

A Decade Later

A witness to God's work in the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma

June 29 will mark the 10-year anniversary of my installment as the Bishop of the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma. On that day in the Reynolds Center on the University of Tulsa campus, I caught a wide glimpse of the faithful of the diocese. The participation of our Native American, Burmese, Vietnamese, Black and Hispanic, European, and Anglo communities reflected the ethnic diversity of our faith community. There was a large contingent of the Knights of Columbus, the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulcher, Knights and Ladies Auxiliary of Peter Claver, and other fraternal organizations present. Visiting priests, deacons, and bishops joined the priests and deacons of our diocese. A healthy group of seminarians and deacon candidates were there, most of whom are now ordained in ministry. The religious communities were there praying. I remember all the young couples, soon to be engaged or married, and all the young married couples with children. I think of how much their lives have now changed over the last 10 years, how their families have grown and matured. And then all of the faithful from throughout the diocese who were there to support the mission of the Church, some of whom, like our beloved Bishop Slattery, have now gone to their eternal rest. As I reflect on that day a decade later, I think to myself, "This is the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma."

As this anniversary approaches, some have asked me what I am most proud of 10 years later. First, I think of the fidelity and the selfless ministry of the priests and deacons of our diocese. I have asked men to move to new ministries and parishes, always a challenge, and they have moved to serve the faithful in different places. I have asked them to take on challenges of new

growth and learning to serve our pastoral plan working with programs and groups like the Next Generation Parish Program, Focus, Evangelical Catholic, and Communio. This work, though at times arduous, is bearing fruit in the growth of pastoral skills in priests, deacons, and parishioners alike. We have a healthy number of seminarians today, and over this past decade, I have had the privilege of ordaining 18 new priests, 27 permanent deacons and 2 transitional deacons who, Lord willing, will soon be ordained into the priesthood. The priests and deacons have been instrumental in the continued healthy growth of parishes throughout the diocese, especially in rural areas. They have helped form disciples in our parishes who reach out to the surrounding communities with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, I am proud of and amazed at the generosity of our donors and volunteers. There are so many faithful who freely give of their material blessings to support our parishes, schools, and the work of the diocese. There are also countless people who are so generous with their time volunteering on boards, parish leadership groups, and ministries throughout the diocese. Then there are the numbers building projects that have taken place. We have built several new churches and have repaired many old churches and school buildings. Easily over \$100 million has been raised, and all of this alongside the annual fund of the diocese, which is so necessary for Christ's mission here. Then there are the estate gifts from men and women who face death with faith and want to leave behind a legacy to support the continued work of the Church.

I am certain that we have the best Catholic Charities in the country with an army of faithful volunteers and benefactors who spread Christ's merciful love to every county of our diocese. What a blessing it is to me to work with all of you in making our Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma the effective ministry that it is.

The Catholic community of Eastern Oklahoma may not be big in numbers, but is incredibly large in its generosity.

I am very proud of our Catholic hospitals and clinics. When I see the annual reports and the many many millions of dollars of free healthcare that they contribute throughout our diocese and

the faithful way in which they bring the healing mercy of Christ to any who suffer, my heart swells.

Finally, the thing that I am most proud of is the faith of the people and families of the diocese.

Ten years ago, some families were not even formed. Over these 10 years I have come to know any number of couples in our parishes who have met, fallen in love, become engaged, gone through marriage preparation, and begun families. The family is the domestic Church. It is the Church of the home and the key to our future. The faith of the parents, the strength of their relationship with Jesus, which they live every day in their marital vocation is so important. The passing of their faith to their children through the ordinary and personal ways of sharing with them stories about the amazing ways that Jesus has served them will assure that these children grow up knowing that they will one day be disciples of Jesus, who will then form their own domestic Churches. From the great sacrament of matrimony and our families flow the rest of the Church: our priests who provide the Eucharist, the source and summit of our life with Christ; the deacons, who serve the heart of Christ among the poor; and our men and women religious, who serve us in many ways and pray for us. Without our faith filled families, we would have none of these.

I have appreciated the prayers and support of so many people over these 10 years as you make Jesus the focus of your lives and your homes. Our future is bright because Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. The most important thing about this past decade is not what I have done but what all of you have done. The priests, deacons, religious, and faithful make the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma a special place. The key to the diocese is you, the people, and the ways you respond to God's invitation to be intentional disciples of Jesus our Savior in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A decade later, I share the sentiments for all of you that St. Paul shared with the Philippians: "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the Gospel from the first day until now. I am

confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” (Phil 1:3-6)