

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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

26 June 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Saint Agnes, Afton, the mission church of the parish of Saint John the Evangelist, Bainbridge, has been tending to the pastoral needs of the people of Afton since 1949. It has a wonderful history. More importantly, it has been a place 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 number of faithful who gather for the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, and who take an active part in the mission of the Church through their involvement at this mission has experienced a significant decline. Sadly, the same decline is present in many of the parishes and in all the vicariates of our diocese.

Consequently, your pastor, Father Jim Serowik, your administrator, Deacon Tom Picciano, your parish trustees, and the members of your parish and finance councils have been considering the future of your parish and its mission church in the life and mission of the Church, which has experienced a seismic shift from Christendom (a time when Christianity and the culture aligned and Christians lived the Christian life) to Apostolic Mission (a time when both Christianity and the culture need to be reinvigorated with the Good News of God's love and salvation in Christ). You, the parishioners, were also invited to consider the future of your parish and its mission church at a town hall meeting and in various other ways.

The result of your deliberations was that the church of Saint Agnes be relegated to profane but not sordid use (closed) so that it can be eventually alienated (sold) because of various important factors (e.g., decreases in Mass attendance, the celebration of the Sacraments, parish programs, etc., annual operational deficits, limited resources, the shortage of clergy in the Diocese of Syracuse, etc.). The purpose of doing so is to further strengthen your already united community as you work to ensure the existence and vitality of your parish.

Accordingly, I have decided to grant the request of Father Serowik and Deacon Picciano to relegate the church of Saint Agnes. The Decree of Relegation is attached.

I am grateful to your pastor, administrator, the parish trustees, the members of the pastoral and finance councils, and to all of you for navigating these challenging times with faith and trust

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in the Lord. I am confident that this decision will help provide stable pastoral care as you continue to carry out the mission of the Church. I look forward to celebrating a final Mass of Thanksgiving with you at Saint Agnes on Sunday, July 6th at 11:00 AM.

Following the final Mass of Thanksgiving, all pastoral activity will take place at the church of Saint John the Evangelist. Moreover, it is only possible to offer one Mass there each weekend. Your last October count indicated that the combined weekend Mass attendance at both Saint Agnes and Saint John the Evangelist was between 50 and 100 people. The church of Saint John the Evangelist can accommodate 190 people, and the shortage of priests available to offer Mass continues to grow. Thank you, in advance, for your understanding.

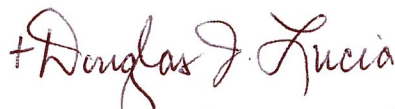
Churches are a significant part of our history and tradition and the loss of a church is certainly sad and something to be mourned. At the same time, it is a reminder that the Church is not merely a building, but the Body of Christ. When we are united in him we experience God's love and salvation – a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

The “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*) of the Second Vatican Council reminds us that “the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the Christian life” (no. 11) and is a “sacrament of unity.” St. Peter Julian Eymard, a priest who devoted his life to helping people appreciate the Holy Eucharist, has stated: “Know, O Christian, that the Mass is the holiest act of religion. You cannot do anything to glorify God more, nor profit your soul more, than by devoutly assisting at it, and assisting as often as possible.” I would like to take this opportunity to invite you not to forget the importance of the Mass in your life as a Catholic Christian and the importance of joining in its celebration on Sundays (the Lord's Day) and Holy days of Obligation wherever it is offered.

May the Lord bless you and fill you with the grace you need to be his witnesses moving forward together as Pilgrims of Hope.

Be assured of my continued prayers for all of you.

In the Name of Jesus,

A handwritten signature in dark 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