

WHAT'S MY STATUS?

There appears some confusion about my status as Diocesan Bishop, - due to the fact that I have reached my 75th birthday. This column is meant to clarify the matter for practical reasons relating to the operation of this Diocesan Church. I am still the Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown. Nothing has changed.

When a Bishop reaches his 75th birthday, Church Law asks him to submit his resignation from active service. It is good to submit that letter in advance so that the Holy See has time to search for and decide upon a replacement. I submitted my letter last year.

In the past, these letters of resignation were accepted on the date of a Bishop's 75th birthday, and, if it was the case of a Diocesan Bishop, he was named the Diocesan Administrator until a new Bishop was named. There would have been a public announcement to that effect. That is no longer the way that it is done and no such announcement has been made. Therefore, I continue to be the Diocesan Bishop.

Following the search and a candidate is identified to be the next Bishop (and he has accepted), an announcement will be made, simultaneously informing the public of our new Diocesan Bishop's name as well as the acceptance of my resignation by the Holy Father. The new Bishop will be called "Bishop-Elect" if he is not already a Bishop. His title will be "Bishop-Designate" if he is already an ordained Bishop. This announcement will be by way of information, and I will still be the Diocesan Bishop.

A period of transition lasting two or three months will follow. This involves the new Bishop becoming familiar with our Diocesan Church and preparing for the ordination and/or installation at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. It will be a time of much activity and excitement, - perhaps, even anxiety. The Liturgy will be planned and hospitality for guests will be arranged. I will move out of the Bishop's Residence into my own home in Hollidaysburg so that the Residence can be prepared for the new Bishop. However, during all this time, I will continue to be the Diocesan Bishop.

Then comes the awaited day! Amidst a flurry of activity and within a rich liturgical ceremony in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, the Decree from the Holy Father will be read and the new Bishop will be ordained and/or installed. If he is not a Bishop, visiting Bishops will impose their hands upon him. He, then, will be anointed by the ordaining Prelate through the pouring of Sacred Chrism upon his head. And, I will still be the Diocesan Bishop.

A part of the installation ceremony consists in the new Bishop being escorted to the Cathedra, also known as the Bishop's Throne. Once he sits in "my chair" at that moment, he becomes our Diocesan Bishop. I continue to be a Bishop of the Church, but no longer the Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown.

Since a Bishop means being an "overseer," every Bishop needs to be a Bishop of some place. Consequently, Bishops who are retired and those who are Auxiliary Bishops to Diocesan Bishops are assigned a Diocese somewhere in the world that once existed but no longer does. Of course, the Bishop does not go there. I look forward to shepherding my new flock from Hollidaysburg.