



**A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CLERGY, MONASTICS
AND FAITHFUL OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN
AMERICA REGARDING THE NEW POLICIES, STANDARDS
AND PROCEDURES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN
AMERICA ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

November 22, 2013
Feast of the Martyr Cecilia of Rome

In April of 2003, the Holy Synod issued a document entitled *Policies, Standards, and Procedures of the Orthodox Church in America on Sexual Misconduct (PSPs)*. At its Fall Session (October 15-17, 2013), the Holy Synod approved a revised version of these *Policies, Standards, and Procedures* and now promulgates them for use within the Orthodox Church in America.

This revised version reflects the lessons learned during the past 10 years of operating under the original PSPs and is the fruit of several years of intense discussion and review within the Holy Synod and in dialogue with the various Church bodies charged with assisting us in this area of our pastoral care: the Office for Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations (ORSMA), the Sexual Misconduct Policy Advisory Committee (SMPAC), our legal counsel and our canon lawyers.

The fundamental purpose of the PSPs remains the same: the prevention, to the greatest extent possible, of instances of sexual abuse in our parishes. While no document will ever guarantee this, the PSPs provide a very practical guide for the Church for such prevention and also provide the tools for the education of our clergy and parish councils in this prevention. For this reason, compliance with the Revised PSPs is mandatory for all within the Church: hierarchs, clergy, parish councils and all who work within our parishes.

In the unfortunate circumstances when allegations are brought forth, there are complex pastoral, investigative, legal and practical matters that need to be addressed for each case. The PSPs explicitly state that the ruling diocesan bishop retains the ultimate decision-making authority in each case. Every provision of the investigative process is provided to assist the bishop in his pastoral and administrative response to each case and does not negate his reliance on the teachings of Christ and the Gospel, as well as the canons and tradition of the Church.

While normative for the OCA, the PSPs continue to be a work in progress and are intended to be continually reviewed and perfected to improve the process of assisting victims more effectively, to streamline the investigative process and to ensure timely closure and healing for all affected.

In order to most effectively promulgate the Revised PSPs, the Holy Synod has blessed the preparation of a new page on our website (oca.org) on which the clergy and faithful can have clear access to the following resources:

- 1) The Revised *Policies, Standards, and Procedures of the Orthodox Church in America on Sexual Misconduct*.
- 2) A Description of the Office for Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations (ORSMA).
- 3) The Charter for the Sexual Misconduct Policy Advisory Committee (SMPAC).
- 4) A simplified “Reporting Procedure” for use within your parishes.
- 5) A “Parish Compliance Report” which is to be submitted annually to your diocesan Bishop and/or office.

The last item is particularly important and the Holy Synod reminds all parishes that the Parish Compliance Reports are an annual requirement. This means that, every year, the parish must submit a Report which documents the parish’s compliance with the following six requirements:

- 1) Documentation in the parish council’s minutes of its adoption of the PSPs.
- 2) Confirmation that the parish has implemented a screening program for anyone who has more than incidental contact with minors.
- 3) Confirmation that criminal background checks and sexual misconduct prevention training have been provided for all laypersons who have more than incidental contact with minors.
- 4) Documentation of verification of applications.
- 5) Confirmation that the parish has adopted a two-person supervision policy and a transportation policy.
- 6) Confirmation that each person affected by the above has been given and has read a copy of the PSPs and has certified this in writing.

The Holy Synod recognizes that the problem of sexual misconduct is only one manifestation of the brokenness of human nature and does not negate the need to address the many other areas of pastoral care in the lives of our clergy and faithful. Our primary goals remain the preservation of our parishes as places of safety and healing for the faithful and the ensuring of a proper level of pastoral care and assistance to our clergy in their difficult pastoral ministries.

We ask all of our clergy and faithful to do all that they can to prevent incidents of sexual misconduct by striving for the perfection and purity of heart called for by our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America



The Most Blessed **TIKHON**
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada



The Most Reverend **ALEJO**
Archbishop of Mexico City and the
Exarchate of Mexico



The Most Reverend **NATHANIEL**
Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian
Episcopate



The Right Reverend **MELCHISEDEK**
Bishop of Pittsburgh and Western
Pennsylvania
Locum tenens of the Diocese of Eastern
Pennsylvania



The Most Reverend **NIKON**
Archbishop of Boston, New England and the
Albanian Diocese
Locum tenens of the Diocese of South



The Right Reverend **MICHAEL**
Bishop of New York and New York and
New Jersey



The Most Reverend **BENJAMIN**
Archbishop of San Francisco and the West
Locum tenens of the Diocese of Alaska



The Right Reverend **ALEXANDER**
Bishop of Toledo and the Bulgarian Diocese
Locum tenens of the Diocese of the Midwest