a crime regardless of who committed it. Our Church is committed to upholding the principles of justice and truth. In each country where we are present, we are committed to developing programs for the protection of vulnerable persons, in cooperation with relevant authorities and organizations.

In caring for healing of inflicted traumas, members of the Church are called to care for the prevention of future abuses. They are also called to understand more deeply the roots of this problem from a moral, psychological, or legal point of view, as well as from a spiritual and theological one.

In coming to terms with the bitter and even shameful experience of the abuse of spiritual authority in the Catholic Church, we urge all state institutions, structures of civil society and business, to realize the extent of the spread of violence, manipulation and outrage against minors and the vulnerable, in the modern world. These problems were and are among us. They are present wherever there are people: in families, in schools, in businesses and offices, in hospitals, in sports and cultural settings, in churches and monasteries, sometimes in highly prestigious and successful circles.

Prevention of violence will only be effective when we understand the causes of this crime and view it in the broader context of human spirituality, psychology and sociology. We believe that Eastern Christian anthropology, derived from Sacred Scripture and built upon the heritage of the Church Fathers, holds the keys to a holistic understanding of the problem of violence. This problem still needs a more detailed analysis in the theological sphere. We encourage theological institutions to work in systematically developing the theology of the body and sexuality, as well as the theology of authority, obedience, and governance in the Church and society.

The issue of violence and conflict it is intrinsically linked to the issue of common general culture. In particular, the manner in which power is exercised within any institution, including the church has a pivotal role. Is church authority a ministry or is it domination of others? Do church authorities listen to and respect the people with which they are entrusted to lead? Is it not, at times, distorted by authoritarianism, elitism, and the belief that those in power should not be held accountable to anyone? A culture of privilege, exclusivity, rigorous “verticality,” one-size-fits-all decisions, and secrecy, creates an enabling environment for violence and requires attention and

responsibility. Instead, a culture of mutual listening and service, collegiality, networking, synodality, and transparency, is safe, nonthreatening, and therefore vital to people-to-people relationships. “Whoever among you seeks to be great, let them be your servant. And whosoever seeks to be your first, let them be your slave.” (Mt 20: 25–28).

We especially caution against the temptation of clericalism – the use of the Church and its spiritual authority by the clergy for personal purposes, instead of serving God and His people. Clericalism creates an artificial division between members of the Church, underestimates the role of the laity, distorts the notion of obedience and humility in monasticism and priesthood, and presents the Church as an institution made up exclusively of bishops and priests. The phenomenon of clericalism is devastating to the Church because it distorts its image. It is not only distant from the example of the Son of God, but rather the opposite of Him, for Christ became lesser, went down, and became marginalized. This is what the holy Apostle Paul is referring to when he says, “Foster the same thoughts that were in Christ Jesus. Being of God’s nature, he did not consider cling to equality with God, but humbled himself, taking the form of a servant, becoming a human being. Appearing as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death— death upon the cross.” (Philippians 2: 5–7).

Let us make our parishes, monasteries, and seminaries places of shared responsibility and brotherhood, where bishops, priests, monastics, and lay people all grow together in faith, love, mercy, and service to one another. Let us follow the model of Jesus Christ, who “did not come to be served but to serve and give his life for the redemption for many.” (Matthew 20:28). Our organizational church culture needs rethinking and pastoral conversion, an on-going process for all of Christ’s followers.

A complete intellectual and spiritual reflection will help the Church adequately prevent abuse and set a good example to the world. In societies where violence and manipulation become commonplace, the Church must always stand up for the weak and vulnerable, Jesus’ “least brethren” (Matthew 25:40): victims of domestic violence, of bullying at school, of sexual harassment in professional or sports environments, of slavery, of torture in the prison system, of manipulation in destructive sects, etc. In the face of the multiplicity of evil in the world, conscious Christians are called upon to defend human dignity and cultivate humanity and solidarity. We also wish to express our desire to work with public institutions to protect children, minors. and vulnerable persons, since the phenomenon of abuse has its roots in societies that do not react before evil or take appropriate precautionary measures.

Dear brothers and sisters! Remember that any form of violence directed against human dignity disrespects the image of God and His likeness that are present in every person (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8). But worse in the eyes of God is the sin of His servants, who violate their oaths and scandalize the hearts of those who trusted them. These evil deeds require lasting and patient healing that is not possible without God’s grace, effective love, and mercy. Safeguarding from violence against children, minors and vulnerable persons, is the responsibility of every member of the Church – bishop, priest, consecrated person, layman and laywoman.

May these our strong words halt those who are still only tempted and are standing at the threshold of sin and crime. It is never too late to turn in repentance to the crucified Christ and to ask for Go’s grace to overcome evil temptation.

Let our church communities be places where everyone, especially the most vulnerable, can fully feel their human dignity and feel protected. We take the example of those bishops, priests, and laity

who stood up for human dignity in inhumane conditions, when others could do it no longer. Such were the blessed martyrs of the twentieth century.

Let us remember the sufferings of the holy martyr Omelyan Kovch, who died a martyr's death in Maidanek concentration camp, fighting to defend human dignity.

We pray that God Almighty will help us build an environment of safety, love, and brotherly solidarity. Only daily conversion and constant spiritual transformation will make us messengers of God's mercy, He who "heals those with broken hearts and tends their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

In the name of the Synod of the Hierarchy of UGCC

† **SVIATOSLAV**

Given in Kyiv,
at the Patriarchal Sobor of Christ's Resurrection,
on the Feast of the Holy Protection of the Theotokos,
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