

Archdiocese of Santa Fe
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OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

November 29, 2018

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

St. Paul reminds us that "We walk by faith, and not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7). Since coming to the Southwest I have been inspired by your faith in Jesus Christ and by the heroic faith of those who came before you, a faith symbolized by our beautiful adobe missions and by the vibrant traditions of our people, the living stones of the Church we call Holy Faith. However, even though our Archdiocese of Santa Fe abides on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, it has been rocked by the terrible scourge of clergy sexual abuse and the mistakes, and in some cases, crimes of our shepherds. Now more than ever, the words of St. Paul have special meaning for us as we seek to bring healing to those who have been harmed by the evil of sexual abuse and to all those who have suffered along with them in any way. Tragically, those who should have protected our children failed egregiously to do so. These sinful deeds have left us in anger, sorrow, and an intense sense of betrayal. It is in the suffering of the innocent and vulnerable that we painfully face the extent of this struggle to walk in the light of faith. I deeply regret this suffering and I am committed to joining you in an unrelenting effort to heal and protect.

Since becoming Archbishop, the number of claims against the Archdiocese has continued to increase. These claims relate to events that occurred almost exclusively decades ago and for understandable reasons were not able to surface until later in a person's life. We have tried to resolve these claims outside of litigation, seeking to treat all of those who have been harmed by workers of the Church in a just, equitable and merciful manner, while at the same time continuing the mission of Christ, the preaching of the Gospel and involving ourselves in charitable works. Unfortunately, we are no longer able to resolve these claims in a manner that is just to those who have come forward and to those who will come forward in the future.

Therefore, after extensive consultation within and beyond the archdiocese and after careful consideration and prayer, I have accepted the unanimous recommendations from these consultations to file for the Chapter 11 Reorganization of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. Given our desire to care for all victim survivors, and given the fact that we have settled over 300 claims, but that such claims continue to be filed, I see this as the wisest and most prudent course to take. It is very important that everyone understand that we have not taken this step to avoid responsibility. On the contrary, we firmly believe that Chapter 11 is the most merciful and equitable way for the Archdiocese to address its responsibility to the victim survivors, to continue to meet its commitment to prevent abuse, and to continue its mission to all those who depend on the outreach of the Church.

The cost of settlement of the over 300 cases which included insurance funds totaled approximately \$52 million dollars of which the Archdiocese paid a substantial amount. Currently we have approximately 40 pending cases, which we need to address in a caring and Christ-like manner.

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Under Chapter 11, the Archdiocese will have the opportunity to work with the survivors to present a plan of reorganization that provides for a fair and equitable way to compensate those who suffered sexual abuse as children by clergy or workers of the Church in our Archdiocese – those who are currently known, those who are about to come forward, and those who might come forward in the future. Chapter 11 will provide for an orderly process by which those who have been harmed can make a claim, and the Archdiocese, in consultation with the survivors, can propose and confirm a plan that will compensate those who make such claims while, at the same time, continue its ministry and mission now and into the future. I firmly believe that the process of reorganization is the best and only way that will allow us to work constructively with all those who suffered from sexual abuse, helping us to ensure that cases that arise in the future will not be unfairly excluded from compensation. Those who have been abused deserve the Church's respect, compassion, and love. I hope that all who will participate in the process can work cooperatively for an early resolution.

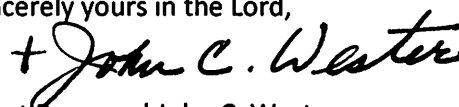
This situation, combined with the revelations of the past few months, causes many to ask what how the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has been providing for the protection of children and young people. I wish to assure you that we have been diligent in providing programs, policies and procedures to help prevent the failures of the past and to keep our innocent children safe. Over the last 25 years, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has had a "Zero Tolerance Policy" whereby every priest, deacon, staff member or volunteer who is credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor is removed from ministry permanently, and the abuse is reported to law enforcement. Since 1993 the Archdiocese has had a full-time Victim Assistance Coordinator, an Independent Review Board, every priest, deacon, staff member or volunteer are required to go through a background check and attend the Archdiocesan Abuse Awareness Training for Adults. In addition, the policy of the Archdiocese is to pay for counseling for any sexual abuse victim who requests it, and the Archbishop has offered to meet with every victim of sexual abuse by a priest, deacon, staff member or volunteer. In September of 2017, the Archdiocese published a list of credibly accused priests and recently updated the list to add additional names and provide the assignment history of each priest.

We fully realize our responsibility to heal the hurt of those who were harmed. We also realize our responsibility to continue the mission that we have received from Jesus Christ: to provide spiritual care, to educate children in the faith, to feed, clothe and shelter the needy, and to advocate for the least among us. We believe that continuing this mission is essential to our communities and is an expression of our very being as Roman Catholics. Please be assured that the ministry, pastoral services and work of the Archdiocese will continue as always throughout this process of reorganization.

In the coming weeks, the process of Chapter 11 will open our Archdiocese to unprecedented public scrutiny. I believe that this is a good thing. We will be open and transparent in this process and I will do my best in the future to keep you informed online or by our website. I invite you to e-mail or write me to share your reactions to this decision and the process along the way. My staff and I are committed to doing our best to meet with you as individuals or in groups in the months ahead.

Please continue to pray as we walk by faith and fix our eyes on Christ, the Divine Physician, who heals our wounds and who has a special place in his heart for those who have been harmed by sexual abuse. It is this same faith that will serve as our guide as we commit to the difficult but critical step of reorganization. I pray that the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son will guide our every step, and in his mercy heal his Church so that we might be merciful, just as our Heavenly Father is merciful.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John C. Wester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend John C. Wester
Archbishop of Santa Fe