



## ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

240 E. ONONDAGA STREET, SYRACUSE, NY 13202-2608

May 20, 2020

Vigil of the Ascension of the Lord

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Lord,

Peace be with you! I hope these days find you well in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic. It has certainly made us pause and examine our interactions with one another, as well as, invite us to consider what is most important to us in life. One of my last weekends of public Masses were with all of you in Oswego.

As you are aware, one thing I have been dealing with since arriving in the Diocese of Syracuse was a hierarchical recourse against the decree of June 20, 2019 which merged four parishes of Oswego into Christ the Good Shepherd Parish effective July 1, 2019. In a letter addressed to me on September 11, 2019, Beniamino Cardinal Stella, Prefect of the Congregation of the Clergy, asked me to re-examine the merger process and wanted me to take some time "to weigh the options available." In order to do so, I suspended the decrees of June 20, 2019 and have had subsequent meetings with: (1) Parishioners in October 2019; (2) The Pastoral Planning Committee in December 2019; (3) The Trustees of all the Oswego Catholic Churches in January 2020; and (4) The Procurator of the hierarchical recourse, Ms. Kristie Pauldine and the canonical advisor for their process, Mr. Philip Gray, JCL in February 2020. I have also received letters of counsel during this process and have talked to individual parishioners who have approached me on this matter.

The overwhelming consensus I have received is the need for the establishment of Christ the Good Shepherd Parish in Oswego for both the good of the local community and the prudent use of the limited resources available to the churches. It is a recommendation that I concur with in examining both local needs and demographics. This merger recognizes as well, the pastoral situation of the Diocese of Syracuse as it seeks to provide service for Catholics throughout Central New York to the Pennsylvania border. It is a conclusion first reached by my predecessor, Bishop Robert J. Cunningham, which I now ratify through the issuance of a new decree. This decree establishes Christ the Good Shepherd Parish from the territories of the following parishes: (1) St Peter's, Oswego with its mission of Sacred Heart Church, Scriba; (2) St. Joseph's, Oswego; (3) St. Stephen's, Oswego; (4) St. Mary's, Oswego; and (5) St. Paul's, Oswego.

In accordance with Canon 216 of the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* and Canon 19 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, when parishes are merged while maintaining more than one church building, the decree of merger is to designate which church is the parish church. Upon added consultation, it is decided that St. Paul's Church will be designated the "parish church" of the new parish. However, it is important to note that in a subsequent letter to me on November 30, 2019, Cardinal Stella indicated that the act of merger does not in itself cease the designation of the other buildings as "churches". The change of these churches for other uses is a separate canonical process. If and until such an event, all remain "subsidiary or secondary" churches that should be open for prayer at the reasonable discretion of the Pastor and on whose anniversary of dedication, as well as, the patronal feast, Mass should be celebrated in the church.

I share this information with you for a better understanding of the status of the other churches. It will be up to the pastoral leaders and parishioners of the newly formed parish to determine the future of the churches involved, considering the input of the respective church's former parishioners. While these buildings continue to exist as churches, former parishioners may request for the Sacrament of Marriage or for Funerals to be held therein.

*Faith • Hope • Charity*

I have also directed that the consolidation of St. Peter's Church and Sacred Heart Church, Scriba into the new parish may occur over a period of time under the direction of the newly appointed Pastor of Christ the Good Shepherd Parish, Fr. John Canorro, with the assistance of Fr. George Wurz, former Administrator of St. Peter's and Sacred Heart, who will serve as a Senior Priest at Christ the Good Shepherd Parish, Oswego.

This brings us to the status of St. Mary's Church. A reason that this parish church was not chosen as the principal church for the proposed new Oswego parish in the merger plan was the concern that its upkeep would impact the finances of the new parish. It was expressed that the new parish should be focusing on programs and not necessarily on the costly upkeep of parish structures. I understand this reasoning because first and foremost a parish is a community of believers, and all should be done to build up and sustain its mission of caring for Christ's flock. On the flip side, even in the newly formed parish, Christ the Good Shepherd parishioners are still responsible for the upkeep not just of the parish church, but also of the secondary churches until other canonical permission is sought to change their use.

Consequently, I have made the decision to make St. Mary's Church a "personal parish" in accordance with Canon 518 giving it the title of "oratory" according to Canon 1223. These designations mean that I am setting aside this church building for a specific purpose for the spiritual benefit of all the Faithful of the Diocese of Syracuse. It will have no territory attached to it, except the land on which it is built. For now, it will be under my direction with a Parochial Administrator soon to be appointed. It is my intention to bring a Society of Apostolic Life to St. Mary's Oratory for the purpose of establishing a Diocesan worship site for those desiring the Extraordinary Form of the Mass, more familiarly known as the Tridentine Mass or the Traditional Latin Mass. I have begun this process, but the Coronavirus pandemic has delayed the formal meetings and visitations necessary. Such an oratory has been a desire of mine since St. John Paul II in *Ecclesia Dei* and Pope Benedict XVI in *Summorum Pontificum* urged provisions be made for those desiring these centuries-old rites. It is my hope and prayer that this decision will foster greater unity in the Catholic family and aid the spiritual growth of all members of the Diocese of Syracuse.

The territorial parish of Oswego is Christ the Good Shepherd Parish and all Catholics within its bounds are its members and its pastoral responsibility. This is especially important in the areas of sacramental preparation, catechesis, and pastoral care.

St. Mary's Oratory as a "personal parish" will be supported by its current assets and by freewill donations. It will not be maintained by Christ the Good Shepherd Parish nor will St. Mary's funds be used to sustain Christ the Good Shepherd Parish. Until other arrangements are forthcoming, I am permitting Fr. Guy Baccaro to remain at St. Mary's Rectory. St. Mary's Oratory will have its own bookkeeper and provisions will be made for the maintenance of its facilities in conjunction with the Diocesan Facilities/Construction Office. I will be appointing trustees for the parish and will arrange for the establishment of a Finance Council.

I hope this lengthy letter illustrates the care with which I have sought to handle the situation I was presented with when I became the Bishop of Syracuse on August 8, 2019. I have very much enjoyed getting to know the Oswego community and I look forward to being present in it on a regular basis.

The decrees establishing Christ the Good Shepherd Parish and St. Mary's Oratory are available on both the parish and diocesan websites. From the issuance of the decrees on the Ascension of the Lord (May 21) until Pentecost (May 31) anyone feeling aggrieved by them can ask me in writing to revoke or amend them. After Pentecost, thirty (30) days for hierarchical recourse to the Congregation of the Clergy begins. The decrees and the letter you have received have been sent to the Congregation of the Clergy in Rome as my response ("votum") to the hierarchical recourse of September 2019. Be assured of my continued prayers for you and your loved ones in this challenging time of pandemic. May God bless you all abundantly!

In the Name of Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas J. Lucia". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia  
Bishop of Syracuse