

Bishop James Checchio

Since becoming your bishop just over two years ago, I have been regularly uplifted – and affirmed in my own ministry – by so many faithful and committed priests, religious and lay people. I am constantly amazed to learn about new initiatives here which strive to deepen our friendship with

Christ, and the numerous efforts that so many undertake to provide genuine responses to tragic situations that call upon us to show the mercy of God to those in need. I also feel strengthened by the examples of generosity that I have experienced when I have called upon you to help me respond to building up our local Church, in order that we can meet so many needs together. The people of the Diocese of Metuchen are an inspiration.

I continue to be saddened and ashamed, however, by reports of the abhorrent events we have been learning about in regard to Archbishop McCarrick – and I know you must be, too. Our efforts to evangelize, and spread the Good News of Christ, have been hobbled by these atrocities.

I am praying for all those who have been hurt and praying that God’s mercy will bring healing and consolation. My heart also breaks for our faithful people, and the clergy and religious of our Diocese, as we face another tragic situation within the Church that we love. Nonetheless, I am grateful that the processes the Church has in place regarding child sexual abuse have been shown to work. The case of Archbishop McCarrick demonstrates that the culture of the Church is changing and that no one is exempt from its censure – regardless of a person’s rank or status, or the number of years that have passed since an incident occurred. As I have done in the past, I continue to urge anyone who has been abused to bring the situation to the attention of law enforcement officials. Also, I want to reiterate that the Diocese stands poised and ready to help any who have been abused.

I am also working to address how we can ensure that similar abuses, especially of seminarians or young priests, would not happen again, particularly by those in positions of authority over them. I have begun to bring together a senior team of advisors to examine reporting processes. Clearly, the safety of an independent reporting structure that allows for anyone to bring an allegation forward without the fear of retribution of any kind is needed. Accountability on all levels helps to ensure that a healthy, wholesome environment prevails to form and train our future priests. I know that I do not have to reiterate to the people of this Diocese that proper priestly formation is central to renewal in the life of the Church.

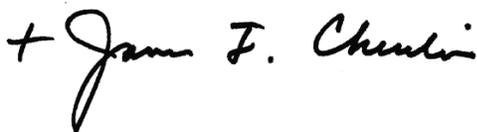
NOTE: This letter was published in the August 9, 2018 edition of *The Catholic Spirit*, the official newspaper of the Diocese of Metuchen.

In the Diocese of Metuchen, we are seeing a new springtime with men studying for the priesthood. We are blessed with the most seminarians we have had in 25 years. They are good men, striving to make over their hearts like the Good Shepherd's own caring heart. Of course, years ago it might have been relatively easy to enter the seminary, and receive the accolades of family, parish and society at large for deciding to become a priest. That is not the case now. Our young men seek to join in this life of service to God and His people at a time when it would be easy to ignore the call and choose another path. Yet, they choose to listen to the quiet call of the Lord, asking them to "follow me" just as our Lord asked the apostles two thousand years ago. I thank God for them, as I thank God as well for you, who support these dedicated young men in their response to God's call in these challenging times.

I ask for your prayers as the Church faces so many challenges in our world today. We know that the Holy Spirit protects the Church by ensuring the truth of the presence of Christ who is its keystone, its heart and its foundation. The Holy Spirit wraps the Church in this protection in spite of our sinfulness — and, it must be said in candor, in spite of the sinfulness of some of its leaders. Despite the failings of the past, however, we remain steadfast in hope. This hope anchors our faith in the credibility of this sinful yet holy Assembly of Believers, a living paradox of unity in diversity, as we endeavor to build the Kingdom of God established through the incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who is "the same yesterday, today and forever." (Heb 13:8)

In the midst of the trials we currently face, I do not want to miss pointing out that Christ is still at work in His Church! This summer, in addition to my weekend visits to parishes for Mass, I have been taking advantage of the lighter weekday schedule to visit some vacation bible schools, religious communities of sisters, nursing homes, prisons and some parishes for daily Mass. It is an honor to be with you, and it is evident that people everywhere are still yearning to see Christ in us — a willingness to place their hope in the many ministries and initiatives through which the Lord Himself uses our humble humanity to touch us with His grace. We must never forget that, in every age, the antidote to the ills that beset the Church is for men and women everywhere to rise up in sanctity. Let us not lose our vision: to "keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith." (Heb 12:12) To Him be glory and praise forever.

Be assured of my prayers for you and know of my gratitude for you. Please remember to pray for me too. God bless you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Checchio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

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

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