



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

March 14, 2019

Bishop's Message for Lent

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This month, I had the privilege of presiding at three Rite of Election ceremonies for 174 catechumens (individuals never baptized), and 315 candidates (individuals baptized but seeking confirmation) at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine. In all this year, 489 people will become full members of the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil in their parishes. And, nearly 2,000 young people will complete the sacraments of initiation when they are confirmed this spring.

Our diocesan family is growing, and we can thank our clergy and lay ecclesial leaders who dedicate themselves to the work of the RCIA and adult faith formation programs. And I thank all of you for the witness of your faith. It is through your example and encouragement that people come to know the Catholic faith and as a result seek full membership in our church. This is true evangelization!

Since becoming Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine in June 2011, I have ordained nine priests for service in our parishes – and four more men will be ordained in May. We currently have 28 men who are seminarians in formation. Also, 27 men have been ordained permanent deacons for the diocese, and a new diaconate ordination class will begin this fall.

Since its inception in 1990, 359 women and men have completed the three-year Ministry Formation Program. They provide leadership and service at so many levels in parishes, schools, and ministries.

Imagine the number of children served in our Catholic schools and parish religious education programs across the diocese. Imagine the many individuals and families served by Catholic Charities and social service programs operated by our parishes and missions in rural areas – reaching out to the least of the Lord's brothers and sisters.

The work of the church is only made possible because of the faithful who are so generous in support of the operation of their parishes and building programs, of national collections including disaster relief, and the Bishop's Annual Stewardship Appeal.

And all of this generosity occurred during a time when the economy had only begun to rebound after one of its lowest points in our country's history. And recently when the Catholic hierarchy is in the news and under investigation for failing to protect children.

I thank the news media for reporting the abuses and coverups of church officials. It needed to be brought forth. Our church faces serious challenges, and I remain committed to improving our policies, procedures, and transparency. And many of our bishops, who I know personally, are also committed to righting the wrongs and to being better shepherds.

It is no wonder that some faithful Catholics have walked away from the church – and I know that many of you who have stayed suffer too because of all that has happened.

I have received negative correspondence – and I understand why – but I also received a letter from a family that was ready to cut support for their parish and the Bishop's Appeal – but realized that would only hurt those who are being served. That humbled me.

In my prayers for Lent, I hope that you and your family grow in the understanding of the riches hidden in Christ – and that we all hunger more for Christ.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ r. r. Estévez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.
Bishop of St. Augustine