

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

STATEMENT BY THE ARLINGTON CARMEL

MONASTERY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY
DISCALCED CARMELITE NUNS
5801 MT. CARMEL DRIVE
ARLINGTON, TEXAS 76017

20 April 2024

+Praised be Jesus Christ: now and forever!

In the past year, since April 2023, our monastery has suffered continued attack and abuse from Michael Olson, the current Bishop of Fort Worth, in an ugly attempt to seize control of our governance, finances and life including an unannounced interrogation of our Mother Prioress while she was in a medically unfit state, the publication of a recording of the said interrogation which, as medical evidence clearly shows, is of no legal value whatsoever, civilly or ecclesiastically (the community affirms its complete confidence in the moral integrity of our Mother Prioress); the illegal seizure of the personal property of the monastery and the copying of private information from the said property; obtaining the status of “Pontifical Commissary” effectively putting the fox in charge of the hen house; the attempt to cut the monastery off from the sacraments by forbidding the celebration of Mass and the other sacraments; untold attempted interference in the daily goings on of the monastery and of attempting to influence the Carmelite Auxiliary and its supporters, as well as several attempts to bully individual nuns and to ‘divide and conquer’ the community.

In good faith and in a spirit of trust we appealed to the Holy See in Rome following the advice we were given at the time.

On April 18, 2024, without informing us, Bishop Olson published documents from Rome concerning us on the diocesan website: we received photocopies of two of these documents only from the diocese later in the day. The substance of these documents is to “entrust” our monastery—its nuns, its daily life and its material goods—to an overarching “Association” of Carmelite nuns with immediate effect.

In respect of these documents, we wish to state:

- We are thankful that the Holy See believes that “every effort should be made to preserve the spiritual health and longevity of the Arlington Carmelite Monastic Community.” We do, however, think that “every effort” could and should include active and ongoing dialogue with we ourselves, and we are surprised and disappointed that these documents have been published without any such dialogue.
- Additionally, we continue to wait for the responses to the recourses we sent to Rome last year against the illegal action of the Bishop, as promised by the Secretary of the Dicastery in a letter to us received in early February. The letters dated April 18, 2024, sent by the Dicastery are perplexing, since the responses to our recourses have yet to be received, and are not normally pre-empted.
- We are grateful that, albeit implicitly, these documents reject a number of the abusive acts of Bishop Olson towards us, for we note that he accepts that he is no longer a “Pontifical Commissary” in respect of our monastery.

If Rome wishes to ‘save face’ and to sweep the issue of the abuse of the Bishop under the carpet and move on regardless, this is unacceptable. In justice the issue of Bishop Olson must be dealt with for our good and for the good of the Diocese of Fort Worth as a whole.

- The ‘request’ of the Carmelite Association of Christ the King (USA) to take over the governance of our monastery, made with the “counsel and full support” of Bishop Olson, which Rome has accepted without our knowledge or consent, is in effect a hostile takeover that we cannot in conscience accept.

To accept this would risk the integrity of our monastery as a community, threatening the vocations of individual nuns, our liturgical and spiritual life and the material assets of the monastery. This outside authority could easily disperse us, impose its agenda in respect of our daily observance and dispose of our assets—even of the monastery itself—as it wishes, contrary to our vows and to the intentions of those who founded our community and our benefactors.

Accordingly, neither the President of the Association of Christ the King, nor any delegate of hers, is welcome to enter our monastery at this time.

- The technical ‘problem’ of the expiration of terms of office last January that Rome uses as a motivation for their ‘solution’ can be solved in any number of other ways—including by Rome’s extension of such terms of office for a suitable period while the issues at hand are addressed equitably. It is our understanding that while matters are under appeal, nothing is to be changed and the status quo is to be preserved.

We hope and pray that Rome will engage in dialogue with us directly to find a suitable way of moving forward that respects the integrity of our life and monastery.

We take this opportunity to state before Almighty God, and before all, that, in conscience we believe that it is our duty in the current circumstances faithfully to persevere according to our vows in our life and vocation of prayer and penance in the Carmelite tradition. To do anything less would be to dishonor our founders and the great saints of our Order.

We note that every US citizen is entitled to justice according to the law. Religious Profession does not cancel that right. Episcopal Consecration does not give the one consecrated the power to violate it. Last year we ceased our civil action so that the Holy See could proceed with their own processes. Once we receive the responses to the recourses, we will instruct our civil lawyers to review the option of the further vindication and protection of our civil rights.

Even amidst the dark shadows of the Cross that have been cast over our monastery over the past year, a light has shone giving us hope and strength: the radiant light of our further and deeper immersion in the riches of the *usus antiquior* (the traditional Latin Mass and Divine Office, etc). This is something which we, as a community, have desired for many, many years now and which we had begun to explore some time ago, but that in the end the Bishop opposed.

In living these beautiful rites each day our monastery has found new life and grace. We are committed to drawing from their treasures ever more deeply in the future, for as Pope Benedict XVI taught: “What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful.” The discovery of the beauty and depths of this truth is a joy to which we look forward daily, of which young women wishing to enter the monastery in the future may be assured.

We repeat that we accept without reserve that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, is the Pope and enjoys full Papal Authority. Similarly, we recognize that Michael Olson is the legitimate current Bishop of Fort Worth with all the authority that this office confers.

However—to clarify any confusion in respect of our statement of August 18th 2023—in line with our own rights, for reasons of conscience, for the good of our souls and to protect the integrity of our life and vocations, in these extraordinary circumstances, we have had to withdraw our cooperation in respect of the unjust exercise of any authority over us by the current Bishop of Fort Worth. Let it be said clearly—to borrow a phrase—that authority without integrity is no authority at all. Anyone who knows the workings of our diocese will understand the reality we face only too well.

Nevertheless, we remain open to any initiative from higher authority that seeks to repair the damage that has been done to us and that respects the integrity of our life, vocation and monastic community. We are not ‘things’ to be traded or given away in back-room deals, but women vowed to the exclusive love and service of Almighty God, whose integrity is to be respected and protected for the good of their souls and for the good of the Church.

We are perfectly willing, as should be any monastery, to welcome in a spirit of humility Visitors whose integrity and impartiality we recognize and accept, to receive their fraternal advice with respectful docility and to consider their recommendations before God. But we are

not willing to accept Visitators who themselves lack humility and docility before the reality of the integrity of our own religious life and who arrive with a pre-determined agenda, as has been seen too often in recent years.

We take this opportunity to thank all our families, friends, auxiliary and benefactors who have supported us with their prayers, very generous benefactions and other means of support over the past year. Your understanding of the realities of our difficult situation and your ongoing personal and practical support are precious gifts which we carry with us into choir at Mass and the Divine Office with thanksgiving, praying that Almighty God will reward you and yours richly for all the good that you do for His Carmelite nuns.

We rely on your support and thank you for continuing to give it so generously.

We pray that the Bishop of Fort Worth will repent of his abuse, apologize for it publicly as well as to us in person, and make due reparation to the Monastery. Until he does so, neither he nor his delegates are welcome on our property.

We wish nothing more than to live our vocation in peace and tranquility with and under the legitimate pastors of the Church and to enjoy their paternal care and protection and we shall continue to pray that the dawn of the day when normal relations with the local Bishop can be restored, and the mutual respect that must involve, will come soon.

An abusive father, however, must be resisted. We take Pope Francis at his word when he invited Consecrated Women “to fight when, in some cases, they are treated unfairly, even within the Church...at times, by men of the Church.” (Video Message, 1 February 2022)

May the Carmelite saints and martyrs intercede for us all!

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ENDS.

MEDIA—PLEASE NOTE: THE NUNS WILL NOT RESPOND TO ANY MEDIA ENQUIRIES OR GRANT INTERVIEW REQUESTS. THE MEDIA ARE KINDLY ASKED AND ARE HEREBY FORMALLY INSTRUCTED NOT TO ENTER THE CONVENT GROUNDS OR BUILDINGS OR TO ATTEMPT TO CONTACT THE NUNS, BUT TO RESPECT THE SILENCE OF THEIR LIFE AND VOCATION, MOST PARTICULARLY AT THIS TIME.