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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings. I wish to address a very tragic and disheartening situation concerning (the former Cardinal) Theodore McCarrick. There have been very credible allegations of sexual abuse by Archbishop McCarrick dating back several decades and possibly continuing for many years. At least one victim who was a minor at the time of the alleged abuse has come forward, and others who were not minors but were adults have also come forward.

This news is truly tragic and discouraging. For me, a brother bishop, it is embarrassing and disheartening. While we as a church have made great strides in protecting young people and holding our clergy, teachers and other leaders responsible for any form of abuse to minors and vulnerable adults, it is frustrating and incomprehensible that we are still dealing with this today. Clearly, more reform is needed – this time focusing on those of us who are entrusted with the Office of Bishop.

We must seek to assist all people who have reported abuse in the past, praying for them and assuring that justice is met. At the same time, we have to redouble our efforts to train and form church leaders to protect all children in our care. But this has made me ask myself: What else, specifically, can we bishops do? I humbly offer some suggestions.

In addition to adhering to the Dallas Charter, we bishops can and must enter more deeply into a life of prayer and penance. We are the Body of Christ, after all, and when one member is hurting, we all hurt. All of us have sinned; all of us are in need of God's mercy. Acts of penance on behalf of individuals can help to heal the Body as a whole.

Another thing that is beneficial to all in leadership is Spiritual Direction and peer support. When we talk to others about our struggles and successes, our hopes and fears, the state of our spiritual life, etc., we let go of the hardness of our hearts and we become accountable to others. Especially for those of us who have the burden and blessing of being the ultimate authority in our local churches, more accountability is definitely in order.

Lastly (but not finally, since there are many things we can and should do), it would behoove us and the people we serve to be more inclusive of laypeople in our decision-making and in our social lives as well. In order to break some of the unnecessary bonds of secrecy and privilege, we should welcome friendships with people outside the episcopacy and priesthood. It has been a tremendous blessing for me to get to know families in parishes and the diocese, and to share with them my own personal struggles and concerns.

Clearly, there is much work to be done. If we are serious about our continued growth and formation, we bishops must take concrete steps. Spiritual Direction, prayer, fasting and penance, and sharing more of ourselves with our peers and families will help us to be more accountable and humble.

Please pray for all victims of abuse – particularly those who have suffered at the hands of bishops, priests, and church leaders. I humbly ask for prayers for me as I continue to learn what it means to be the shepherd of this diocese. And be assured of my prayers for all of you; something I do every single day.

May God bless us and make us good and faithful servants.

In Christ,

Most Rev. William A. Wack, CSC