



The Historic **CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH** *of Dover, Delaware*

Established 1884

The Place Where Life Begins

Bishop W. James Thomas, II, D.Min., Senior Pastor

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Greetings, CBC Family and Friends,

On Monday, April 21, 2025, the world lost a significant voice in Pope Francis, the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church. We extend our condolences and prayers to our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. Secondly, we pray for the Cardinals who now bear the burden of electing the 267th pontiff. Selecting a leader is no small task, nor is it to be engaged lightly or irreverently. Discernment is especially critical in such situations.

There are a few reasons I feel led to release a missive regarding the death of Pope Francis. First, he represented, in a very prophetic manner, the true essence of the visible church. He was the first Latin American to ascend to the See of Peter. His ascension reminds us that God can use whomever God chooses to use, regardless of where we came from and our life experiences. It is not, however, just about being the first; it is about being the first of many. That means when God opens a door for us, we have the responsibility of not shutting that door behind us but opening it wider to allow someone else to walk through it.

Pope Francis exemplified the posture of authentic leadership. Many people see leadership as something to be “glorified” and used for self-aggrandizement. When positions are handled this way, we forget about the people and become self-absorbed, insensitive, and dismissive. Being a leader should not fuel arrogance but encourage tenderness. When I was consecrated to the sacred office of Bishop in 2011, my Consecrators reminded me that shepherds need to “smell like sheep.” In other words, we should lead from among the people and not from above the people. We should be touchable and relatable. We should care more about the people we serve than the position we hold. When the position becomes more important than the people, we have lost our way and have become something that displeases the God we say we represent.

Pope Francis affirmed the God-given dignity of all people. Just because a person does not share our faith or beliefs does not give us the right to disregard their personhood. The church should be a place of healing and hope, where people are seen, loved, and, when possible, reached and reconciled.

We may hold distinct differences in our faith traditions, and disagree with some of the convictions of Pope Francis, but we sure can learn a lot from him on what it means to love and lead.

Thoughtfully submitted,

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