



## Bishop Hicks' Column October 2024

### *A prayer answered: Our new Auxiliary Bishop*



Sometimes I get the impression that many people view the Diocese of Joliet as a "small" diocese. Perhaps this is because we border the mammoth Archdiocese of Chicago. However, to refer to us as "small" is rather misleading and inaccurate.

The Joliet Diocese serves over half a million Catholics in a geographic area of 4,218 square miles throughout DuPage, Kankakee, Will, Grundy, Ford, Iroquois, and Kendall counties. We are blessed with 117 parishes, 7 missions, 43 grade schools, 8 high schools, and 3 universities within our diocesan boundaries. To put the geographical size and scope into perspective, when I worked as Vicar General in the Archdiocese of Chicago, I put about 6,000 miles per year on my car visiting parishes, attending meetings, presiding at masses and celebrating sacraments. Now, I average over 20,000 miles per year attending to the same essential ministries.

In a diocese as large as ours, there has been an unwritten understanding that we would always have an auxiliary bishop. An auxiliary bishop is a bishop who assists the diocesan bishop in the administration and pastoral care of the diocese. Over the years, we have been blessed with six auxiliary bishops, including Daniel W. Kucera, Daniel L. Ryan, Raymond J. Vonesh, Roger L. Kaffer, James E. Fitzgerald, and Joseph M. Siegel. Bishop Siegel departed from our diocese and was installed in the Diocese of Evansville, Indiana, on December 15, 2017. Since that time, we here in the Diocese of Joliet have been patiently waiting, petitioning, and praying for a new auxiliary bishop.

On Friday, September 27, 2024, at 5:00 a.m. Central time, the Vatican announced that Pope Francis had appointed Rev. Dennis E. Spies as our new Auxiliary Bishop. Since that announcement, many people have asked me, "Who is Father Spies, and what is he like?"

Let me share some information. Bishop-elect Spies is 56 years old and is a native son of the Diocese of Joliet. He was raised on a farm in the small town of Ashkum, Illinois, and attended Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish. He was ordained a priest in 2002 and has both a Master of Divinity degree and a Sacred Theology degree from the University of St. Mary of the Lake. Following ordination, he ministered in a variety of assignments, including as parochial vicar at St. Walter's in Roselle and St. Mary Immaculate in Plainfield. He was pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes in Gibson City, St. George in Melvin, and Immaculate Conception in Roberts, as well as at St. Liborius in Steger, Mother Teresa Catholic Academy in Crete, and St. Mary Parish in Park Forest. He also served on the faculty at Mundelein Seminary and is currently the Vicar for Clergy for the Diocese of Joliet.

Besides his impressive education and wide variety of assignments, there is a consistent narrative shared by most who know him: he is hardworking, prayerful, and "down to earth" with a very relatable manner. He loves God and has a true friendship with Jesus. He wants the best for the Church and for God's people and works toward these goals in a sincere and humble way.

The evening before the big announcement of his appointment as Auxiliary Bishop, Father Dennis told his mom, Rose Mary, that the next day she was going to hear some big news about him. Not knowing what this big news was all about, Rose Mary talked with the wife of her son's best friend. With the keen instincts only a mother has, she said, "I think my son is going to be named a bishop!" The friend disagreed. So, they made a friendly wager as they anticipated the news. Later, when it was revealed that Father Dennis was indeed being named a bishop, the friend handed \$20 to Rose Mary. Mom was right! However, when they both gleefully realized Father Dennis was actually staying within the Diocese of Joliet and not being relocated to another diocese, Rose Mary handed that same \$20 right back to her friend!

Many of us find ourselves appealing to God for something specific: a definite decision in a definite time frame with a definite outcome. Here within our Diocese, besides our fervent asks of God, we tried to guess and predict who, when, and where a new bishop might be named. Why, I found myself doing the same, as much as I entrusted God with the decision. Despite our prayers and good intentions, we all eventually come to realize we are not in control of any process, even within the Church. Like all junctures in life, we have to rely on God's providence and timing. Even a bishop needs to be reminded once in a while that God's wisdom and timetable will always prevail and will be eminently right.

I thank God for the appointment of a new auxiliary bishop. Not only will he be a tremendous support for me with Confirmations, Masses, events, and the multitude of pastoral and administrative responsibilities, but he will also be a great gift to the Diocese of Joliet.

Please join me in congratulating Bishop-elect Dennis Spies and thanking the Holy Father for this appointment as our new Auxiliary Bishop. With gratitude and anticipation of his ordination on November 6, 2024, in unison we ask God to bless our soon-to-be Auxiliary Bishop, as we pray, "Come Holy Spirit."