



Diocese
of
Cleveland

Cathedral Square

198/2009

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

The Reverend Michael A Matusz
St. Martha
300 E. Tallmadge Ave.
Akron, OH 44310-2399

Dear Father Matusz,

In this Lenten season we are called to a time of prayer, fasting, repentance, and sacrifice so that we might strengthen our faith and better fulfill our Baptismal commitment as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a fitting time to reflect upon our prayer and sacrifices as a diocesan Church so that we also might strengthen our mission and pastoral care, and lay a foundation that will serve the mission of Christ for many years to come.

I want to express my gratitude for the work that you and your Cluster Planning and Coordination (CPC) Team have done over the past many months in preparing your proposed cluster plan in consultation with your parish leaders and parishioners. Following my review of all the plans, it is clear that parish leaders across our diocese have taken the planning seriously, and have given much careful study and discernment in seeking to better serve the mission and ministry of the Church. I also want to recognize the valuable counsel given to me by the *Vibrant Parish Life – Phase II* Committee, by my cabinet staff in their review of all the plans, and by the Presbyteral Council in their deliberations regarding clusters where there was a call for consolidation.

Please understand the fundamental importance of evangelization and the celebration of the Eucharist as the foundation of who we are and what we do. The implementation of every cluster plan must lead to bringing the Gospel message into people's lives by helping people to find more life and hope in their relationship with God and in the Church. We must focus on truly making the celebration of Mass, in accord with the mind of the Church, the summit of what we do as Church so that it may be the source of our faithfulness to Jesus' mission.

Since we began this process, our region and our world have encountered economic changes and difficulties that were not anticipated. These conditions have adversely impacted every aspect of the Church – the lives and enterprises of our people, the financial support of parishes and schools, our Catholic Charities services, and the value and sale of closed properties. History has also shown that in difficult times people turn more to their faith – the potential evangelizing moments will need to be responded to with much care. We will need to move forward in ways that give witness to understanding and compassion for what these economic realities mean in people's lives, while recognizing the need for careful stewardship in how we equitably use the limited resources we have. The economic realities only intensify some of the challenges with regard to changing demographics, finances and fewer priests, and compel us to take the necessary steps now that will enable us to provide a strong and lasting Catholic presence in every area of our diocese. **Guided by the Holy Spirit we must embrace our unity as Church and transcend whatever might divide us for the greater good of Christ's mission.**

Page 1 of 3

In May of 2007, I asked you, along with your parish CPC Team and parishioners, to address several issues and challenges relative to your cluster, which included the consolidation of parishes. I am grateful for the efforts you and your Team have given to developing your proposed cluster plan. I recognize how challenging this work has been. Having considered your proposed cluster plan and the consultation I received in the diocesan review process and from the Presbyteral Council, I now present my decisions regarding consolidation as they affect St. Anthony of Padua, Christ the King, St. Hedwig and St. Martha Parishes:

- St. Anthony of Padua Parish will continue.
- Christ the King and St. Martha Parishes will merge, with the worship site at St. Martha.
(See comments below regarding schools.)
- St. Hedwig Parish will close.

The rationale for these decisions is as follows:

- These decisions support the recommendations of the CPC team and are consistent with the consultation which I have received in the diocesan review process and from our Presbyteral Council.
- These decisions provide continuing parishes that can strengthen evangelization and offer the social and community services needed to serve the poor and the surrounding neighborhoods.
- The decisions address the cluster realities with regard to demographics and the total number of people and households served by parishes in this cluster, the available financial resources of the Church for the long term, and the limited number of priests. Two parishes will be able to provide a strong, stable Catholic presence in this area and offer the pastoral care needed in an equitable manner.
- The decisions will provide continuing parishes that can collaborate to support strong, stable Catholic schools supported by the parishes in the cluster area.
- I recognize how difficult it may be for the parishioners of St. Hedwig to leave their parish, and I respect how much the parish has meant to parishioners. As a diocese we are committed to assist parishioners from parishes that close or merge in being welcomed by the members of other parishes. It is my earnest hope that these parishioners will find and contribute to new life and vitality in their new parish. The pastoral care of Polish parishioners and their language needs will need to be considered.
- I also recognize how difficult it may be for the parishioners of Christ the King to leave their worship site. I believe the merger of Christ the King and St. Martha Parishes provides an opportunity for new life and revitalization that can bring together the experiences, resources and hopes of parishioners from each parish in creating a new community that fully embraces everyone.

Please know and make public that those who wish to appeal my decision may write to me giving reasons for their request that I revoke or emend the decision. In accord with Canon 1734.2, the petition must be made within the period of ten useful days from the legitimate notification of the decision, i.e. by 27 March.

Regarding the other issues and challenges in my 28 May 2007 letter:

- St. Anthony of Padua and the newly merged parish will be responsible to build upon and further develop the areas of collaboration stated in the plan regarding senior ministry, the social justice commission, youth ministry, PSR and faith formation, and the ongoing unity and communications of the cluster. I appreciate the spirit of unity reflected in being the North Hill Catholic Community.
- I encourage collaboration regarding evangelization and the outreach ministries that provide the social and community services needed to serve the poor and people in the surrounding neighborhoods. Evangelization efforts will need to address the diverse pastoral needs of the African-American, Hispanic and Asian communities in this area. Consideration can also be given to the possibility of enhancing service to the wider community through a *Church in the City* partnership.
- I also encourage that further steps be developed to engage the faithful in regularly attending and participating in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy. The celebration of the Mass according to the Church's teaching must be the priority in inviting people to the community of faith.
- Akron Catholic North and St. Anthony Schools will continue at this time. However, given enrollment and financial trends, future consolidation will need to be addressed to sustain a strong, stable Catholic school in this cluster. At the very least, a clear visible model of inter-parish collaboration will be essential to sustaining the long term presence of Catholic schools in our diocese.

If you have any questions or concerns about going forward with the implementation of these decisions, please contact Deacon James Armstrong, my Special Assistant for Reconfiguration, at 216-696-6525 or 800-869-6525, extension 2130. In matters of consolidation involving closing or merging parishes, parishes will work directly with Deacon Jim and our diocesan staff to implement the directives in the new *Consolidation Manual*. The steps of closing or merging parishes are the responsibility of the pastor and designated parish leaders in those respective parishes.

As a first step in follow-up to this letter, I have scheduled a special diocesan meeting for the pastors, administrators and parish life coordinators from each parish that will close or merge, and two lay leaders whom they see as crucial to leading an effective transition process. The purpose of this meeting will be to be present together in this very challenging time, and to introduce resources to support the work that needs to be done. I will be present with Deacon Jim Armstrong and members of my staff to present the new *Consolidation Manual* and review the steps for closing and merging parishes. This meeting will be held on Wednesday, 25 March 2009 from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Center for Pastoral Leadership, 28700 Euclid Avenue, Wickliffe. For parishes closing or merging, please confirm your attendance by faxing the enclosed RSVP form to Deacon James Armstrong at 216-696-5824 by 20 March with the names of those who will attend. Attendance is required even if someone is appealing my decision.

In addition to the *Consolidation Manual*, the diocese will also be providing a booklet of *Prayer and Care Resources for Parishes in Transition*. Later in April, a *Welcoming Manual* will be made available for all parishes in the diocese to assist in providing pastoral care for every parishioner affected by the consolidation.

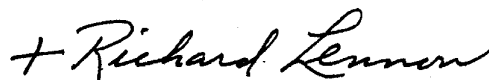
In order to coordinate the needed diocesan support for the closing and merging of parishes, the pastors, administrators and parish life coordinators of parishes to close or merge will need to consult with their parish pastoral council and submit a suggested date for the closing or merging of the parish by 22 April to Deacon James Armstrong (1027 Superior Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio, 44114 or the above fax). In the case of mergers, this date will also need to be discussed among the pastors, administrators and parish life coordinators of the merging parishes, taking into account the time needed to prepare for the establishment of the new parish and to recommend names for the new parish to me. I will study all of the suggested dates that I receive from parishes and then confirm specific dates. Please understand that I intend to respect the submitted dates as much as possible. However I need to recognize the capability of our diocesan staff to support these changes over the coming 16 months.

I expect a letter with a brief update on the progress of the plan implementation, including the collaboration to be done among the continuing and merging parishes to provide needed ministries, no later than 30 October 2009 jointly signed by the pastors of each parish, and a more comprehensive report no later than 30 June 2010, again signed by the respective pastors. It is my intention that future parish visitations in the spirit of Canon 396.1 by the auxiliary bishops and myself will include a continued review of progress being made in implementing the approved cluster plans.

I look forward to your cooperation as we work to fulfill the Church's mission throughout our diocese. May God's blessings be with you and your parish community in this Lenten season.

Fraternally yours in Christ,


Chancellor


Bishop of Cleveland

12 March 2009