

DIOCESE OF BUFFALO

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THE CHANCERY

First Sunday of Lent, 2020

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

By now, you will have heard that on Friday, the Diocese of Buffalo filed for Chapter 11 Reorganization. This is a decision arrived at after much prayer, discernment and consultation with the College of Consultors and our Diocesan Finance Council, and is based on our belief that this approach will enable the most number of victim-survivors of past sexual abuse in achieving fairness and a sense of restorative justice for the harm they have experienced. This filing for reorganization will also allow the vital, mission-driven work of faith that is so essential to the residents of Western New York to continue uninterrupted.

This decision is no way an attempt to avoid our responsibilities. Instead, this step will make possible a more equitable resolution for the largest number of abuse claimants. Were the Diocese to delay or avoid filing for Chapter 11 reorganization, the result would inevitably be protracted litigation and potentially large jury awards for some, which would only deplete limited Diocesan resources in favor of those whose cases were heard and/or settled in the earliest stage. Under this scenario, many victims might be left with little or no recovery for their claims, and the Diocese might be forced to seek Chapter 11 protection anyway, though under far more dire circumstances.

We have no more urgent work than to bring about justice and healing for those harmed by the scourge of sexual abuse. The intense emotional, mental and spiritual pain inflicted on these innocent victim-survivors is a heavy burden they are forced to carry throughout their lives. There is no excuse, no adequate explanation that will satisfy the gnawing questions of why and how our Church has come to this place - how our Catholic Faith has been obscured by the evil acts of those who presented themselves as trusted ministers of Christ. This crisis, as we know, has confronted our Church locally, nationally and internationally. It has preoccupied the faithful in our parishes, as well as our priests, deacons and religious, bishops everywhere, and our Holy Father, Pope Francis. It also preoccupies me.

You will, no doubt, have many questions about the impact of this decision on the daily operations of parishes and schools, and diocesan departments, programs and outreach that accomplish so much good in our communities. It is important to understand that parishes are separately incorporated under New York State's Religious Corporation Law and not included in this filing. Our Catholic elementary and secondary schools will also not be part of the Chapter 11 case because they are owned by parishes or are separately incorporated entities. Catholic Charities, similarly, with its extensive ministries that serve so many critical needs, is separately incorporated under New York's Not for Profit Corporation Law and will not be part of the filing. This is also true for the Upon This Rock Campaign and its case elements.

It is our firm intent to complete, at the earliest opportunity, the reorganization plan that a Chapter 11 filing requires, although we recognize it may take more than a year to achieve this. This process will enable us to resolve victim claims with available assets and insurance coverages, while ensuring that the Diocese can continue to fund its essential mission throughout Western New York. In this respect, I humbly point out that the financial generosity of so many continues to be vital for this purpose - proclaiming and living out the Good News of the Gospel as Disciples of Jesus Christ.

Recognizing your need for as much information as possible about our decision to pursue reorganization, we have established an information resource page on our Diocesan website at: **www.buffalodiocese.org/reorganization**. There you will find frequently asked questions and answers, as well as information updated as it becomes available throughout this process. We have also established an Information Help Line at: **(833) 302-0061** to answer your questions and concerns more immediately. Please know that we will be communicating often with you as we work through the issues now before us.

I am deeply grateful for your steadfast commitment, and that of our priests, deacons, religious and lay ministers, and for all that each of you do to demonstrate your devotion to Christ the Lord. You have my full commitment to walk every step of the way with you throughout this period of reorganization - as long as the Holy Father should wish of me, personally. I am fully confident that as a Diocesan family we will forge a path toward renewal and greater stability, emerging stronger, more united and confident about the future of our local Church.

As we continue our Lenten journey, a time for conversion and renewal, may God in his infinite mercy grant you peace, and instill in us all the assurance of his abiding grace, love and protection.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Edward B. Scharfenberger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Edward B. Scharfenberger
Apostolic Administrator
Diocese of Buffalo