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STATEMENT REGARDING INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL REPORT

From Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda

As a bishop in Minnesota, I read with sadness the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative report released today by the U.S. Department of the Interior. It is an important first step in what I anticipate will be a painful but necessary journey for our country and for our Church. While the report deserves a closer review in conjunction with other leaders in our state, please allow me to make a few preliminary comments, including information about the relationship building and records-review efforts already underway in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

When Pope Francis met last month with indigenous leaders from Canada to discuss their own experience of boarding schools, he expressed, “I feel shame – sorrow and shame – for the role that a number of Catholics, particularly those with educational responsibilities, have had in all these things that wounded you, in the abuses you suffered and in the lack of respect shown for your identity, your culture and even your spiritual values. All these things are contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” I echo those words, especially as a shepherd of an Archdiocese that operated the industrial school at Clontarf, in collaboration with the federal program for eight years.

Particularly disturbing is that today’s report finds that the government chose to contract with Christian entities to operate some of the schools in the hope that Christian formation would strip away the indigenous identity of the children brought to these schools. The report sadly mentions, moreover, the involvement of Catholic organizations in that process. Any such instrumentalization of the faith or disrespect for culture is abhorrent. The clear teaching of the Catholic Church today is that indigenous peoples and cultures are to be respected, and never harmed or sacrificed in the name of evangelization.

Please allow me to also add my heartfelt apology to that of Pope Francis. I am sorry. I am sorry for the role that our Church played as part of the U.S. government’s systemic separation of families, often leading to the intergenerational trauma experienced by so many of our sisters and brothers. There are women and men in our Archdiocese and across our state who personally experienced the boarding school system. They are with us now. Their stories must be told and we must listen to them. We must also listen to the voices of the children and grandchildren whose ancestors endured such pain and death.

Even before I had the honor of gathering with tribal leaders from across the state of Minnesota in Onamia last December 9 to hear their stories and insights, members of the Archdiocesan staff had already begun the gathering and review of any Archdiocesan materials related to Indian boarding schools. These initial efforts seemed to be well-received by tribal leaders who were reassured that the truth about what happened would be discovered and, importantly, shared. This work continues today and I am grateful for the experienced

professionals who are conducting it. You may listen to our Archives Program Manager, Allison Spies, discuss her team's work on this [radio/podcast interview](#) on the Archdiocese's weekly show, Practicing Catholic. Already, with the guidance of Minnesota's American Indian nations and with the leadership of the Minnesota Catholic Conference and the Catholic bishops of Minnesota, we have established a process and portal to share with the tribes the records we have discovered. Whether and how the records will be made more widely available will be discerned in collaboration with the tribes.

As an Archdiocese, we will continue journeying with our Native sisters and brothers in exploring the ramifications of today's report and other information that is produced in the future. I commit today that Archdiocesan staff will continue searching our records and testimonies of the American Indian communities to find the truth, no matter how painful or complicated it may be. I ask in the meantime for the prayers of the priests and faithful of this Archdiocese that the Holy Spirit might illuminate a path for all of us in addressing this painful experience in our community as "brothers and sisters all" as Pope Francis reminds us.