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**STATEMENT
Archbishop John C. Wester
On Support of Victims and Our Call to Follow Christ
August 31, 2018**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Tragic events test a community and people cope in various ways, but we must be on guard not to give in to the temptation to blame. Sadly, since the recent revelations of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury and the abuse committed by Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick, there have been many who, it seems to me, have been using these tragedies to further an agenda. Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, with his eleven-page letter made public by several outlets, needs to show greater care in helping us to discern God's will in these tragic times. I am disturbed by this, and other attempts to promote a certain agenda, for two principal reasons.

In the first place, the issue that the Catholic Church has been dealing with, and must continue to deal with, is that of the sexual abuse of children and young people. As the people at the Covey Institute say, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." The Church's focus in light of recent news stories must be to assist victims who have been abused and to do everything in our power to prevent further abuse. I fear that we lose our momentum in this regard and become distracted when the discussion turns to ecclesial politics and the typical flash points between conservatives and liberals. This is not the way of the Gospel, and we do harm to the Body of Christ by our politics and polarization.

Secondly, I am deeply saddened by those who attack Pope Francis and even go so far as to call for his resignation. Incredibly, some of these attacks are from my brother bishops. I pray that the office of the Shepherd entrusted to us be more nobly served. Pope Francis has shown himself to be a man of integrity, compassion and love. In the short five years of his pontificate, he has demonstrated again and again his truthfulness and his love for the vulnerable, even in the midst of strong and painful criticism. He has led the Catholic Church with a clear vision that is formed by the Gospel and grounded in our sacred tradition. He has not wavered in his dedication to the poor and marginalized as he seeks to gather everyone into the Kingdom of God. He has also demonstrated that he is open to learning and to discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit at work in the Catholic faithful and evident in the "signs of the times". I have every

confidence in him and I pray that my fellow Catholics, indeed all people of good faith, will join me in granting his request by praying for him often as he leads the Church through the turbulent waters of our day and as he keeps us focused on the real issue of the moment: the support, healing and well-being of victims of sexual abuse.

Sunday before last, we read how Jesus encountered those who found His teaching incredible and who turned away from Him. When asked if he too would leave, Peter responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life." (John 6:68).

Let us in these days turn to Christ and His devotion to the will of the Father. --END