



July

17, 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Peace and grace be with you! Today, I write to share some important news and to seek your prayers and support. After extensive consultation with diocesan staff, the Council of Priests, College of Consultors, Diocesan Finance Council, Diocesan Pastoral Council, the priests, deacons, pastoral leaders of the diocese, and outside legal and financial advisors, I have authorized the filing of a Chapter 11 reorganization for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ogdensburg. This difficult and painful yet necessary decision was made in response to the lawsuits filed against the diocese under the Child Victims Act.

I again apologize for the suffering caused by child sexual abuse by priests and other church personnel. I am sorry for the suffering endured by survivors and their families. I remain committed to helping victims find hope, healing and some peace of mind. I remain equally committed to maintaining a safe environment in our Church for all, especially our children and young people.

Between August 2019 and August 2021, when the Child Victims Act window was open, 138 lawsuits, previously barred by the statute of limitations, were filed against the diocese, parishes and other related Catholic entities. These lawsuits relate to incidents that allegedly happened decades ago, prior to the institution of our current safe environment policies and procedures. We are surprised at the number of claims that have been filed, but even one incident of abuse is too many. While we have been in litigation for almost three years, the merit of the claims and amount needed to resolve them has not yet been determined. In the past three years we have been able to resolve 14 claims by settlement or dismissal, and we have come to realize that reorganization is the best context for resolving the remaining claims while continuing our mission as a diocese.

Without filing for reorganization, the Diocese would face these civil actions in a slow, unpredictable, and costly process that would require years of court involvement. Such lengthy lawsuits would delay justice for survivors and prolong their suffering. Reorganization ensures that each survivor receives just compensation. It eliminates a race to the courthouse in which the earliest cases settled or brought to judgement could exhaust the resources available to pay claims, leaving nothing for victims whose cases are resolved later. Filing for reorganization does not hinder claims filed by victims of sexual abuse. Rather, it establishes a process for all claims

to be treated fairly. Reorganization enables the diocese to resolve the claims in one court in an efficient and timely manner.

Filing for reorganization allows the diocese to continue its programs, services, and ministries. It allows us to continue to pay our employees and retirees. We must continue to focus on our relationships with Christ while resolving the claims that have been filed. With the help of our advisors, we will evaluate diocesan assets to determine how we can maintain our mission while seeking to compensate victims fairly. We will continue our mission.

As a diocese, we have worked in a serious and determined manner to reach out to survivors of child sexual abuse, and we have developed safe environment policies and procedures that keep our young people safe. We have instituted policies and procedures to prevent abuse from happening. We have addressed allegations responsibly and promptly when they have been raised. I continue to be available to meet with victims, and we continue to offer support and assistance to those who have been so terribly hurt by this tragedy.

In New York, parishes and other entities are separate corporations. Only the diocese will file for reorganization. However, it is our hope that this reorganization will resolve all claims against the parishes and other related Catholic entities along with those against the diocese. It is likely that parishes will be asked to contribute funds to settle these claims so they can be free of litigation in state courts and released from all liability for existing claims.

As I stated above, a goal of the reorganization is to help us continue our mission. We will continue to serve God's people and spread the Gospel in the North Country. In order to do so we need your prayers and continued support. Funds from our recent capital campaign were designated for specific parish and diocesan projects, and it is our intention to use those gifts for their intended purpose. The Bishop's Fund Appeal supports essential ministries in our diocese, including the education of seminarians, Camp Guggenheim, the Good Samaritan Fund, and the training of lay ministers, priests, and deacons. It is our intent to use the donations to the Bishops' Fund Appeal to continue these essential ministries.

For additional information on reorganization, please visit our diocesan website: <https://www.rcdony.org/reorganization>. I am attaching a sheet with frequently asked questions for your information. We will keep you updated on developments in the reorganization.

As we embark on this journey towards reorganization, I ask you to join me to pray for all victims of child sexual abuse. May this process give them a sense of peace and bring them healing that comes from God alone. I also ask you to pray for our diocese. Please pray for me, my

brother priests, deacons, consecrated religious, and all who work to spread the Good News in the North Country. May we be united in our resolve to reach out to victims of sexual abuse with compassion, and to renew our commitment to serve God and neighbor.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Terry R. LaValley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley
Bishop of Ogdensburg