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**Archbishop John C. Wester's Letter
On the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandal
August 22, 2018**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Once again, we find ourselves reeling from the shocking and horrific revelations of the sexual abuse of children and young people by the clergy. The crimes attributed to the former Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick and those named in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report are unspeakable. Precious children, who especially reflect the image of God in all their innocence and goodness, have been savagely attacked by the very people who were charged with their protection and well-being. Moreover, the tragedy of sexual abuse, described by Father Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, as the “shredding of the human soul”, has been compounded by the abuse of power and the complicity of those who kept silent in the face of evil. I realize there are those who are wary of more words on this subject, but I nonetheless state with all my heart that I am profoundly sorry for the pain and suffering endured by so many at the hands of the clergy whose crimes were enabled by a lack of transparency and a culture of self-preservation in the Church. I apologize principally to the victims of clergy sexual abuse who not only endured unthinkable suffering as children, but who had to carry that burden throughout their lives. Robbed of their innocence, wonder and awe, they grew up into an adulthood of loneliness and quiet desperation. Tragically, many felt compelled to end their suffering through suicide. I apologize to their families who either suffered along with their relatives, or who were unaware of why their loved ones were distant and despondent. I apologize to my fellow Catholics and to all who have been rightly angered, saddened and distraught by the seemingly endless stream of revelations of abuse. I believe deeply in the words of Jesus, who built His Church on the Rock of Peter, and who promised that the gates of the netherworld would not prevail against it. But I also believe that this same Church has been severely shaken, and that only with Christ's love and mercy will the victims of abuse find healing of some kind, a healing that the Church needs as well.

I want to assure everyone that since the early 1990's we have promoted healing and put into place systems and programs that are meant to ensure a safe environment for children and young adults. Priests have been rightly removed from ministry as a zero tolerance policy was

put into place that extends to this day. Any clergy who are accused with any shade of credibility are, and will continue to be, immediately removed from ministry. Last year, a list of priest offenders was published by the archdiocese and will be updated as needed on our website. Victims are immediately offered professional counseling. All clergy and those religious, volunteers and laity who in any way work with children must pass criminal and sex offender background checks on the local and national level. In addition, they must keep current on their safe environment training which is offered through the archdiocese. Children in our Catholic schools and religious education programs are given age appropriate instruction that empowers them, among other things, to say “no” to improper advances, how to be alert to their environment, the dangers that can be posed by the internet and how to report any concerns to trusted adults. One of the ways we do this is through the “Circle of Grace Program”. This program also helps parents to be effective in helping their children protect themselves. In addition, the Archdiocesan Independent Review Board, comprised of lay people who come from highly noted professional backgrounds with training and expertise in the area of sexual abuse and criminal behavior, conducts investigations of reported sexual abuse and monitors all of our procedures and policies to ensure that we are doing what we say we are doing. This board conducts its activities within the parameters of local and national law, paying particular attention to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People promulgated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2002 and regularly revised. Annual national audits, which are conducted by a professional, independent and national firm, also help to ensure that the Archdiocese of Santa Fe is doing everything in compliance with the Charter to keep minors safe. The Archdiocese of Santa Fe has passed these annual audits since their inception. While this list of initiatives is not exhaustive, it does provide an idea of our commitment to keep children safe. It is important that Catholics and non-Catholics alike know what we are doing and help to hold us accountable.

During these past few weeks, a very deep and profound wound has been reopened. The healing of this wound must begin with prayer. Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth and the life” and only He can show us the way forward as we seek to walk the path of healing. As always, prayer leads to action. For it is prayer that reminds us that we can never do enough to heal victims and to protect the innocent. I therefore commit our Church to renew our vigilance and to seek ever new ways to live out the Gospel of Life, as we strive to bring healing and to strengthen protection of the innocent. I have directed that a Victim Assistance and Safe Environment Board be established to assist Ms. Annette Klimka, our Victim Assistance and Safe Environment Coordinator. This board will work closely with her and the Independent Review Board. I will work closely with this new board as well. As new initiatives are created, I will be sure that they are communicated clearly and concisely so that Catholics and non-Catholics alike will be aware of our determination to make the Catholic Church a place where the children can come to the Lord without fear and in complete safety.

In addition to action plans on the local level, I am pleased to see that the USCCB, under the leadership of Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, is establishing action plans related to investigating, reporting and resolving allegations brought against bishops. The USCCB is ensuring that these action plans include substantial lay leadership and that these leaders are given proper authority and independence.

As I express my sorrow and reiterate my apology to all, I once again remind everyone that when it comes to sexual abuse, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has a zero tolerance policy. Furthermore, I urge any victims of clergy sexual abuse to call the police and/or The New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) as well as Ms. Annette Klimka at 505.831.8144.

I also call for all Catholic churches, schools and institutions to observe this coming September 14th, the Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross, as a day of prayer, atonement and reparation for the sins of those bishops and priests who either abused children or failed to protect them. I ask that we pray especially for the healing of victims of sexual abuse. Appropriately, the feast falls on a Friday this year, the day the Lord was crucified. It is my hope that such a day of repentance would be the beginning of observances so that this archdiocese will pray without ceasing for healing and vigilance, a prayer that always leads to acting justly.

We are the Church, and in Christ's suffering we are one with those who have been abused and who suffer in ways that we cannot comprehend. Therefore, we must all take responsibility for the healing and safety of these, our brothers and sisters in the Lord, who have been so tragically hurt. Indeed, we have all been wounded by this terrible scandal; the abuse of a child is a violation of all humanity and we all must work tirelessly for our healing. May Christ, the Good Shepherd, heal His Church and heal us all. Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for us.--END