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STATEMENT REGARDING ACTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

From Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda

In the aftermath of the demoralizing Pennsylvania grand jury report and the troubling claims made by our former nuncio, Archbishop Viganó, much has been said about the scandals in our Church – worldwide and here in Minnesota. I can only imagine how jarring those reports must be for those who have survived abuse and for their families. I am sorry for the harm inflicted and the ongoing pain caused to so many.

In recent days, I have continued to hear from many concerned people: young parents worried about the safety of their children, seasoned parishioners wondering when this crisis may end, priests asking how they can serve their parishioners when they themselves no longer know who is trustworthy, and bishops regretting that we were so slow to seek the help of lay experts and act with fuller transparency. In the midst of this darkness, it is the Lord's promise that he will be with us always (Mt 28:20), that he will never abandon his Church, that gives me hope. As the darkness of the past is brought to light, I am trusting in St. Paul's insight that what is illuminated will itself be light (Eph. 5:13).

I have been encouraged to put these global issues in a local context and reaffirm publicly both our commitment to justice and healing for those who have been harmed and our conviction that abuse can never be tolerated. Yet, I offer my comments knowing full well that mere words and apologies ring hollow unless accompanied by actions.

With that in mind, allow me to briefly describe the actions that have been taken in this local Church. Working with the lay volunteers on our Archdiocesan Ministerial Review Board, Corporate Board of Directors and Finance Council, along with many other volunteers, employees and clergy throughout the Archdiocese, we have constructively and openly confronted our failures – the failures that led to criminal and civil charges, bankruptcy, a loss of trust and a weakening of our moral voice. Although we have more to do, we have come a long way. In 2015, we entered into a far-reaching Settlement Agreement with the Ramsey County Attorney's Office that requires us to take verifiable actions to prevent future abuses. The agreement has improved the way we respond to victim/survivors; the way we hold priests accountable; the way we accept, prepare and promote seminarians; the way we train our priests, employees and volunteers; and how we educate our children and youth in every parish and Catholic school in the Archdiocese. It has helped to improve our culture. We have not only abided by that agreement, but have done more than it requires. This has been verified in court every six months. More recently, we worked with victim survivors to file a joint plan in the bankruptcy court that financially compensates those who have been harmed in our Archdiocese. We have also changed

our governance within the Archdiocese, embracing greater involvement and collaboration between the Corporate Board and Finance Council, which assures greater oversight by lay leaders.

Certainly, we cannot rest on these actions alone. There will be challenges in the future, but we now draw on the expertise of a broad range of individuals, primarily laity, to address those issues with integrity, objectivity and transparency. It is my hope that what has been learned here can serve the broader Church nationally and internationally.

Turning now to the issue of bishop accountability, let me first explain the improved process that has been in place here since 2015. Based on the Ramsey County Settlement Agreement, when an allegation is leveled against an auxiliary bishop or archbishop, the Director of Ministerial Standards and Safe Environment is required to notify the Corporate Board. Thus, the allegation is made known to lay leadership who have duties to provide oversight and fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities. Moreover, a claim today cannot be settled without the knowledge and involvement of our lay leaders. Both of those measures of accountability are new, and critically important.

Regarding accountability for bishops around the world: I fully support engaging lay leadership. Church leaders must be judged by outsiders who have the independence, objectivity and expertise to be fair and credible. We need the assurance that any cleric – whether a newly ordained priest or a Pope – who abused minors or knowingly protected or enabled such abusers, will be held accountable. The same is true for those who abuse their position to take advantage of vulnerable adults, persons receiving spiritual care or seminarians. An oversight board similar in make-up, independence and authority to our Archdiocesan Ministerial Review Board should be empaneled to address accusations of misconduct against bishops and archbishops. We would also benefit from the appointment of a number of trusted outsiders who can assist those who have grievances. Locally, former Hennepin County Attorney Tom Johnson fulfills that role as our appointed ombudsperson, giving those aggrieved a safe avenue for pursuing claims without fear of repercussions.

Having had good reasons to place my trust in both Pope Francis and Archbishop Viganó, I am personally at a loss as to how to evaluate the claims that have been made by the Archbishop. Based on my experience in this Archdiocese, I believe that some form of an independent review led by credible outsiders is the only way to resolve such situations and restore trust.

In conclusion, I am fully committed to the course we are on to correct our failings, advance accountability, assist those harmed and prevent future abuse. I realize that I am far from perfect, but I always try to act to the best of my ability and with integrity, collaborating with the many hardworking and committed individuals in this Archdiocese who contribute every day to making our Church a better place through their steadfast dedication to safe environments and the Gospel.

Mindful of Pope Francis' recent call for prayer and fasting, I invite our priests, and all others, to join me for a Eucharistic holy hour of reparation and prayers for healing at the Cathedral of Saint Paul on the Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows, Saturday, September 15 at 11 a.m.