

Bishop-elect John Barres' Statement at Diocese of Allentown News Conference

Thank you Bishop Cullen. I am so happy to greet the church of the Diocese of Allentown for the very first time. I have heard of the holiness, vitality and missionary spirit of the priests, deacons, religious women and men, and the laity of the diocese. I am so much looking forward to serving with you.

In this last month of the year of St. Paul, let's all finish the race well, open our hearts to the risen Lord on our own unique road to Damascus, and rekindle a Pauline Missionary fire in our lives.

I am honored and humbled to have been asked by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, to serve as the 4th Bishop of the Diocese of Allentown. Under the inspirational leadership of Bishop McShea, Bishop Welsh and bishop Cullen, the Diocese of Allentown is known for its evangelizing parishes and dedication to both the gospel of life and Catholic social justice teaching.

It is known for Catholic high schools, elementary schools, religious education programs and youth ministry that put effective, content-rich catechesis and Catholic identity at the forefront.

It is known for its promotion of Catholic marriage and family life and the truth of the church's moral teaching. It is known for its cultivation of vocations to the priesthood and religious life primarily through the holiness and heroism of so many dedicated priests and religious who live their call with contagious joy. I will be praying in a special way for Deacons Allan Hoffa, Keith Mathur and Gene Ritz, and their families, as they prepare for their ordination to the priesthood on June 6th.

The Diocese of Allentown is known for its devotion to the power of the Mass and for Eucharistic devotion and its and its dedication to making generously available the Catholic treasure of the Sacrament of Penance. It is known for its love for Mary and the rosary.

It is also known for its dynamic outreach to the people of Berks, Carbon, Lehigh, Northampton and Schuylkill counties through the work of Catholic charities. I am truly fortunate to have been asked to serve the people of the diocese as their Bishop.

On February 12th, 2009, we celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. We Catholic Americans with all Americans can learn so much from President Lincoln. In his second inaugural address, he speaks about the duty to bind "up the nation's wounds."

As Catholics we should recommit ourselves to “bind up the wounds of the church and the world” — the wounds of the poor, the homeless and the stranger, those suffering from the financial crisis, and those in prison; those Catholics who are inactive or alienated from the church, the unborn, the elderly and those on death row; the victims of clergy sexual abuse and abuse of all forms. Our duty of healing and reconciling is summed up in Bishop Cullen’s Episcopal motto: “Christ, Church, Compassion.” That motto will be complemented by my own: “Holiness and Mission.”

I am delighted to join Bishop Cullen and all of you in continuing to pursue holiness in our lives and our mission for Christ with confidence in the power of the Lord and a willingness to lift high his cross.

I am also delighted to join you in the Diocese of Allentown because in many senses it is a homecoming for me. My father Oliver Barres, along with his older siblings Jeannette, Herster and Theodore, grew up on Linden Street across from Liberty High School in Bethlehem.

I have great memories of coming to Bethlehem just about every summer to visit my Aunt Jeannette Zug, Uncle Charlie and my cousins. Many in the Moravian Church in Bethlehem will remember Jeannette’s tours both here in Bethlehem and in Europe, and her work for the Moravian Museum on the History of the Moravian Church. Most of my family on dad’s side is buried in Nisky Hill Cemetery.

Thus, you will soon have a Catholic Bishop with many Moravian relatives. With that family heritage, you can understand that I will be intent on continuing to foster deep inter-religious and ecumenical bonds with all our fellow Christians and members of other religions in the diocese.

I grew up with stories of Bethlehem. My grandfather, also Oliver Barres, was a freight agent on the Lehigh Valley railroad and eventually became an insurance salesman for the Northwestern Mutual Life Company. The story is that he would often ride the train to New York with Bethlehem steel executives in order to get to know them and sell them policies.

Upon arrival in New York, he would immediately catch the next train back! To celebrate with the family after a big sale, he’d bring home a quart of coffee ice cream. His wife, my grandmother Matilda Mary Ritter was president of the “Bethlehem Womens’ Club” and the “St. Luke’s Hospital Ladies Aid Society.”

The joy of saying hello to the Diocese of Allentown is tempered at this moment by the sadness of saying goodbye to the bishops and people I have served in the Diocese of Wilmington, as well as to so many inspirational brother priests who have taught me so much, and whose friendship I treasure.

As a priest, I have been blessed to work with for three outstanding shepherds — Bishop Robert Mulvee, Bishop Michael Saltarelli and Bishop Francis Malooly. They have modeled for me with their own unique personalities and gifts the holiness and pastoral charity of the Good Shepherd.

I also find it providential that I will have the opportunity to receive the guidance and counsel of a great churchman here in the Diocese of Allentown — Bishop Edward Cullen whom you all know, love and appreciate, and whose legacy is so large. I am so much looking forward to praying and working with him and with all of you.

I would like to thank the Holy Father for the trust he has shown in me and I ask for the prayers of the people of the Diocese of Allentown that the Holy Spirit will always help me in my task. Finally, I ask for the intercession of the Patroness of the Diocese.

Mary, Mother of the Church, Pray for Us.