



December 14, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Many of you have reminded me that our Church needs to face today's challenges with more direct action. Changes must be made that will prevent regression to old ways. I am taking additional steps in this Archdiocese to change the culture that fostered the clergy abuse crisis.

A new position has been created in the Office of Ministerial Standards and Safe Environment to ensure that the voice of survivors of clergy sexual abuse will be regularly heard within Archdiocesan leadership. To strengthen that voice, I want to say again today that any survivor who at any time entered into a settlement agreement containing a confidentiality provision is released from that provision. I also reiterate my pledge to meet with any survivors who would like to do so. I am leaving open all Friday afternoons in February, March and April for that purpose. Meetings at other times and places will still be available as well. Planning for spiritual outreach in 2019 is also underway. It will include opportunities, both at the parish and Archdiocesan levels, for reparation, spiritual renewal, and prayers for healing.

I also want to share a few thoughts regarding bishop accountability. This was a major topic at the recent meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. As mentioned before, I strongly favor the creation of a lay-led mechanism for investigating and assessing any allegations made against me or any other bishop. It is clear to me that expanding meaningful lay involvement is essential for us to accomplish cultural change and put in place a credible and lasting process. In order to fully address bishop accountability, the Church needs a national or regional board empowered to act, much as our well-respected Ministerial Review Board has been empowered to address allegations involving our priests and deacons. The Church cannot fulfill its mission without public trust.

I remain troubled by the failure to bring closure to the 2014 investigation into allegations of inappropriate conduct with adult males leveled against my predecessor, Archbishop John Nienstedt. You will recall that Archbishop Nienstedt had delegated the investigation to his senior auxiliary bishop, who in turn sought the assistance of two separate law firms. In 2015, the investigative materials were submitted to the then-Nuncio, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò. Also in 2015, the investigation's underlying allegations were provided by the Archdiocese to the Ramsey County Attorney's Office. As far as I know, any effort by the Vatican to further address the allegations was suspended in June 2015 when Archbishop Nienstedt resigned his office. Thus, the matter remains unresolved for the accusers, for Archbishop Nienstedt and for the public. I share the frustration that is felt by them, and believe this situation highlights the need for a better-defined process and independent mechanism to resolve allegations made against bishops.

I am also aware that resolution of the 2014 investigation would, in itself, no longer fully address the question of Archbishop Nienstedt's status. After the Archbishop had already resigned and left Minnesota, a separate allegation emerged. In 2016, Ramsey County shared with us and made public an allegation it received that in 2005, then-Bishop of New Ulm Nienstedt, while at a World Youth Day event in Germany, had invited

two unaccompanied minors to his hotel room to get out of the rain and wet clothing. It is alleged that he then proceeded to undress in front of them and invited them to do the same. Archbishop Nienstedt denies this ever happened. My opinion is this allegation needs to be fully addressed before a definitive resolution of Archbishop Nienstedt's suitability for ministry can be made. For that reason, I transmitted Ramsey County's documentation concerning this allegation to the Nuncio in 2016.

I have been asked repeatedly whether there are any restrictions on Archbishop Nienstedt's ministry. My answer has always been that although I do not know of any, I am the wrong person to ask: Bishops report to the Holy Father, not to each other. I have no general juridical authority over Archbishop Nienstedt or any other bishop outside the Archdiocese.

I can, however, exercise some control over the types of public ministry permitted in this Archdiocese. With all of this in mind, and in the hope of advancing a resolution to this matter, I am taking the following steps:

1. The Archdiocesan Ministerial Review Board has recently recommended that I publicly clarify that Archbishop Nienstedt, like any priest facing similar allegations, would not be free to exercise public ministry in this Archdiocese until all open allegations are resolved. I concur. As is true in similar cases involving our priests and deacons, this is not intended to convey an indication or presumption of guilt. While this may cause some pain, my hope is that this decision prompts further action by those with authority over Archbishop Nienstedt to resolve this question.
2. Further, I will continue in the near term to advocate for the creation of an independent review board. In this way, my hope is that resolution of the allegations and any additional investigation can be handled in a way that is fair to all and worthy of public trust.
3. Finally, I am publicly committing to transmit the entire 2014 Archdiocesan investigation to whatever national or regional review board is created.

I share the disappointment of many that more progress has not been made at the national and international levels to address bishop accountability. It is my prayer and hope that the February meeting Pope Francis is convening with bishops from around the world produces tangible results. We need a review board at the national or regional level – similar to our local Ministerial Review Board – with the authority and credibility to address allegations of misconduct against bishops and make fitness-for-ministry recommendations to the Holy Father.

As we continue our preparations this Advent for the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ, I ask you to join me in praying for peace and healing for the men and women who have been abused, along with their families, friends, and communities. These are our brothers and sisters who deserve our prayers, love, and support more than ever.

With every good wish, I remain,

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Bernard A. Hebda". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda  
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis