Interregnum and diocesan administrator

I have been elected by the College of Consultors, an advisory board which assists in the governance of a diocese, to serve as the diocesan administrator as we await the appointment of the 11th bishop of Burlington. A question that comes up quite frequently in conversations is, “What’s a diocesan administrator and what can he do?” These are legitimate questions. The most precise answer to these questions comes from canons 421 and 427 of the Code of Canon Law, which state:

The college of consultors must elect a diocesan administrator, namely the one who is to govern the diocese temporarily. … A diocesan administrator is bound by the obligations and possesses the power of a diocesan bishop, excluding those matters which are excepted by their nature or by the law itself.

I understand that this language can seem a bit cold and theoretical, so I would like to provide the following figure as representative for the diocesan administrator, a figure taken from JRR Tolkien’s “The Lord of the Rings” — Denethor, Steward of Gondor. Denethor was given the responsibility of providing leadership in the City of Gondor as the citizens waited for the return of the legitimate king. He had great authority, but he had to understand that he was not the king and so could not perform actions which were reserved to the king himself.

The diocesan administrator has the authority needed to keep the diocese on an even keel as it awaits the appointment of a new bishop, but his authority has limits. Canon 428 provides the overarching guide for the diocesan administrator: When a see is vacant, nothing is to be altered. This means as administrator I need to avoid undertaking any significant new initiatives or programs or take actions that are reserved to a bishop alone (e.g., ordaining a man to the diaconate). The administrator will work with the diocesan staff and advisory boards to keep things moving along because diocesan life does not come to a halt without a bishop, but the administrator will try to avoid doing anything that could jeopardize the ability of the new bishop from assuming leadership from his first day in office.

What all of this means is that just as I needed prayers when I served as the administrator in 2014 while we awaited the appointment of Bishop Coyne, so I need your prayers as we await our new bishop. If you want a very specific intention to pray for — besides a speedy appointment of our next bishop — it would be that my administration ends a bit more successfully than Denethor’s. Those who have read the books or seen the movies will understand what I mean. If you’re not sure what this means, I encourage you to read the books.

Be assured of my prayers for all our parishes, ministries, parishioners, and ministers, and please pray for me.

In Christ Jesus,

[Signature]

Rev. Msgr. John J. McDermott
Diocesan Administrator
10|17 TUESDAY  
Edward Dowling, SJ: The Apostle to Alcoholics Anonymous  
Saint Michael’s College, Colchester • 4:30 pm  
Dawn Eden Goldstein, an American Roman Catholic author, journalist, and songwriter, will present on her research and finding regarding the influence of Fr. Dowling, SJ, on Bill Wilson, a co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, and the spirituality of the twelve-step movement.

10|18 WEDNESDAY  
Vermont Catholic Professionals Networking Breakfast  
Diocesan Offices, S. Burlington • 8:30 - 10 am  

10|19 THURSDAY  
Our Lady’s Kitchen & Catholic Movie Night – Randolph  
Our Lady of the Angels, Randolph • 6 - 8:30 pm  
Free meal and a movie! Come one, come all!

10|19 THURSDAY  
Spanish Mass  
St. Peter, Vergennes • 7 pm  
With Fr. Timothy Danaher, O.P.

10|21, 28, 11|04, 11, 18 SATURDAYS  
Women’s Walking Group  
St. John Vianney, S. Burlington • 9 am  
SJV Women’s Ministry welcomes interested women to meet and walk together for roughly 45 minutes, usually leaving from the SJV parking lot. It’s a great, community-building way to get some steps in and meet some of your neighbors in a slightly social setting. On second and fourth Saturdays we will meet at alternate walking locations which will be announced ahead of time, usually on our website. In the event of inclement weather, check our website for a cancellation notice; stjohnvianneyvt.org/walking-with-wm. FOR MORE INFO: email Connie at sjvgoodnews@gmail.com.

10|21 SATURDAY  
St. Peter’s Cemetery Committee Craft Fair  
St. Peter, Vergennes • 9 am - 3:30 pm  
Bake Sale and luncheon.

10|21 SATURDAY  
The Chosen — Movie Night and Potluck  
St. John the Baptist, Enosburg Falls • 5 - 6:45 pm  
Come join us for a movie night and potluck dinner every third Saturday of the month.

10|22 SUNDAY  
Nativity Ham Dinner & Priest Appreciation  
Nativity of the BVM, Swanton • 12:30 pm  
Come show appreciation to our priest at this annual ham dinner.

10|25 WEDNESDAY  
Mater Christi School Open House  
Mater Christi School, Burlington 8:30 am - 11 am  
We are excited to welcome you, and to show you how we work together to make Mater Christi School a special place for children to learn and grow. Register: mcschool.org/about/contact-us/

10|26 THURSDAY  
St. Justin Martyr and the Eucharist  
Holy Family, Essex Junction • 7 pm  
Fr. Michael Carter, SSE will present on St. Justin Martyr, who wrote about the Eucharistic celebration in his First Apology, written between 153 and 155 AD. Written for those outside the Church, St. Justin’s writing is a simplified explanation of early Christian practices. Discover what ancient practices from the second century, continue down to this day.

10|26 SATURDAY  
Annual Fall Vermont Catholic Women’s Retreat 2023  
Immaculate Heart of Mary, Williston  
8:30 am - 3:30 pm  
Keynote Speaker is Sr. Paul Mary Dreger, FSE. The Theme of the Retreat is: The Eucharistic Life: Bread of Life & Bread for Others. Registration Fee: $30, lunch included. Register at: vermontcatholic.org/womens-retreat.

11|05 SUNDAY  
Eucharistic Healing Service  
St. John the Evangelist, St. Johnsbury • 3 - 4 pm  
Benediction and Exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament at 3 pm on the first Sunday of every month with Fr. Lance W. Harlow.

11|06 MONDAY  
Spanish Mass at St. Michael’s College Chapel  
St. Michael’s College, Colchester • 7:30 pm  
Join our mailing list at: mrainville@smcvt.edu.