



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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

18 June 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The parishes of Saint Bernard (est. 1850), Saint Mary (est. 1869), Saint Joseph (est. 1870), and Saint Joan of Arc (est. 1931) have been tending to the pastoral needs of the people along route 20 for some time. These parishes have remarkable and beautiful histories. More importantly, they have been 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 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 these parishes has experienced a significant decline for decades. Sadly, the same decline is present in many of the parishes and in all the vicariates of our diocese.

In order to better navigate the pastoral challenges of our time, your parishes have been working together since 2020, accomplishing great work in the care of souls. Now they are coming together as one to share resources and the living of the Christian life.

For the past several years, your pastors, parish trustees, and the members of your parish and finance councils have been considering the future of your parishes 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 parishes at multiple Town Hall Meetings and in various other ways.

The result of your deliberations was that the parishes of Waterville, Hamilton, Oriskany Falls, and Morrisville be merged into one 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.). Considering the many blessings that you have already experienced from working together, you decided to come together in a more pastorally effective and spiritually fruitful way as one new parish now called "Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Parish."

Faith • Hope • Charity

Consequently, Father Donovan has requested from me that the parishes of Saint Bernard, Saint Mary, Saint Joseph, and Saint Joan of Arc be canonically merged (extinctive union – merger).

I have decided to grant this request. The Decree of Modification is attached. Please note that this modification does not yet close any of the churches that are part of the new parish. However, discussions can now officially begin to discern what churches are possible to maintain moving forward. I am grateful to Father Hage and Father Donovan, 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 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.

Parishes are a significant part of our history and tradition and the loss of individual parish identity is certainly sad and something to be mourned. At the same time, it is a reminder that the Church is not merely a parish, 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 as disciples and a parish on mission.

Be assured of my continued prayers for all of you.

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