



DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

May 3, 2021

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Five years ago today, I was blessed to become your Shepherd. In sending me to your diocese, I remember Pope Francis said to me, “you must know a lot of people and clergy in your new diocese since it is so close to your home.” Obviously, he thought my transition from Rector of a college in Rome to Bishop in New Jersey would be eased by my friends and acquaintances. However, the opposite was true. I knew very few individuals here having met only a couple of Metuchen priests in my 24 years as a priest, and just a few lay people. Today, the Metuchen Diocese is my home filled with friends: clergy, religious and laity.

When I arrived in 2016, I was filled with gratitude for your warm welcome and since then have been overwhelmed by your love, encouragement and especially your prayers. Although I had never been a pastor despite having asked my bishop a few times for a pastorate and requesting that I finish up as Rector of the Pontifical North American College to become a pastor in my home diocese of Camden, I truly try to approach my role of bishop as being the pastor of the diocese.

Although I realize I cannot personally know 635,000 Catholics nor be present all the time at our 90 parishes, dozens of schools and other ministries and institutions throughout our four counties, I truly try to carry each of you in my heart and prayers, to be as present as humanly possible and be a witness to the resurrection of Jesus, a minister of hope for you. That is the bishop’s most basic responsibility, as a successor to the apostles, to witness to the resurrection of Jesus and hence offer hope in a world that sometimes does not seem so hopeful.

While there have been many blessings during my ministry in the Metuchen Diocese, we have had more than our share of challenges, too. The pandemic of this past year, the McCarrick scandal, financial and sex scandals in our Church, divisions and racism in our country have all been scourges that have affected our good people. While we wish these issues did not occur, we must try to view the most horrific situations in light of God’s providential love. With much help and encouragement, we have done our best to face these issues in a prayerful, forthright, and transparent way. I have shared what I know with you as we continue to do everything possible to ensure these issues never occur again while we build up the kingdom in our midst God has entrusted us. Our task as ministers of the Gospel is to proclaim the promise of new life where the world sees only ruin and desolation.

For those times when I disappoint you, or when I do not meet your expectations, especially when it is a result of my own limitations, I am deeply sorry. I know I am human and often this role of bishop seems to have heavenly expectations. I strive to become a saint, as we all do. I pledge anew to use all my strength and whatever talents I have in ministering to you. I am grateful for your patience when it is called for, as I continue to learn more and more about how to be the bishop you deserve.

What helps me tremendously are your prayers and your dedication and for that you have my heartfelt thanks. I love being with you, and I am always encouraged by our visits. I am inspired by your dedication to the Word of God and the Eucharist, even during the pandemic, and the challenges it presented to our faith. Likewise, I am so inspired by your great generosity to your parishes, our Bishop's Annual Appeal and the other good causes where we join together to light a fire in the heart of our Church. Your continued support of all these initiatives bring me great consolation!

I am also so grateful for our faithful priests, deacons and religious who minister in the parishes and institutions throughout our beautiful diocese. Our lay ministers in our parishes and ministries as well as our diocesan staff work tirelessly, often behind the scenes, to keep things moving along in our administration and pastoral outreach. In our schools we have an army of teachers and catechists and many who serve in various religious education programs, all who sacrifice so much and show such great dedication.

Of course, our seminarians are one of our hopes for the future as they prepare to become our shepherds. We are blessed with 24 good men in formation for the priesthood, the most we have had in over 25 years. It is a blessing. Please pray for even more vocations, shepherds for our Church so we have enough priests for all of our parishes and our many needs. Some have asked what they can do to mark my anniversary. Prayers first, of course, are appreciated and needed. Also, if you are able, I would be very grateful if you would make a contribution to fund our seminarians' formation as it is a large ticket item on our annual diocesan budget, partially funded through the Bishop's Annual Appeal, to pay for the formation, health insurance, and the other needs of our 24 seminarians preparing to be your shepherds.

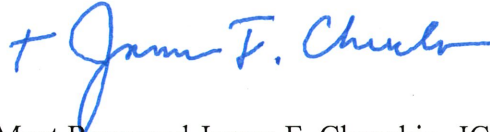
I loved being rector of the North American College and consider it a very unique privilege in my life, not because it was in the Vatican or because I had studied there as a seminarian and young priest, but rather because it was such a unique spot to witness the Lord doing such beautiful things in the lives of the young men sent there for priestly formation for the good of our beloved Church.

I, myself, was re-formed as a priest during my time in Rome, and I had a front row seat in witnessing great growth in holiness amongst the seminarians and priests. When I asked, after 12 ½ years at the college, to be reassigned to return to my home diocese to minister as a pastor and be closer to my family, I wondered if I would ever be as fulfilled in my priestly ministry. I can tell you, without a doubt, that even though it didn't happen as I had hoped, I am, and it is thanks to God's goodness and to you, the good people of this beautiful diocese, our priests, deacons, religious and seminarians.

Thank you for your warm welcome, your prayers and your collaboration in lighting a fire in the heart of our Church and for your patience with me too, as I have grown as a person, priest and now bishop in your midst. Know of my love and prayers for you, and my gratitude too. May Our Lord pour His abundant blessings upon you and your loved ones. Please continue to pray for me so that we can continue to do beautiful work in this loving vineyard of the Lord called the Diocese of Metuchen.

With renewed best wishes, I remain

Yours in Christ,



Most Reverend James F. Checchio, JCD, MBA
Bishop of Metuchen