

July 10, 2018



My Sisters and Brothers in the Lord,

On July 7th of this year I sent a reminder to the priests, sisters, administrators and those in our schools and institutions to be aware of and respectful of the "Guidelines for Pastors and Parishes on Advocacy and Political Action". This was necessitated by the response to the visible presence of four priests at a political rally in Great Falls held on July 5th that was in support of various Republican candidates and elected officials and was attended as well by the President of the United States.

Often in my prayer I ask the Holy Spirit to give me prudential judgment, with prudence being defined as, "using good judgment or common sense in handling practical matters....careful with respect to one's own interestcareful about one's conduct". This being part of my morning offering to the Lord I, more frequently than desired, can find myself in my evening examination of conscience asking for forgiveness and even greater understanding.

Let me clearly state that I sincerely regret any and all confusion or hurt this incident has caused. Subsequent to their attendance, I have spoken to the two priests from our Diocese who have been prominently featured along with two priests from the Great Falls- Billings Diocese on social media. Both have assured me that their purpose in attending was to accept an invitation to be present given by one of the candidates and to see the President as well. It was not their intention to be a billboard for the rally organizers or a backdrop for the viewing audience. They went as spectators. To quote Father Lebsock, "I write to apologize to you (Diocesan Administrator), to the Diocese, and to the people who have been hurt.....my intention was to show that the Church is part of society and desires to be represented in political life".

A significant number of those responding to their presence objected to two things. First, that they were in clerical attire, and secondly that they gave the appearance of blanket support of any and all statements made at the event. I am troubled that they were assigned such a prominent place in the arena particularly since they were dressed in clerical attire. My disappointment is underscored by their attire being associated with that of an official presence of the Diocese or as if they were acting as its official representatives, which they were not.

Both of our Diocesan priests have also stated that their observable responses to statements made at the rally, when truly analyzed in a same-time comparison, should provide evidence that they did not display a lack of charity or concern for their sisters and brothers in the Lord as they have been accused of doing. They both expressed disappointment in what has transpired and the reactions their presence at the rally has engendered, particularly regarding the public face of the Church and its Mission. In all our lives, whether we are priest, citizen or elected to High Office, how very important is the grace of prudence that leads to understanding and right judgment and resolves itself through mercy in wisdom and true and lasting peace. May we all act with resolve to be an instrument of that peace.

Prayerfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin S. O'Neill", is written over a faint, larger version of the same signature.

Msgr. Kevin S. O'Neill
Diocesan Administrator

O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P

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