



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
of
BATON ROUGE
Office of the Bishop

From the desk of
Bishop Michael G. Duca

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

PRAISE BE JESUS CHRIST!

I have asked your Pastor to have this letter read to you today for two reasons.

The first is to thank you all for the warm and generous ways you have welcomed me into the Diocese of Baton Rouge. My visits to our church parishes have taken me into the urban areas of Baton Rouge, as well into the parish churches up and down the river, *West and East Side*, and through the parishes on northeast side of the Diocese. These visits have provided me with the experience of a vital and impressive Catholic community throughout the Diocese. I am beginning to understand that your deep faith in Jesus Christ, our diversity of cultures, the rich history and your commitment to family and tradition provide a solid foundation for our Catholic faith and are the sources of, you might say, the personality of our diocese. I indeed feel blessed that you have received me so willingly into this beautiful Catholic family.

I have also spent the last two months visiting individually with our priests and I am deeply impressed by their faith, commitment to their vocation and love of their people. In all the difficulties that we are facing now as a Church, you should appreciate the good priests who

serve in our parishes. From time to time let them know of your appreciation and prayers. They certainly have my respect and support.

My second reason for this letter is to keep you up to date with my progress on the list of clergy who have been credibly accused of wrongdoing in the Diocese of Baton Rouge from the diocese's founding in July, 1961. I do not mean to be disrespectful regarding the seriousness of this matter by simply calling it "wrongdoing," but I do so with an awareness of sensitive young ears attending Mass today.

This week an independent review was begun of all the personnel files of the priests and deacons who have served in our diocese since we were created out of the Archdiocese of New Orleans over a half century ago. The outside law firm of Hebert, Spencer & Fry, L.L.P. has been engaged to do the work, and it has hired the highly-respected accounting and consulting firm of Postlethwaite & Netterville, APLC to assist in performing this independent review.

Neither I nor any of my staff is involved in this review, and the auditors will have full access to clergy personnel files while they are on site. The auditors estimate it will take a minimum of four to six weeks to complete their work, after which they will submit a comprehensive written report of their findings. From this information I will compile a list of credibly and substantially accused clergy to be published (hopefully) before the end of January. I will be more exact on the release date once the review by the auditors is complete and the report is submitted to me.

You may think that my arrival in the diocese just 2½ months ago is the principal reason the diocese appears to have delayed publishing such a list. On the contrary, we have been

working carefully and intentionally on this list since I arrived so that we can publish a list that will be complete, accurate, credible and transparent.

I have also written a column in the current issue of the *Catholic Commentator* to provide additional background on the issues that need to be addressed in this crisis within our Church. I hope you will pick up a copy of the paper after Mass today and read it. I ask your prayers for us all, particularly, that this good, yet difficult undertaking will be a source of healing and affirmation for the victims of abuse by the Church's ministers of any rank.

Also please pray for the Bishops of the United States who will meet this week for our annual meeting in Baltimore, Maryland. Pray that the decisions and reforms we make in Baltimore, along with the work we are doing in our own diocese, will serve as a catalyst for continued and more expansive reforms of the Church.

Faithfully your Shepherd in Christ,

+Michael

Bishop of Baton Rouge

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