Statement on Establishing Policies to Address Sexual Misconduct

In our previously published statement on October 15, 2020, we made it clear that acts of sexual misconduct, in particular by any member of the clergy, against any individuals, especially children, is an abhorrent misuse of trust and will not be tolerated. Firmly convicted of this truth, we have turned our attention and efforts towards fulfilling our commitment to ensure the safety and protection of all our members. While the Holy Episcopal Synod has been reviewing policies and standards to address sexual misconduct in the Church, we also understand the urgency and importance of having a policy in place for our diocese during this interim period. Many of the faithful throughout the Diocese of South-West America, including many members of the MGOCSM and FOCUS ministries, as well as clergy, have earnestly reached out to us to express their genuine concern and strong desire to address the sin of sexual misconduct within the Church. We give thanks to God for the graciousness and forthrightness of all those who have communicated with us. We acknowledge the concerns received, and we desire to communicate the following updates since our last communication to all the members of our Diocese:

1) As per the direction of His Holiness the Catholicos & the Diocesan Metropolitan, we have been instructed to draft protocols and standards to meet the particular needs and situation of our diocese;
2) We have tasked a team comprised of individuals with social work, clinical psychology, and pastoral backgrounds to draft these policies in consultation with legal counsel;
3) Our team has already collected and reviewed the drafted documents presented to the Holy Episcopal Synod as well as pertinent policies from our sister Orthodox communities in the U.S. that have already taken clear and decisive steps towards rooting out this sin;
4) We are reasonably hopeful that in the coming months an approved policy and standard will also be published for our diocese and implemented thereafter;

While our timeline does not establish a hard deadline, we are committed to developing a policy that accomplishes the goals of preventing sexual misconduct, protecting our members, and establishing accountability for clergy. As we prioritize these goals, we request your understanding and prayer during this time so that our next steps are both wise and effective, as well as capable of withstanding any challenges. We will continue to provide meaningful updates with regards to our progress on this matter, and we exhort everyone to pray that God will guide those involved in the drafting and reviewing of these policies. There is much work to be done, but we are confident that it will be accomplished to ensure the safety and future of all our members.

Finally, we seek your continued prayers and support for any and all who have been affected by acts of sexual misconduct. We pray that God provides healing and comfort to their spirits and bodies, to their families and friends, and that His peace and salvation reign within them. Let us affirm our faith in the Lord God Almighty and trust that His truth and life may dwell within us all.

Metr. Dr. Zacharias Mar Aprem
January 20, 2021