Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write again to address the ongoing investigation of allegations made against Father Ronald Escalante. Over the past several weeks, I have received letters and emails from the faithful who have expressed their concern for Father Escalante and the review of allegations against him. Sadly, much of the correspondence has contained claims and theories generated by rumors and has not been based in fact.

Before I address some of these claims, allow me to say that announcing that allegations of any sort have been brought against a priest of this diocese brings me great sadness. I am well aware of the pain this situation causes and how hurtful it is to the faithful. My duty, as a bishop, is to take all allegations seriously and ensure those allegations are investigated responsibly. I am doing that in this case and have also been respectful of Father Escalante’s rights.

One of the claims communicated to me is that because the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office did not bring criminal charges against Father Escalante, the Diocese has no reason to pursue these matters any further. Law enforcement declining to pursue criminal charges does not mean that nothing immoral or illicit occurred or that the allegations have no merit. Consequently, the Diocese continues with its own investigation to determine if the claims are credible and if there are other potential victims.

A misunderstanding in much of the correspondence I have received is that allegations by a single family are the only allegations against Father Escalante. Regrettably, this is untrue. In fact, other individuals, all of whom are adults, have come forward with claims of inappropriate behavior that, if true, would require serious disciplinary action. For the sake of clarity, I should note that those who have come forward with allegations are not all from Saint Francis de Sales Parish. The revelation of other allegations of misconduct by Father Escalante has extended the process, and I continue my obligation to respect due process and confidentiality. When I am able to make a final determination in this matter, I will come and speak at the parish in person and celebrate Mass with you.

The peace and unity within your parish has further been disrupted by an article in the Blue Ridge Leader, which cited only anonymous sources and questioned the integrity of a family that came forward with allegations. It was grossly unjust to that family and we conveyed our serious concerns to the author. Claims that this family falsified their allegations have never been reported to the Diocese by anyone with firsthand knowledge. Furthermore, I worry that articles such as this, and the reaction by some to it, will deter others from reporting their experience of abuse to the Church or other authorities in the future. I renew my call to anyone who has direct information related to sexual abuse by any clergy of the Diocese to report that abuse to the legal authorities and/or the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator.

Please know that my intention is to discover the truth, protect the flock, ensure our priests are living up to their priestly promises, and to help your parish community heal.

United in prayer through the intercession of Mary our Mother and St. Francis de Sales, may Our Lord Jesus abundantly bless you and your families throughout this sacred season of Easter.

Sincerely in Christ,

Bishop Michael F. Burbidge