



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Bishop Michael F. Olson's Pastoral Letter
Addressing Recent Decisions

December 15, 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I said at my ordination and installation as your bishop, Pope Saint John XXIII was fond of saying that a bishop is not given a diocese but rather he is given *to* a diocese. At that time, I stated that this paraphrase was how I would approach my ministry as your bishop. It is hard to believe that almost five years have passed since the day of my ordination as your bishop, and each day of that period I have spent in gratitude for the service that Christ has entrusted me to offer you with leadership in teaching, overseeing, and sanctifying.

The Diocese of Fort Worth now includes more than 1,100,000 self-identified Catholics living in a diverse geographical area over 28 counties in 90 parishes and one mission. This number has risen from 720,000 self-identified Catholics five years ago. Two new parishes have been established during that time: St. Martin de Porres in Prosper and St. Benedict (extraordinary form). I have ordained 12 men as diocesan priests in my five years as your bishop. We have a clearly defined program for fostering vocations in our Catholic schools and religious education programs throughout the entire Diocese. We have had 51 participants in "Come and See" seminary retreats during this last year alone. Prayers for priestly vocations have become more intentional.

Our involvement in lay ministry is thriving. This past September, the Diocese of Fort Worth had the honor of hosting the National Encuentro V, at which over 3,000 Hispanic Catholics gathered in communion as participants. Our laity provided 800 volunteers for hospitality and security at this wonderful event. The Diocese of Fort Worth has trained more than 30,000 lay ministers in a renewed safe-environment program; these lay ministers include everyone from extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and parish advisory boards, to catechists, teachers and youth ministers.

Capital campaign efforts remain strong. Weekly stewardship is increasing Diocese-wide. Sunday offertory collections increased 4.68 percent from FY17 to FY18. Comparing the just-completed 1st Quarter with last year, FY19 increased 6.5 percent over 1st Quarter FY18. Building projects are underway and evidence of growth is everywhere.

We continue to develop a sound program of catechesis in several languages, directed at family

formation and rooted in the authentic teaching of Christ and His Church. This program of catechesis is in harmony with the religious education program of our Catholic school system; it is a Catholic school system dedicated to renewal in classical Catholic education. We have seen the establishment of a new Catholic high school, Cristo Rey Fort Worth at Our Mother of Mercy. Nolan Catholic High School recently broke ground on the first phase of a \$43 million building and renovation program, of which \$21 million dollars has already been committed before the capital campaign has even officially kicked off. Cassata Catholic High School continues to lead the way in alternative education for students in the Fort Worth area.

Our Catholic Charities have developed into one of the largest and most effective Catholic Charities in the United States, leading the way with innovative, nationally recognized programs with an evidence-based approach to eradicating poverty in all 28 counties of the Diocese of Fort Worth. We clearly have a lot for which to be grateful.

The size and diverse needs of our Diocese require that I, as the bishop, make decisions well in keeping pace with the growth and development that we are experiencing. I have made such decisions prayerfully, with consultation, and with an eye towards the greater good of all while being mindful of the needs of the more vulnerable in our community. With that in mind, it is impossible to please everybody. At times, some people have been unhappy or disappointed by decisions that I have made, which is understandable.

Recently, a handful of such dissatisfied people identifying themselves as supporters of Father Richard Kirkman, a priest of our Diocese, have organized a group operating under the moniker of “FRK Advocates.” This group has undertaken a destructive social media and political campaign in an attempt to discredit and disrupt my ministry and leadership as your bishop. They have launched a website, engaged in negative social media attacks, taken out billboards, and have sought media coverage seeking to air their grievances. For the good of our Diocese and to resist these attempts to divide us from within, I must clarify several of the points that the FRK Advocates have grievously misrepresented.

First, the decisions of Father Gary Picou and Father Jeff Poirot to abandon priestly ministry were made by each of these priests on their own accord. I did not ask them to leave, nor did I force them out. Many are saddened by their decisions. I am saddened as well. I pray for them, and I hope that through prayerful discernment, they decide to return to their priestly ministry. I ask you to please pray for them as well.

Secondly, the members of the community who attended San Mateo Mission and who opposed my decision to cease services at that mission have had their canonical rights to due process respected and continue to receive due process. They objected to my position that San Mateo is, in fact, *not* a parish but instead holds the status of a mission of the Saint Patrick Cathedral parish. They sought a judgment from the Congregation of Clergy in the Holy See, which upheld my decision – twice. Their canonical rights have been respected. I look forward to reconciliation and peace among all.

Thirdly, the claim has been made that I did not respect appropriate procedures regarding the termination of the tenure of Father Genaro Mayorga, TOR, as pastor of All Saints Catholic Church. Officers of the Fort Worth Police Department visited me and informed me that Father Mayorga had

received a citation for assaulting another man at 2 a.m. in a public park located immediately across the street from his parish church. The officers told me that it was reported that Father Mayorga grabbed the other man's genitals. While Father Mayorga denies the allegation, the officers told me that they believe the report to be credible after conducting their investigation, which included interviewing Father Mayorga after locating him still in the park at that time. The police officers came to me with explicit concern for the community and the parish. I requested and received a copy of the police report, which is public information.

I spoke with Father Mayorga and with his superior, whom I requested recall him from assignment in our Diocese back to his religious order for pastoral care. The Diocese immediately and transparently informed the parish of this at each of the masses celebrated on the following Sunday. While I clearly followed protocol in requesting his recall from the parish as religious order priests serve at the judgment of the local bishop, I find it concerning that advocates would suggest that I should return Father Mayorga to ministry in our Diocese after learning of the grave concerns expressed to me by the officers of the Fort Worth Police Department.

Finally, the FRK Advocates include a handful of people who are upset and angry about my decision to ask Father Kirkham to resign his office as pastor of Saint Martin De Porres in Prosper – a resignation that he did, in fact, tender in writing. My request that Father Kirkham resign his office as pastor was based upon several factors, including: first, his failure to report what he alleges to be predatory behavior on the part of a priest of the Diocese of Dallas in the workplace against a vulnerable adult; and secondly, his writing of a letter that is lewd, intimidating, and threatening to another priest.

I learned about the letter from the Bishop of Dallas, who was presented with the letter by one of his priests after that priest received it from Father Kirkham. The Bishop of Dallas provided me with a copy of the letter. In my judgment, the letter is lewd, intimidating, and threatening, and it is not befitting of a priest to write such an obscene letter. I met with Father Kirkham, at which time I produced the letter and asked him to explain his actions of writing it and sending it to the other priest. Father Kirkham admitted to me in the presence of witnesses that he wrote the letter out of anger in an attempt to obtain the attention of the other priest, who had sought to cease contact with Father Kirkham. Father Kirkham claimed to have learned about the alleged misconduct that he obscenely detailed in the letter over half a year before writing the letter to the other priest, but he never reported it. Father Kirkham admitted to me in the presence of witnesses that he never intended to report the allegations of misconduct. The FRK Advocates suggest that Father Kirkham is a “whistleblower” who is being punished for attempting to come forward with information of misconduct by another priest – this claim is patently untrue, as is so clearly shown by Father Kirkham's admissions to me in the presence of witnesses.

The FRK Advocates further suggest that the letter was an act of “fraternal correction” between priests. An allegation as serious as predatory behavior in the workplace as detailed by Father Kirkham in his letter is beyond the pale of “fraternal correction” and requires the intervention of authorities for the safety and integrity of the victim of the predatory and sexual misconduct allegedly perpetrated. The FRK Advocates ignore the fact that Father Kirkham did not report such wrongdoing and, in so doing, failed to consider the plight of the alleged victim in favor of what they claim to be an “act of fraternal correction” among priests.

As I stated at the beginning of this letter, the Lord has given us so much for which to be grateful, including the diligence, prayerfulness, and pastoral care offered by the vast majority of our priests. I ask you for your prayers for the priests of our Diocese who work so hard to serve your pastoral needs. I ask your prayers for those individuals who are unhappy or saddened by these events including those that are actually the result of my decisions. I ask your prayers for greater unity and peace among us as one diocese. And, I ask for your prayers for me as your bishop that I might always strive to protect the sheep of the Lord's flock from both the wolves and the hirelings. With every good wish for a Blessed Advent and Joyful Christmas, I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Michael F. Olson". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Michael F. Olson, STD
Bishop of Fort Worth

Please see my pastoral video titled “Bishop Michael F. Olson Addresses Recent Decisions,” which can be found on the Diocesan website at: <https://fwdioc.org/>