

Statement of Bishop Joseph F. Martino August 31, 2009

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Good Morning!

As you know, just over six years ago, on July 25, 2003, I was named the ninth Bishop of Scranton. My heart was filled with gratitude to Almighty God and Pope John Paul II for entrusting me with a flock to lead and accompany into greater holiness and mission. At the time of my installation as Bishop of Scranton on October 1, 2003, I cited the example of the late John Cardinal O'Hara, C.S.C., Archbishop of Philadelphia from 1952 until 1960. At Cardinal O'Hara's installation Mass, he stated that he had no program to announce. He simply asked people to tell him their needs and to rely on him to do his best to meet those needs. In this way, the Cardinal said, "Together, we will save our souls."

As I became more informed about the needs of the Diocese of Scranton throughout 2004, it became clear to me that, at the very least, something had to be done to halt the rapid financial deterioration of our Diocese. This situation had been caused by very high institutional expenses due to an excessive number of schools and parishes competing with one another and diluting Diocesan and parish resources. Even greater than the financial challenge of the Diocese was the fact that with so many schools and parishes, the clergy of the Diocese was not assigned in a strategic manner, with a view to leading a vigorous and successful New Evangelization of the Diocese, so dear to us all.

For some time now, there has not been a clear consensus among the clergy and people of the Diocese of Scranton regarding my pastoral initiatives or my way of governance. This development has caused me great sorrow, resulting in bouts of insomnia and at times a crippling physical fatigue.

The Diocese of Scranton needs to continue to respond to the call of our late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, and of his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, to engage in the New Evangelization. To do so, however, the Diocese of Scranton requires a Bishop who is at least physically vigorous. I am not that Bishop.

Therefore, I have asked our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, to accept my resignation as Bishop of Scranton. Today, it is being announced that the Holy Father has accepted my resignation and that he has named me the Retired Bishop of Scranton. I am deeply grateful to our Holy Father for his paternal compassion for me and, more importantly, for his pastoral zeal for the clergy and people of the Diocese of Scranton. While I have no immediate plans, I hope to be helpful and I will be residing for the most part in the Diocese of Scranton, specifically at the Fatima Center in Dalton, PA, when I am not visiting relatives and friends in Philadelphia.

At this time, I can also announce that the Holy Father has accepted the resignation from the office of Auxiliary Bishop of Scranton presented by Bishop John M. Dougherty, my right hand for the last six years. I am grateful that Pope Benedict XVI permitted Bishop Dougherty to stay on as Auxiliary Bishop, even though he had passed the age limit over two years ago, in order to assist me in the challenging task of governing pastorally the Diocese of Scranton. I have no words to describe the depth of my gratitude to Bishop Dougherty.

I also announce now that until a new Bishop of Scranton is chosen, Pope Benedict XVI has named His Eminence, Justin Cardinal Rigali, as the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Scranton. I wish to express to His Eminence my prayerful wishes that he have a fruitful apostolate among us all as our temporary Shepherd. The Cardinal will add responsibility for the almost 350,000 Catholics of the Diocese of Scranton to his current care for the almost million and a half Catholics of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. This will be a great challenge for him, and I call on everyone in our Diocese to rally around the Cardinal and give him not only our cooperation but our hearts.

Finally, I thank everyone in the Diocese of Scranton who has collaborated with me, and as is customary on an occasion like this one, I seek forgiveness from anyone whom I may not have served adequately as Bishop, due to my human limitations. I invoke the prayers of Mary and all the saints and I close with these words from St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians:

“Now may God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen”

And may Jesus Christ always be praised!