



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

May 11, 2019

Dear Parishioners,

As you well know representatives of each of the parishes of Oswego have been involved in an intense study for the past eighteen months to determine the best way to provide for the Church's presence in your community. This has not been an easy task and those who have worked on the study deserve our gratitude and appreciation.

People of faith know that the Church's mission is of primary importance. It supersedes issues of the maintenance of buildings that have served well in the past, but have become a hindrance to service in an area of declining population, increased cost and a lessening of personnel and financial resources.

Yesterday, following an extensive locally based process, I received a consensus based recommendation from the Oswego community that St. Paul's Church should be the home of Christ the Good Shepherd Parish. With this letter, I affirm the consensus recommendation. The unification of the parishes of Oswego will begin on July 1 and will be celebrated at Masses on July 6-7. The plans for celebrating the legacies of St. Joseph, St. Mary, St. Paul, and St. Stephen the King will be shared with you as those celebrations are planned.

The Background: In 2017 the pastoral leadership and parish finance councils reported that the financial condition of the Oswego parishes was unsustainable and that restructuring and unification would be required. 2020 was projected as 'the line in the sand.' A full analysis was provided of each parish. This overview was shared with the pastoral leaders, the trustees, and each of their parish finance and pastoral councils. Each group in their turn affirmed that the need for change is urgent. In many ways, this was the simple part of the process.

Then the difficult part began. Which campus would be the home of the Oswego parish? Strong affirmations of each site have been offered for each parish; and, the weaknesses of each campus have been pointed out clearly. In summary we have four parish campuses that have served their parishes well.

The process included appropriate professional studies, attentive listening and much conversation. And, yes, tears were shed, as they should have been. Some much loved parish churches would no longer be used for regular worship. The two basic questions were at the

core of all discussions: Which parish campus would be used? Which ministries should be central to the community of Christ the Good Shepherd?

The choice of location involved four parish campuses each of which has the challenges of aging structures and equipment, city parking issues, ADA standards, and the challenge of finances. Each parish served Oswego well, even when each parish served a much larger community.

As a new worship center, the soon to be Christ the Good Shepherd parish offers 1) comfortable capacity as we strive to welcome more worshipers with more limited worship times; 2) easily adaptable space which will include a tribute to the legacy parishes of St. Joseph, St. Mary, St. Stephen, and St. Paul. The worship space will also include elements from each Church; 3) Prioory Hall and Trinity School provide more than adequate community and program space; 4) the attached rectory offers office space essential to lay and clergy leadership for life; 5) adjustments needed in the parish are made simpler by design of the facility. Other factors: a) Initiated in 1830 the site is home to the oldest parish in Oswego. b) It is the home of Trinity School, which we hope will flourish. None of the facilities was an entirely turn-key venue.

After your initial response, we are faced with what comes next for these parish churches. The answer is complex. As mentioned above, each parish will have a Mass celebrating the life and contributions of the parish. When Christ the Good Shepherd Parish begins its life, a Mass will mark its beginning. It will take some time to design heritage displays representing each parish and to move items from each of the churches to be an integral part of Christ the Good Shepherd.

The process to establish new uses for the legacy churches will begin immediately, and take whatever time that it needs to take. As the future unfolds, weddings, funerals, events, and daily Mass may take place in each legacy site. Each location will have apportioned specific roles in the ministry of the parish. In this manner St. Joseph, St. Mary, St. Stephen's will continue to be an integral part of the parish until its new purpose becomes evident. When a new use is determined, there will be an appropriate celebration.

I am aware of the sensitivity that accompanies change, even when it is anticipated. I promise my continuing prayers for you and for the Oswego community. I ask your prayers for me and for the diocese. We live in challenging times. We are each and all disciples of the Lord Jesus. May Christ the Good Shepherd guide us as we move into the future.

Cordially yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Robert J. Cunningham, D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Syracuse