



| BISHOP MARK O'CONNELL, JCD

May 2026

Peace be with you.

You may not yet have felt it, but I personally sense a real momentum building here in the Diocese of Albany. Please allow me to share why I feel this way and why I invite you to join me in “looking up” with optimism toward the good things we can accomplish together to renew our Church in this local portion of the Lord’s vineyard.

This letter is not a typical fundraising appeal, though I know many of you have already responded generously to the Diocesan Appeal. Thank you for that trust and for allowing us to be good stewards of your gifts. To those who have not yet contributed, or who have held back for whatever reason, I simply ask you to hear me out with an open heart.

I was installed as your bishop on December 5, 2025. Now, five months later, I write to you with growing hope. Upon arrival, two urgent challenges demanded immediate attention: bringing the long and painful bankruptcy process to a just resolution and addressing the critical shortage of priests serving our people. With the help of our dedicated team at the Pastoral Center, we have moved forward decisively on both fronts.

First, the settlement with survivors of abuse. As many of you know, I have spent more than 25 years in the Church working directly with survivors of clerical abuse—listening, seeking justice, and walking with them in their pain. That experience prepared me to approach this difficult chapter with both urgency and care. In March, we reached a \$148 million settlement agreement with the survivors. I am deeply grateful that the level of participation and sacrifice shown by the People of God in our diocese—especially the significant contribution that will be coming from parish savings—was received with appreciation by those victim/survivors we met with.

I want to speak plainly about where the majority of the parish portion of the money is coming from. The vast majority of our parish reserves were built up over generations by the faithful sacrifices of our parents, grandparents, and ancestors who built these churches and schools with love and devotion. Now it falls to us to make our own sacrifices so that future generations can continue to worship, pray, and encounter Christ in these same sacred spaces. If you are able, I humbly ask you to consider a sacrificial gift to your home parish to help replenish these important funds that have been redirected toward healing and justice.

Second, the need for more priests. Our people deserve ready access to the Sacraments that nourish their faith and sustain their lives. Despite the excellent work of our dedicated lay leaders, deacons, and religious, we simply do not have enough priests to meet the sacramental needs across our large diocese. To ease the burden on our current priests—who have been stretched thin for too long—I have moved quickly to welcome faithful, English-speaking priests from outside the diocese who are willing to serve here, at least for a time, while we continue building up vocations from within.

I am pleased to share that we are currently in conversation with eight such priests. My hope is that, with your support and prayers, we can give all our priests healthier workloads so they can serve with joy and remain strong in body, mind, and spirit for years to come.

In these past months, I have traveled extensively across the diocese—visiting parishes, schools, prisons, shrines, hospitals, and ministries. I have been profoundly encouraged and impressed by the faith, creativity, and dedication I see among you. I remain committed to visiting every school and prison by the end of this year, and every parish within my first two years. Bishop Scharfenberger left us with a strong and capable team, for which I am very grateful, so I can spend time away from the Pastoral Center.

Change is rarely easy, and I know I bring a certain energy and pace that may feel challenging at times. Yet I also bring deep joy, enthusiasm, and a firm conviction that God is calling us to rebuild strong, sustainable, and vibrant parishes and communities together.

When I first came to you, I promised to love you with all my heart, mind, and soul, and to share the great joy the Lord has placed in me. After these first months with you, that joy has only deepened.

If you, too, sense even a portion of the momentum and hope I feel, would you prayerfully consider—or reconsider—making or increasing your gift to this year's Diocesan Appeal? New vision and new initiatives require new resources. I ask you to trust me, and our team, to use your gifts prudently and courageously for the renewal of our diocese and the glory of God.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I remain your brother and servant in Christ, and I keep you and your families in my daily prayers.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark O'Connell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "O".

Most Rev. Mark O'Connell, JCD
Bishop of Albany

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBANY
40 N. MAIN AVENUE
ALBANY, NY 12203
BISHOP.MARK@RCDA.ORG | 518.453.6606