

March 23, 2020

Dearly Beloved of St. Joseph and St. Francis,

I regret having to write you like this, when we all struggle with difficulties of a once-in-a-lifetime seriousness. I miss seeing you at Mass. Please remember that the church remains open for prayer, and I would love to see you, if you stop by the office.

Attached to this letter, you will find a letter to you from Most Reverend Barry Knestout, Roman Catholic Bishop of Richmond. I want to make a couple points about the bishop's letter.

First, I want you to know that I wrote Bishop Knestout six days before his letter to you. In my letter to him, I discussed the state of affairs with my weblog. He received my letter that day, Friday, March 13. He has yet to respond to my letter, or even acknowledge it.

Second, there is a significant factual inaccuracy in the bishop's letter to you. He writes that he invited me "to meet with him privately," yet each time I "refused or demurred." This is not true.

In early September of 2018, the bishop ordered me to remove a post from my blog, and I complied. That led to a written dialogue, which you can read at <https://frmarkdwhite.wordpress.com/bishop-knestout-letter-to-parishioners/>. On September 22, 2018, I e-mailed the bishop, suggesting that we meet at the upcoming annual priests' convocation to discuss his concerns. (I have my e-mail to him in my computer archive.) He never replied. At the convocation, he announced that his appointment time-slots were all filled.

I heard nothing more on the matter for over a year. On November 21, 2019, the bishop came unexpectedly to Rocky Mount. We met in my office there that day. He ordered me to remove my blog from the web entirely. I complied. I asked for specifics about his objections, so that we could discuss the matter in detail. He declined to discuss anything with me.

On December 14, I wrote to the bishop, asking him to reconsider. I proposed a means by which we could resolve the matter. The bishop responded by proposing that we meet in early February of this year. I arranged the meeting with the bishop's secretary. Then I

wrote back, once again expressing my hope that we could discuss the specifics of his concerns with my weblog.

Then, on February 5, 2020, I traveled with two companions to meet with the bishop in his office in Richmond. (I mentioned this second meeting to you at Mass on January 12, and again on February 9.)

Once again, we asked the bishop to identify blog posts he found offensive, so that we could discuss them, and I could make corrections. And once again, the bishop declined to have such a discussion. Mr. Joe Graf, of St. Francis in Rocky Mount, can confirm this.

Therefore, I am grateful to His Excellency for answering my long-lingering question, in his letter to you. He has specifically identified the particular posts on my blog to which he objects. (Links to all the posts he mentions are available at the web address cited above.)

The bishop's letter to you provides titles of posts and quotes from them. He provides no context. All of these posts involve fairly long and complex subject matter, and all of them have a careful line of argument. In his letter to you, the bishop simply ignores the issues at hand.

In my blog, I have tried to engage the facts about the sex-abuse scandal in the Church. We can trust God to lead us forward, when we live in the truth. By writing out my point-of-view on my blog, I have opened my mind and heart to you. I will continue to do so. I think that's the best way, the most truly Catholic and Christian way. I believe open and honest self-expression offers the path to true harmony and unity in our Church.

Bishop Knestout has helped us all with his letter. He has given us an opportunity to reflect on the state of our beloved Church. He has reminded us about Christian obedience: namely, that we must always seek the will of Christ, and follow it with unsparing love and devotion.

I beg you to express yourselves freely to me on this matter. I know I deserve criticism and correction, just like any sinner. I will be glad to receive your loving admonitions, or any thoughts you have.

Love, Father Mark