

Priesthood Open Letter

An Open Letter to the Faithful of the Diocese of Arlington and Fellow Catholics

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace and blessings to each of you in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I write this letter with a full heart and deep gratitude, both to God and to you—the faithful of the Diocese of Arlington and the broader Catholic Church. For ten years, I had the sacred privilege of serving as a diocesan priest in the Roman Catholic Rite. It was an honor beyond words, and I remain forever grateful for the countless relationships, moments of grace, and experiences of God's love that marked my priesthood.

It has now been three and a half years since I stepped away from active ministry. I want to be clear and transparent with you: I did not leave the priesthood because of scandal or disobedience. It was a personal and prayerful decision made in complete unity with the Church and with the approval of my bishop and the blessing of the Holy Father. I remain a Catholic in full communion with the Church and in good standing.

The Church, in Her wisdom and goodness, has a process for this known as dispensation from the clerical state (*indultum reductionis ad statum laicalem*), which includes a great deal of time, prayer, discernment, extensive review and papal approval. While I no longer exercise the sacramental or governing functions of the priesthood, the Sacrament of Holy Orders leaves an indelible mark on the soul. I will always be a priest in that spiritual and ontological sense. The Church, through the authority of the Holy Father, has encouraged me—indeed, strongly urged me—to continue to live out the prophetic dimension of my vocation: to preach and to teach the Gospel in the world. I have taken this call seriously and joyfully.

Today, I live out this mission through one-on-one spiritual direction to laity, priests, and religious, also offering Catholic life coaching and pastoral counseling for individuals and families navigating all kinds of challenges - and most of all evangelization. I continue to draw deeply from the wellspring of the Church's sacramental life: I attend daily Mass when possible, pray before the Blessed Sacrament, and keep the Rosary close to my heart—often praying it multiple times a day as my grandfather taught me. My relationship with Jesus and my devotion to the Church have only deepened in this new chapter of life. I am truly thriving, by the grace and mercy of God.

To all those who knew me during my years of priestly ministry, and to those who wonder where I now stand: please know that my heart remains with you. I am still—and always will be—your brother in Christ, and I continue to walk this journey of faith alongside you, committed to drawing others into the light and love of our Savior.

Thank you for your continued prayers, as you have mine. May we all remain faithful to Christ, open to the movements of the Holy Spirit, and united in the communion of the Church.

With love in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Thomas Cavanaugh, May 2025