



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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September 12, 2019
Memorial of the Most Holy Name of Mary

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

I begin this letter by renewing my sincere apology to all those who have suffered sexual abuse by those clerics or Church personnel who violated their position of trust. I am so very sorry for the suffering you have endured, and I pray for you every day. The Diocese remains committed to helping victims find hope and healing and to creating a safe environment for all, especially our children.

In response to the tragedy of child sexual abuse, the New York State Child Victims Act was passed earlier this year. A one-year legal window to file lawsuits opened last month on August 14, 2019. As a result, the Diocese now faces a significant number of claims of sexual abuse of a minor, all dating back decades. The Diocese has not received a contemporaneous report of sexual abuse of a minor since 2006. Litigation cost and settlements or jury awards will exceed our resources, and the Diocese will be unable to litigate or settle these claims.

For that reason, and after much prayer, study and consultation with diocesan consultative bodies which include many lay persons who have expertise in these matters, the Diocese of Rochester has filed for bankruptcy under Chapter 11 of the United States Bankruptcy Code.

This is a very difficult and painful decision. But after assessing all reasonable possibilities to satisfy the claims, reorganization is considered the best and fairest course of action for the victims and for the well-being of the Diocese, its parishes, agencies and institutions. We believe this is the only way we can provide just compensation for all who suffered the egregious sin of sexual abuse, while ensuring the continued commitment of the Diocese to the mission of Christ.

Enclosed with this letter is a document that provides in a "Frequently Asked Questions" format the many details of this process. In summary, a Chapter 11 filing stops the collection of debts and legal actions and enables the Diocese to form a Reorganization Plan that will detail how available assets will be used to settle claims and negotiate reasonable settlements. Had the Diocese not filed under Chapter 11, it would face multiple civil actions, a slow, unpredictable and costly process that would require years of court involvement and those claimants who filed suits first would receive all available funds to pay victims. As a result, later claimants would receive nothing. Most importantly, such lengthy proceedings delay justice for the victims and only prolong their pain and suffering.

I am sure you are concerned how this Chapter 11 filing affects your parish. The parishes are separately incorporated under New York State's Religious Corporation Law. Charitable entities such as Catholic Charities are separately incorporated under New York's Not for Profit Corporation Law. The ministries and operations of parishes and entities, such as our Catholic Charities agencies, should not be directly affected by the Diocese's Chapter 11 proceeding.

The Diocese's goal is to bring the Chapter 11 process to a conclusion as soon as is possible in order to continue the work of healing and reconciliation, both for the victims and our diocesan family. Through all of this, we will remain focused on Christ's mandate to preach, teach, and sanctify, to reach out to our brothers and sisters suffering from sexual abuse, to serve those in need, and to be present to the community, as we have been for the past 151 years of our diocesan history.

If you wish more information, we have created a special page about our Reorganization on the diocesan website, www.dor.org. The page has several resources, including the Reorganization Frequently Asked Questions and court documents, and it will be updated throughout this process.

On this, the Memorial of the Most Holy Name of Mary, model of faith and perseverance, steadfast at the Cross of Our Savior, let us turn to her and ask her intercession amidst this significant challenge. I humbly ask for your prayers for the victims and for the Diocese as we move forward in this process. Jesus is our strength, our hope and our life.

Trusting in God, I remain

Devotedly yours in Christ,


The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano
Bishop of Rochester

Enclosure: Reorganization Frequently Asked Questions