

A RESPONSE

An open letter to the priests and laity of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown and one to me were printed several weeks ago in newspapers serving Altoona, Johnstown, and State College. The letters were from Dr. Brian Kopp of Johnstown. It appears that they were meant as an apology, indicating a change of heart on the part of this particular individual. If that is so, I am truly grateful and praise the Lord. I have great respect for a person that is able to come forth publicly and make the statements that he did, - even paying for the newspaper space to do so.

Obviously, this action of his was motivated by the tragic death of Father William A. Rosensteel. This death has affected many of our clergy and faithful, has raised questions as to the facts of the case, and elicited criticism relative to my decisions. Much healing needs to take place. I am in the process of meeting with our priests and deacons in an effort to bring that about.

I would like to assure Dr. Kopp, - as well as our priests, deacons, religious, and faithful, - that my decisions continue to be based on current law and practices of the Church. I do not act merely as a result of pressure from special interest groups, as Dr. Kopp seems to infer. In that, he can take comfort and be at peace. Neither he nor anyone else is to blame for my actions. Nor can attorneys be faulted, as they have come to understand that bishops are to act pastorally to the degree possible. Both they and my advisors remind me that, as bishop, the decisions are mine.

Dr. Kopp speaks of all of us having “lost in this local civil war.” I was not aware that there was such a war going on! I, as the Diocesan Bishop, take steps that I deem necessary and appropriate for the good of the Church and individuals. Of course, not everyone agrees with me when I do. That is understandable. One can make judgments only on the basis of what is known. Father Rosensteel is not a victim of any “civil war.”

Father Rosensteel’s death has had a profound affect on me, along with others. There is not a day that I do not think of him since it happened. The scenario in his regard keeps playing over and over in my head, - and, heart. I know that I am not above making mistakes. But, when I do, I would like to think that they are “honest mistakes,” resulting from good intentions based on information that is available at the time.

Early retirement for me, as has been suggested, is not in my plans. I expect that our pastors not run away from difficult situations in particular parishes. Neither should I, - as inviting as early retirement might sound. And, while certain groups within our Diocesan Church (such as that with which Dr. Kopp has been associated) have made life more difficult for me, they have provided me with a challenge and kept me honest. They, too, serve a purpose.

I truly regret that a decision of mine may have precipitated an action on the part of another, which, in turn, has caused grief to the Rosensteel and diocesan families. We have good priests, deacons, and faithful. We have a good Diocesan Church. Healing will come with time and the grace of the Lord.

In the final analysis, I need to stand before my God alone. So did Father Rosensteel. And, so will all those who are critical on the basis of limited information. I am edified by the spiritual tone of Dr. Kopp’s letters. Indeed, one’s actions need always to be those that serve the salvation of one’s soul. Thank you for the early judgment.