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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

God sent his Son into the world to conquer sin and death, and in his resurrection, we are redeemed and forgiven. Even as this truth gives us eternal hope, we recognize that sin, violence and sickness still prevail on earth. In the Catholic Church we have witnessed the horror of sexual abuse by clergy and other church leaders. It is an unspeakable action that cries to heaven for justice. The sin of sexual abuse must be rooted out and eliminated.

We have received the "Report on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church in Florida," which was issued today by the Florida State Attorney General. Like you, I have been shocked and outraged by the scope of this scandal. As a priest (and bishop), I am utterly confounded as to how this can happen in our Church. I have met with victims of abuse and have listened to their harrowing accounts. I know that this will stay with them for the rest of their lives, and we are doing what we can to assist them in their healing. At the same time, we owe it to every victim – as well as to everyone in the Church and world – to do what we can to make sure this never happens again.

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee is dedicated to providing a safe environment for all of God's children. Whether people come of our churches, our youth ministry gatherings, our schools or to any church-related event, we must guarantee that they will be welcomed and will be kept safe from any harm. Tragically, we now know that this was not the preeminent focus several decades ago. That is why this has been a time of reckoning for our Church. For the last two decades, the Catholic Church has focused on education and formation for both clergy and the laity alike, assuring a safe environment going forward.

Even as we look ahead, we can never forget the past. This is why you will see the list of former clergy members who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse with a minor on our website. We cannot hide from the past; we can only heal if we fully admit our sins and beg God – and others – for forgiveness.

Please join with me in praying for all victims of sexual abuse, particularly those who were abused by clergy and other Church leaders. Let us redouble our efforts to care for all victims of abuse, especially those who suffer from abuse from clergy and trusted Church leaders. Let us pray for healing and help from God. And let us never tire of doing the right thing for our children and all of God's beloved people.

In Christ's Peace,

Most Rev. William A. Wack, CSC

