News



Bishop Mark O'Connell smiles following his installation Mass as the 11th bishop of Albany, New York, at St. Edward the Confessor Church in Clifton Park Dec. 5, 2025. (OSV News/Courtesy of The Evangelist/Patrick Dodson)

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In a quick assessment of the Diocese of Albany, New York, where he was installed Dec. 5, Bishop Mark O'Connell said: "The priests seem healthy; there's lots of lay involvement; the churches look in good shape. I'm impressed."

He acknowledged that his new role would be a challenge but "I'm happy to be here," he said.

One immediate challenge on his docket is that the diocese declared bankruptcy in 2023 as it faced several lawsuits alleging clerical sexual abuse.

Prior to coming to Albany, O'Connell was an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Boston, so he knows what it means to help a diocese through the fallout of the sexual abuse crisis.

"I have walked with a community before that is shell-shocked," he told the National Catholic Reporter Dec. 23. He also knows that organizing the diocesan finances has to be one of his top priorities as a new bishop. But when people have asked him when this crisis will end he tells them it won't, because the trauma created by clerical sexual abuse won't be over. "Saying you're sorry and giving somebody a check does not mean they're healed," he said.

He does, however, firmly believe in the church's mission and that it has an important role to play in the lives of people in New York's capital region.



Then-Boston Auxiliary Bishop Mark O'Connell is pictured in a Feb. 6, 2024, photo. (OSV News/The Pilot/Gregory L. Tracy)

"My only way of bringing hope is presence," he said. And to put that in action, he's begun visiting Albany's 126 parishes and says he is excited to meet more of its priests and laity. One thing he hopes he can implement is a short-term theological certificate program for the laity. Boston used to have one, but it was replaced by a master's degree at the diocesan seminary, something he thinks was a mistake.

"Very few people can spend time on a degree — even online," he said. "I want to teach everyone," said O'Connell, who has taught canon law to both lay students and seminarians at St. John's Seminary in Boston and to seminarians at Pope John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Massachusetts.

Promoting increased knowledge of the faith is one of his personal goals, which led him to start a YouTube channel called Listening to Catholic Women, where he interviews Catholic women about their faith.

He decided to start this after he heard a speaker say that young men are coming back to the church and young women aren't. He said he thought part of this was because it is harder for young women who have left the faith to find examples of female Catholic voices that aren't angry, and so he hopes to be able to give space for Catholic women to talk positively about their relationship with Jesus.

The way the church is portrayed online is why he is grateful for the new preparatory year of study for seminarians, which focuses on spiritual and moral formation over academics. "There needs to be this formation in the Catholic Church and away from the church of social media," he said. Unlike Boston, Albany doesn't have its own seminary, so he said he'll need to consider where to send his candidates. But he has been pleased with the younger priests of the diocese.

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During his time as an auxiliary bishop in Boston, O'Connell hosted "Ask a bishop Q-and-A sessions," something he hopes to continue in Albany to foster honest dialogue instead of angry debate. "It starts with a decision to be like Pope Francis, to be like he preached in terms of synodality and listen to the other side without thinking of the next response," he said. He knows he isn't immune to the urge to have a quick comeback, but he strives to provide a good example to his flock, stressing: "This is how we grow."

O'Connell was born in Ontario to parents from Massachusetts and the family moved back to Massachusetts when he was 12. He attended Dover-Sherborn Regional High School and Boston College before studying for the priesthood at St. John's Seminary. After his ordination in 1990 by Cardinal Bernard Law, he served several parishes and was campus chaplain at Salem State College.

One thing he learned from campus chaplaincy is that for young adults, crises can come and go very quickly, so a campus chaplain needs a lot of availability — and patience. In Albany, he hopes he can increase the lay involvement in campus ministries.

He is looking forward to shepherding the Diocese of Albany and encouraging the faith of the people of the diocese and helping them to share their faith with the community. As he said at his installation Mass: "Each apostle had a unique mission. Each disciple does too. You who are here in this church, watching online or on Catholic TV or listening in your parishes. You are uniquely called to tell your family, the next generation, and those who do not know him yet: We have found the Messiah."

He said he plans to encourage local Catholics in their daily witness and to walk with them "as we carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ into every corner of our 14 counties."

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