November 12, 2020
Memorial of St. Josaphat, Bishop and Martyr

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The mission of the Church continues in new and creative ways, particularly during this difficult and challenging time. The parish of Saint Mary of the Assumption in Cleveland and its mission of Saint Bernadette in Constantia have been tending to the pastoral needs of the people of the North Shore since 1874 and 1959 respectively. Indeed, this parish and its two worship sites have a remarkable and beautiful history. More importantly, they are places where God is worshiped, the Good News of his love and salvation are lived and shared, and those in need are served.

It is unfortunate that the population and resources of the North Shore have experienced a significant decline, evidenced by the closure of the local elementary school and various places of business. It is even more unfortunate that the number of faithful who gather for the celebration of the Eucharist in this area and who take an active part in the mission of the Church through their involvement at the parish of Saint Mary and the Mission of Saint Bernadette has likewise experienced a significant decline.

As a result of these trends, the parish of Saint Mary began using the mission church of Saint Bernadette as the principal church of the parish in 2015. During this time, the church of Saint Mary was used regularly as a secondary church for worship and devotions. However, the financial situation of the parish can no longer support this arrangement. Moreover, the repairs and ongoing maintenance needed at the church of Saint Mary are substantial.

Recently, Father Seibt, the pastor of the parish, presented the current situation to the parish trustees, finance council, pastoral council, and parishioners. The consensus was to request from me that the church of Saint Mary be closed so that it can be sold. This request was motivated by a desire to continue pastoral ministry on the North Shore at the mission of Saint Bernadette for as long as it is needed or as long as it is possible.

Faith • Hope • Charity
Therefore, I have decided to grant this request. The Decree of Relegation is attached. I am grateful to Father Seibt and his predecessor, Father Celentano, not only for tending to the pastoral needs of parishioners, but for leading them through this difficult and challenging time. I am confident that this decision will help to strengthen the vitality of the parish so that it may more effectively continue the mission of the Church.

Church buildings are a significant part of our history and tradition and the loss of such a beautiful one like that of Saint Mary is certainly sad and something to be mourned. At the same time, it is a reminder that the Church is not merely a building, but the Body of Christ. When we are united in him, we experience God’s love and salvation – a tremendous grace and blessing that transcends all space and time!

To all the faithful of the North Shore I want to encourage you that no matter where the nearest Catholic church is to you, how important to gather for Mass as you are able and to take part in the life of the parish. It is essential to remember that the Catholic church has received from Christ himself “the fullness of the means of salvation.” This means that in the Catholic church subsists “correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 830). I hope that you will continue to avail yourself to such a wellspring of grace!

The final celebration of the Eucharist at the church of Saint Mary will be on Monday, December 7th at 4:00 PM, the vigil of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Please join me in giving thanks to God for the great gift that the church of Saint Mary has been for so many years. And let us together ask the Lord to bless you that, as you begin a new chapter in our history, he may fill you with the grace you need to be his witnesses so that you parish will be a beacon of faith, hope, and charity to the people of the North Shore and beyond.

Be assured of my continued prayers and support for you and your community during this difficult yet hope-filled time.

In the Name of Jesus,

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse