



The Reverend William M Jerse
St. Paul
1231 Chardon Rd.
Euclid, OH 44117-1192

Dear Father Jerse,

In this Lenten season we are called to a time of prayer, fasting, repentance, and sacrifice so that we might strengthen our faith and better fulfill our Baptismal commitment as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a fitting time to reflect upon our prayer and sacrifices as a diocesan Church so that we also might strengthen our mission and pastoral care, and lay a foundation that will serve the mission of Christ for many years to come.

I want to express my gratitude for the work that you and your Cluster Planning and Coordination (CPC) Team have done over the past many months in preparing your proposed cluster plan in consultation with your parish leaders and parishioners. Following my review of all the plans, it is clear that parish leaders across our diocese have taken the planning seriously, and have given much careful study and discernment in seeking to better serve the mission and ministry of the Church. I also want to recognize the valuable counsel given to me by the *Vibrant Parish Life – Phase II* Committee, by my cabinet staff in their review of all the plans, and by the Presbyteral Council in their deliberations regarding clusters where there was a call for consolidation.

Please understand the fundamental importance of evangelization and the celebration of the Eucharist as the foundation of who we are and what we do. The implementation of every cluster plan must lead to bringing the Gospel message into people's lives by helping people to find more life and hope in their relationship with God and in the Church. We must focus on truly making the celebration of Mass, in accord with the mind of the Church, the summit of what we do as Church so that it may be the source of our faithfulness to Jesus' mission.

Since we began this process, our region and our world have encountered economic changes and difficulties that were not anticipated. These conditions have adversely impacted every aspect of the Church – the lives and enterprises of our people, the financial support of parishes and schools, our Catholic Charities services, and the value and sale of closed properties. History has also shown that in difficult times people turn more to their faith – the potential evangelizing moments will need to be responded to with much care. We will need to move forward in ways that give witness to understanding and compassion for what these economic realities mean in people's lives, while recognizing the need for careful stewardship in how we equitably use the limited resources we have. The economic realities only intensify some of the challenges with regard to changing demographics, finances and fewer priests, and compel us to take the necessary steps now that will enable us to provide a strong and lasting Catholic presence in every area of our diocese. **Guided by the Holy Spirit we must embrace our unity as Church and transcend whatever might divide us for the greater good of Christ's mission.**

In May of 2007, I asked you, along with your parish CPC Team and parishioners, to address several issues and challenges relative to your cluster, which included the consolidation of parishes. I am grateful for the efforts you and your Team have given to developing your proposed cluster plan. I recognize how challenging this work has been. Having considered your proposed cluster plan and the consultation I received in the diocesan review process and from the Presbyteral Council, I now present my decisions regarding consolidation as they affect St. Paul, St. Christine, St. William, St. Felicitas, St. Robert, and Holy Cross Parishes:

- Holy Cross and St. Christine Parishes will merge, with the worship site at Holy Cross.
- St. Robert and St. William Parishes will merge, with the worship site at St. William.
- St. Felicitas and St. Paul Parishes will merge, with the worship site at St. Felicitas.

The rationale for these decisions is as follows:

- These decisions are consistent with the recommendations of the CPC Team and the consultation which I received in the diocesan review process and from our Presbyteral Council.
- These decisions address the cluster realities with regard to demographic trends and the total number of people and households in this cluster. Three strong, vibrant and stable parishes will best serve people in Euclid and strengthen pastoral care in an equitable manner in the coming years.
- These decisions also addresses diocesan trends regarding the limited number of priests and the need to assign priests in an equitable manner given the overall needs for priestly ministry in the diocese.
- The decisions were the best way to provide financial solvency given the levels of existing and projected debt as well as the capacity to meet operating costs in the years to come.
- The decisions provide three merged parishes that can collaborate to sustain strong, stable Catholic schools supported by the parishes in the cluster area.
- I recognize how difficult it may be for the parishioners of parishes to merge, particularly if their parish site is not chosen, and I respect how much the presence and ministry of each parish has meant to people. I believe the three mergers provide opportunities for new life and revitalization that can bring together the experiences, resources and hopes of parishioners from each parish in creating new communities that fully embrace everyone. Care will need to be given to sustaining existing parish services and ministries in the newly merged parishes.

Please know and make public that those who wish to appeal my decision may write to me giving reasons for their request that I revoke or emend the decision. In accord with Canon 1734.2, the petition must be made within the period of ten useful days from the legitimate notification of the decision, i.e. by 27 March.

Regarding the other issues and challenges in my 28 May 2007 letter:

- I appreciate the positive witness reflected in the submitted plan for working together for the common good of the Catholic Church in Euclid.
- I affirm the past collaboration and encourage further efforts regarding PSR, sacramental preparation, communal reconciliation, the annual shared Mission, and the joint promotion of parish activities.
- I encourage the proposed collaboration regarding the cluster youth and young adult ministry, the coordination of pastoral ministry positions at each parish in a way that can serve all three merged parishes, and the development of stronger pastoral care for older adults.
- I appreciate the careful thought given to evangelization that addresses community outreach, ministry to area health care institutions, social justice, being a welcoming presence for the racially and culturally diverse population of this area, a possible census for the new parishes, and the study and use of best practices in ministry.
- I encourage the parishes to collaborate in doing all that is possible to engage all of the faithful in regularly attending and participating in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy. The celebration of the Mass according to the Church's teaching must be the priority in inviting people to the community of faith.
- I appreciate the commitment to form a strong working relationship among pastors and principals, and to be proactive in support of strong, stable Catholic schools in Euclid. The proposals for committees to address ongoing evaluation, deeper coordination of school operations, and models of finance and governance are commendable. I encourage you to coordinate this work with the Office of Catholic Education. At the very least, a clear visible model of inter-parish collaboration will be essential to sustaining the long term presence of Catholic schools.

If you have any questions or concerns about going forward with the implementation of these decisions, please contact Deacon James Armstrong, my Special Assistant for Reconfiguration, at 216-696-6525 or 800-869-6525, extension 2130. In matters of consolidation involving closing or merging parishes, parishes will work directly with Deacon Jim and our diocesan staff to implement the directives in the new *Consolidation Manual*. The steps of closing or merging parishes are the responsibility of the pastor and designated parish leaders in those respective parishes.

As a first step in follow-up to this letter, I have scheduled a special diocesan meeting for the pastors, administrators and parish life coordinators from each parish that will close or merge, and two lay leaders whom they see as crucial to leading an effective transition process. The purpose of this meeting will be to be present together in this very challenging time, and to introduce resources to support the work that needs to be done. I will be present with Deacon Jim Armstrong and members of my staff to present the new *Consolidation Manual* and review the steps for closing and merging parishes. This meeting will be held on Wednesday, 25 March 2009 from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Center for Pastoral Leadership, 28700 Euclid Avenue, Wickliffe. For parishes closing or merging, please confirm your attendance by faxing the enclosed RSVP form to Deacon James Armstrong at 216-696-5824 by 20 March with the names of those who will attend. Attendance is required even if someone is appealing my decision.

In addition to the *Consolidation Manual*, the diocese will also be providing a booklet of *Prayer and Care Resources for Parishes in Transition*. Later in April, a *Welcoming Manual* will be made available for all parishes in the diocese to assist in providing pastoral care for every parishioner affected by the consolidation.

In order to coordinate the needed diocesan support for the closing and merging of parishes, the pastors, administrators and parish life coordinators of parishes to close or merge will need to consult with their parish pastoral council and submit a suggested date for the closing or merging of the parish by 22 April to Deacon James Armstrong (1027 Superior Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio, 44114 or the above fax). In the case of mergers, this date will also need to be discussed among the pastors, administrators and parish life coordinators of the merging parishes, taking into account the time needed to prepare for the establishment of the new parish and to recommend names for the new parish to me. I will study all of the suggested dates that I receive from parishes and then confirm specific dates. Please understand that I intend to respect the submitted dates as much as possible. However I need to recognize the capability of our diocesan staff to support these changes over the coming 16 months.

I expect a letter with a brief update on the progress of the plan implementation, including the collaboration to be done among the continuing and merging parishes to provide needed ministries, no later than 30 October 2009 jointly signed by the pastors and administrators of each parish, and a more comprehensive report no later than 30 June 2010, again signed by the respective pastors and administrators. It is my intention that future parish visitations in the spirit of Canon 396.1 by the auxiliary bishops and myself will include a continued review of progress being made in implementing the approved cluster plans.

I look forward to your cooperation as we work to fulfill the Church's mission throughout our diocese. May God's blessings be with you and your parish community in this Lenten season.

Fraternally yours in Christ,


Chancellor


Bishop of Cleveland

12 March 2009