

## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Many years have passed since that seventeenth day in December of 1971 when I was ordained to the priesthood in Saint Peter's Basilica. My parents and some relatives and friends were able to be present. It was an exceedingly joyful day. In that great Basilica, during the prostration as the Church invoked the intercession of Our Lord and all the saints on behalf of those to be ordained, many thoughts crossed my mind: what would my years as a priest be like; what would be the assignments that I would have; who would be the people that I would work with; what an extraordinary joy it would be to celebrate Holy Mass and the Sacraments. At that time, I never really contemplated any sad or distressing moments into the future. Yet, that these moments are a reality of life became very apparent when only six days later, on December twenty-third, I received news that my grandfather had died suddenly of a heart attack. So I accompanied my parents back home and my first public Mass as a priest in Rhode Island was my grandfather's funeral. Indeed, life is the mysteries of the rosary: joyful, sorrowful and glorious, all lived in the embrace of Jesus.

Now almost forty-eight years later, I have lived my priesthood in a constantly evolving society that has presented situations and circumstances that I never contemplated on that day in December. Many have been joyful, but many have been sad. I never thought that I would be the Bishop of a Diocese dealing with the horrendous scandal of the sexual abuse of minors by those called to serve the Lord. Nothing would have prepared me to lead a sorrowful people terribly wounded by our present challenges or to console victims of sexual abuse as they try to rebuild their lives. If I had seen what the future held in store for me, would I have had the courage to say "yes"? I pray the answer would have been a strong "yes," simply because the sins of humanity are not the sins of Jesus, and despite extraordinarily difficult times, Jesus must continue to be brought to His people at Holy Mass, in the administration of the Sacraments and in preaching the Gospel. Those who have wounded the Church cannot further wound God's people by depriving them of the presence of Jesus.

I am writing this letter on the Feast of Saint Thomas the Apostle, July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Saint Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to the Apostles on that first Easter Sunday evening when Thomas was not present. So Jesus appeared again to the Apostles when Thomas was among them and Jesus instructed Thomas to place his hands into His wounds. From this extraordinary encounter ushered forth that great testimony of faith by Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

On August 14<sup>th</sup>, the Child Victims Act enacted in New York State opens a one-year window, allowing victims of sexual abuse as a minor to come forward to seek compensation. Our Diocese has a steadfast record of responding earnestly to offer

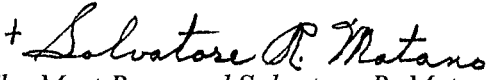
spiritual and psychological counseling and to arrive at settlements when victims have come forth. I have welcomed the opportunity to meet with victims to offer my personal apology for all they have endured, to encourage them to continue their relationship with Our Lord and, as Saint Paul encouraged, to not allow any human being to separate them from the love of Jesus. (Cf. Romans 8:38-39).

While our diocesan efforts continue to heal, to restore and to encourage all affected by painful acts committed many years ago, it is not possible to speculate on the overall impact the Child Victim's Act will have upon our Diocese. Our safe environment protocols have been firmly in place for several years, especially since the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* was approved in 2002 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In order to address the financial impact upon our Diocese, we are reviewing all possibilities that certainly include a path that is sensitive and fair to all victims, while making every effort to ensure that the Church's mission will continue in our Diocese, our parishes and institutions. In addition, our liability insurance coverage is being reviewed. Our parishes are incorporated as separate entities from the Diocese under the New York State Religious Corporation Law, and that law will govern parish assets. Every effort is being made to assure the continuance of the Church's mission and charitable ministries in our Diocese, our parishes and religious institutions.

As the days unfold, I ask for your prayers, especially as many important decisions must be made. I am most grateful for the members of the laity who serve on our consultative boards and committees and who provide wise counsel in addressing these matters. I also am most grateful that you continue the journey of faith in the most difficult of times and, like Our Mother Mary, endure the trials of present-day crosses that have been placed upon you by others who violated the sacred trust they had been given. It is your faith, the faith of our good priests who serve daily in our parishes, the faith of our laity who continue to cross over the threshold into our churches to seek the Lord's guidance, the faith of the countless numbers who pray daily for the Church, the community of faith, the faith of the many who continue to serve the poor, the refugee, the unwanted, the foreigner, those on the fringes of society – yes, you, God's holy people who will continue the Lord's work. Together we will deal with the challenges before us, ever mindful of the words of Jesus: "Know that I am with you always!" (Matthew 28:20) and be able to respond with the words of Thomas: "My Lord and my God!"

Invoking the intercession of Our Mother, Mary, and our diocesan patron, Saint John Fisher, I remain

Devotedly yours in Christ,

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 The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano  
 Bishop of Rochester