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BISHOP OF OAKLAND



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November 8, 2023

Dear parishioners and friends of the Diocese of Oakland,

As we come to the final days of our liturgical year, looking forward to the feast of Christ the King, I want to take this opportunity to update you on the good work happening in our Diocese and what are moments of hope going forward into Advent and our new year. I would also like to update you on where we are in the bankruptcy process.

Last month, we saw a most extraordinary gathering of our faithful at the Cathedral of Christ the Light. Our Diocesan Eucharistic Revival Congress brought nearly 2,000 Catholics to our Cathedral for several days, and together we worshiped, adored, and glorified Jesus Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity. I know our Diocese is blessed and will continue to be blessed by our dedication to Our Lord and Savior in the gift of the Eucharist.

In many ways, the Diocesan Eucharistic Revival Congress is a beacon for us. Not only did we experience God's tremendous sacrificial love for us in those days, I believe we have also seen a glimpse into our future, of being the Body of Christ that witnesses God's salvation for all.

As Christ's ambassadors, we are creating places where people can come to know Jesus Christ and He can come to know them. Our parishes and schools and our St. Vincent de Paul Society's and Catholic Charities locations are all sacred places – beacons of Christ's mercy.

This purpose and hope are the heart of our Mission Alignment Process. We are taking stock of the gifts given to us by God, both temporal and our own talents, and understanding how we can be more effective in bringing about tremendous fruit in our Diocese.

We are committed to addressing the current reality in our Diocese, a reality happening not just here, but throughout North America and in many Christian denominations. It is a dual challenge of declining engagement by Catholics and a decline in priestly and religious vocations, resulting in underutilized parish resources and facilities. In our Diocese, for example, we have 25% fewer priests than in 1985 and Mass attendance has dropped precipitously, almost in half, since 2010. It is essential we focus on our mission to serve people where they are now... and not where they were in 1965 (when most of our parish facilities were built). We cannot afford to maintain structures that no longer serve our mission.

We filed for bankruptcy because we believe this process is the best way to support a compassionate and equitable outcome for survivors of abuse, while ensuring we continue to provide the essential services and support so crucial to our parishioners and communities.

For the greater glory of God

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Since the initial filing, we have continued our important spiritual work while moving forward with the Court supervised proceedings. The September 11 deadline for survivors of clergy sexual abuse to file claims has passed, closing the period established by the bankruptcy court for all claims to be filed.

As a result, there are now 407 claims to resolve through the bankruptcy process. Now that we have a defined claim universe, the Diocese can begin working with both the creditors' committee and our insurers on a plan to equitably compensate the survivors.

The next steps include entering into mediation with the creditors' committee and insurers, conducted by court-appointed mediators. Mediation will serve as an essential path by which claimants will receive compensation through the bankruptcy process.

I ask for your commitment to work with me and our pastors in the upcoming months as we determine how best to "right size" our parishes to serve the faithful and all who come to us seeking Christ's tender love. This effort will require us to reimagine how we use our facilities and other resources. All will be impacted by these changes; yet I promise all will be able to be part of a faith community where we can celebrate the sacraments, pass on the faith to our children, and offer works of mercy to those individuals in need. This challenge will require us to put aside our personal preferences and work together for the good of the whole diocese and the future of our beloved Church.

Please join me, too, in praying for the survivors of clergy sexual abuse and their continued healing. My prayer is that all Catholics in the Diocese of Oakland live our lives as true witnesses of the love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

You, the priests, and the people of our Diocese are generous, faithful, and full of good will. Thank you for your continual support for Christ and His Church.

Wishing you every grace and blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Barber S.J." with a small cross symbol to the left of the name.

The Most Reverend Michael C. Barber, S.J.
Bishop of Oakland