

November 4, 2021

Dear Parishioners,

As you know, the Diocese of Norwich filed bankruptcy on July 15, 2021. During this past week, I attended a meeting of pastors where more information was presented about the bankruptcy and how it directly affects our parishes.

**History and background.** To have a better understanding about what is happening, it is important to understand a bit as to what happened in the past and how that impacts us now. Historically, whenever the Diocese was sued in a case alleging the sexual abuse of minors, the location where the abuse was alleged to have occurred was also sued. Thus, when abuse was alleged to have occurred in a parish, the parish corporation was sued as well as the diocesan corporation. In such a case, the Diocese sought legal counsel on behalf of the parish, negotiated a settlement on behalf of the parish, and paid all the legal expenses of the parish as well as any financial settlement leveled against the parish that was not covered by insurance. According to The Day newspaper of New London, the average settlement amount was one million dollars.

**The situation.** As the diocesan bankruptcy case proceeds, at some point in the process an injunction will be issued for the Diocese that will bar future lawsuits for matters that occurred before July 15, 2021, including lawsuits alleging the sexual abuse of minors.

**The Challenge.** Once the injunction is established by the bankruptcy court, the parishes will no longer have the protection of the Diocese; and thus, the parishes will be responsible for all legal costs and the procurement of legal counsel as well as all financial settlements regardless of amount. In addition, the insurance coverage would provide very little, if anything, because the insurance payouts will have been exhausted due to the bankruptcy settlement.

**Solution.** A solution to this challenge is for the parish to be included as part of the injunction, or channeling injunction. To be part of the channeling injunction, however, the parishes will have to make a court-ordered payment as part of the bankruptcy settlement. To participate in negotiations for inclusion in the injunction, the parishes will also have to hire and retain legal counsel.

One response to this that was raised by some pastors is to have the parishes work together and hire one legal counsel for the entire group of fifty-one diocesan parishes. At this time, this seems to make the most sense as we move forward and seek to be included and gain the protections of the channeling injunction.

In presenting this to you, it is also important to note that inclusion in the channeling injunction is not about the Diocese; it is about the parish.

While this solution and its process are not ideal, it is the best we can do right now. Do I like it? No. Is it fair to everyone? Not exactly, but there are no other options.

As we move forward, I ask you for your prayers and support. First of all, please pray for the victims and survivors of sexual abuse and for their families. Secondly, please pray for our parishes and all of our parish families. None of us – victims, survivors, families, parishioners – wanted to go down this road. We were forced down this road and that is where we now are. The solution is not ideal, but it is the best we can do.

Sincerely,

*Fr Mark*

Pastor