

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

A Letter to the Church of Rochester

Dearest Friends in Christ:

In this, my last weekly message to you for a while, I write with a heart full of gratitude to the good Lord who has sustained me in my nine years as Shepherd of the Church of Rochester and to all of you — priests, religious, and laity, whose prayerful support has given me strength and courage in the painful moments of sickness, conflict, doubt and anxiety.



Just nine years ago yesterday (November 28, 1969), I was ordained and installed as the seventh bishop of this diocese. I have read and reread often and especially in the past few months the promises I made to you on that occasion. I made it clear that I was not dismayed by the turbulence of our times because I had faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to give me the courage to accept the tensions of the pilgrimage, and the wisdom to make them a creative force for renewal.

I chose as the motto for my episcopate words from St. Paul (2 Cor. 12:15). "Gladly will I spend and be spent." And I remarked: "It expresses a high ideal, indeed. All I can promise is to strive for it with all my heart. To spend oneself, to be the servant, can be the only purpose of a bishop's life. Vatican Council II made this abundantly clear, and I pray that I may be able to ratify it with my life."

The Lord alone can judge the measure of my fidelity to those promises. All that I can say is that I have honestly tried to be a good bishop working within the constraints of my own limitations. And when those limitations became more obvious to me during my recent illness, I reached the decision which was announced to you yesterday. The decision is a good one and I am at peace. I pray that all of you will rejoice with me. I thank God for the crisis of my illness which gave me time to reflect and to pray for guidance.

I want to share with you my petition to the Holy Father to accept my request for resignation from my office. I wrote the letter on September 15, 1978 to Archbishop Jean Jadot, the Apostolic Delegate to the United States:

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP  
Diocese of Rochester  
1150 Buffalo Road  
Rochester, New York 14621  
September 15, 1978

The Most Reverend Jean Jadot,  
Apostolic Delegate  
3339 Massachusetts Ave.  
Washington, D.C., 20008

Your Excellency:

I beg your assistance in forwarding to our Holy Father Pope John Paul I through the Sacred Congregation for Bishops my humble request for resignation as the Ordinary of the Diocese of Rochester, New York. My request is prompted solely by reasons of health. The medical testimony accompanying my request will verify its validity. The tensions of administration have taken their toll and the doctors who have cared for me for the past nine years have been concerned by the continual deterioration of my health. I feel that it would be an injustice to my people to continue in my present position.

On November 28 of this year I will have completed 9 years as Ordinary of the Diocese. It would seem a proper time to be able to announce to my people the news of my retirement.

I shall continue to serve the administration of the Diocese and my eventual successor with obedience and with all the strength I have.

Rochester is a good diocese. It was with great pride that I presented our 'ad limina' report to our late beloved Pope Paul VI this past April 20. I shared the report with all of my brother bishops and with all of my people.

I am grateful to the Lord for His many blessings and to the priests, religious and laity for their prayerful support. And I thank you, Your Excellency, for your fatherly concern for me.

Your devoted Son in Christ,  
+ Joseph L. Hogan  
Bishop of Rochester

During the recent meeting in Washington, D.C. of the National Conference of Bishops, the Apostolic Delegate handed me this letter dated November 16, 1978:

3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

No. 2741/78/2  
This No. Should Be Prefixed to the Answer

16 November, 1978

Most Reverend Joseph Hogan, DD  
Bishop of Rochester  
1150 Buffalo Road  
Rochester, New York

Your Excellency:

This morning I was informed that the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has graciously accepted the resignation from the office of Bishop of Rochester which you tendered on September 15th.

Further, the Holy Father has disposed that, in accord with your expressed desire, the official announcement of the resignation will be made at 8:00 A.M. (EST) on Tuesday, November 28th.

Finally, it is the desire of His Holiness that you serve as Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Rochester until your successor takes possession of the see.

With cordial regards and best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,  
+ Jean Jadot  
Apostolic Delegate

And so this day, November 29, 1978, finds me strong in spirit, improved in health, and with a heart filled with gratitude. It has been my custom each year on the anniversary of my ordination as bishop, which usually falls close to Thanksgiving Day, to express my personal litany of thanks for blessings received. This year my prayer has a special significance and urgency to it. Please join with me as I pray:

"Lord Jesus, I, Joseph, called to leadership in your Church, thank you:

For Your Holy Spirit Who breathed on me nine years ago yesterday the fullness of Your Priesthood

For Your breath that has challenged me each day to set aside my fears and to venture faith on courses uncharted

For Your fire which has invited me to burn away my selfish interests and which has lighted my path to personal renewal and renewal of Your Church

I thank You for the voices you have directed to speak to me

For voices that have affirmed me when in doubt

For prophetic voices that have been near me to correct my erring steps and for voices lifted in prayer each day on my behalf.

I thank You for nine years of privilege as the servant of Your people.

I thank You, Lord, for all the blessings I have failed to sense and for all the blessings I do not recall.

Yes — Thank You, Lord — Thank You.

With my blessing, I remain as always,

Gratefully yours in Christ Jesus,

Joseph L. Hogan  
Joseph L. Hogan