



*The Diocese of New Jersey*

THE RIGHT REVEREND SALLY J. FRENCH, BISHOP OF NEW JERSEY

February 27, 2024

Dear Friends,

Since I began serving as your bishop eight months ago, I have prioritized our diocese's financial sustainability and need to develop transparent, appropriate financial protocols. As we discussed at our [Special Meeting of the Convention](#) in December, this work is essential to our ability to steward faithfully what God has given us and equip ourselves for God's mission.

As I have explored this situation more fully, it has become clear that we have a number of areas where we have not maintained appropriate financial and administrative controls. The situation is complex and, in some instances, longstanding, and action is required. These concerns have made our diocese vulnerable and must be addressed promptly, but I want to assure you that there is no indication of any financial malfeasance or fraud.

In considering how to proceed, I have consulted extensively with our diocesan legal team and received the unanimous consent of the Standing Committee. Together, we have determined that in the coming days, Canon Phyllis Jones will conclude her ministry as Canon to the Ordinary for Finance and Administration and Acting Chief Financial Officer, and we will retain the services of a certified public accounting firm that specializes in working with faith-based and non-profit organizations in situations like ours. I am grateful to Canon Jones for her grace in handling this transition, and I ask you to join me in expressing our gratitude for her honesty, dedication, and love for the diocese over her many years on the diocesan staff. While her work with us will conclude in the next few days, we will celebrate her ministry with a formal farewell during our Diocesan Convention on March 9.

I also want to assure you that I do not believe that Bishop Stokes bears responsibility for this situation. His faithful efforts to resolve these issues are clearly in evidence as I review the facts at hand. In addition, some of the more serious challenges only became known in the past week. I continue to be grateful for his leadership and generosity to me in these early days of my episcopacy.

As we begin to work with outside support, please know that we will need time and assistance to gain a full understanding of the issues we face. We know that we have not made substantial progress toward completing overdue diocesan audits; maintained canonical protocols and financial controls regarding disbursements from diocesan trust funds; or provided updated and accurate information to the Trustees of Church Property. We also face errors in our financial recordkeeping.

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We know that many of our congregations have not regularly been receiving payments due to them from the proceeds of mortgages held by the diocese. We cannot resolve that urgent situation without first gathering more information, and I ask for your continued patience while we do so. Gaining clarity about this issue is my top priority, and with hard work and God's grace, I believe that we will soon have an accounting of our resources and obligations. In the meantime, if you have specific needs or questions about your congregation's finances or real estate, please call Sarah Paige at 609-460-5401 or email her at [spaige@dioceseofnj.org](mailto:spaige@dioceseofnj.org). If you have additional information to share, or if you would like to be in contact with me directly, I can be reached at [sfrench@dioceseofnj.org](mailto:sfrench@dioceseofnj.org). I have delayed my departure for the House of Bishops meeting that begins tomorrow to begin to address these challenges. Today and tomorrow, I am meeting with staff, members of diocesan leadership structures, and financial professionals.

Although this period of uncertainty about our financial picture is difficult, we have many strengths as a diocese, and I am confident that we are moving in a good and faithful direction. I am committed to resolving these issues as promptly and transparently as possible, and I will keep you updated as the work continues. In the meantime, please pray for our diocese, for Phyllis and her family, and for everyone for whom this is hard news.

Thank you for your commitment to our shared ministry. I am grateful to serve with you.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sally French', with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Bishop Sally French