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**A Reflection on the Moral and Ethical Imperative
to Create Systemic Change to Transform the Lives of Our Children**

By Archbishop John C. Wester

ALBUQUERQUE – Friday, January 26, 2018–IMMEDIATE RELEASE— *When Pope Francis appointed me two years ago as Archbishop of Santa Fe, I was shocked to discover the poverty in which so many children live. Hearing their cries, I offer a reflection on the moral and ethical imperative to create systemic change to transform the lives of our children.*

For eight years, there has been debate over funding Early Childhood programs, yet there has been no substantial investment to create an intervention that will change the trajectory of our children. Much time, but little paid effort, has been spent to fund proven programs. We cannot call 25% of children receiving Pre-K as a full effort. We cannot call fewer than 5% receiving Home Visiting a full effort.

The disparity is surprising, even more so when shown by the US Census that 36.2% of our children under the age of five live in poverty, while the state accumulates a Land Grant Permanent Fund (LGPF) of \$17.2 billion. State Investment Council and Legislative Finance Council members offer unfounded projections of LGPF doomsday scenarios, of the stock market crashing and gas and oil dropping. Yet both have come and gone and the fund has proven to be strong.

The true doomsday is the condition of our children. Adverse childhood experiences are at epidemic proportions in New Mexico. If we calculate the hardship and cost to society for crime, educational remediation and an unprepared work force, this is the doomsday scenario playing out right in front of us.

*We are at the bottom of the barrel of all outcomes of children’s wellbeing, yet there is another barrel, which has become a **golden calf**, which is overflowing. Commissions paid on the management of the LGPF have been referred to as a drop in the bucket, yet asking for a distribution of 1% is a smaller drop than was paid in commissions. The proposition that this 1% would deplete the fund is not true.*

The lack of programs is why our outcomes have not improved. Polls show that New Mexicans are

ready to support 1% being drawn from the LGPF; to make real change we must place this issue on the ballot.

As a leader of the Catholic Church in New Mexico, I view this through the lens of the Gospel, echoed in the challenges to care for our children presented by Pope Francis. For Catholics, fidelity to the Gospel is a communal call for a preferential option for the poor. The reality is that if a great many of our children are in poverty, we all are impoverished.

An investment in human capital is recession-proof. A resilient society creates more profit for a state than the dependency on a trust gambled daily in the stock market.

Be assured of my prayers for the children of New Mexico. I urge all people of good will to keep our children in our hearts, in our minds, and in our voices to bring about productive change.

None of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice.

Pope Francis

Most Reverend John C. Wester
Archbishop of Santa Fe