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Office of the Bishop

May 19, 2021

To My Sisters and Brothers of Saint Maria Goretti Parish:

Please know how grateful I am for you all and how important you are to the Church of Pittsburgh and to me as your Bishop. As the Church celebrates Pentecost, I pray that the Holy Spirit will shower you and me with His seven special gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and awe of the Lord.

In 2015, I began an initiative, *On Mission for The Church Alive!*, that has as its goal to bring us all into a closer relationship with Jesus and with each other as the faith communities of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. That initiative is also designed to help the parishes of our diocese to be positioned for the future through realignment of resources, including parish finances, personnel and clergy. How could we, across all six counties of our diocese, share among every parish what was needed to accomplish my dream for our local Church? After a period of prayer, dialogue and study, *On Mission for The Church Alive!* was launched. Following consultation with and input from the faithful, parishes were grouped together with the intention of working collaboratively under one clergy team and a shared staff to build stronger parishes that would be able to flourish for decades to come.

All the parishes of the diocese were included in separate groupings, each of which was announced in April 2018. Your grouping includes Saint Maria Goretti and Our Lady of the Angels Parishes under the direction of your Administrator, Father John Harvey, OFM Cap.

Last year Father Harvey, recognizing the financial challenges facing your parish and the need to realign resources, began a process to study which properties, including church buildings, would best serve the needs of your parish and what buildings might be considered for closing. As you are aware, in 2020 the recommendation was both made and accepted to close Saint Lawrence O'Toole Church. Further concerns were raised about the two remaining sites, Immaculate Conception and Saint Joseph in Bloomfield.

A review of Diocesan Guidelines with Parish Services and your Regional Vicar initiated a study of the Bloomfield churches. A Task Force was established to study the buildings and propose a recommendation. Onsite evaluations of Immaculate Conception and Saint Joseph Churches were conducted to review structural merits and needs. Also included was a thorough review of finances including operating costs for buildings (utilities/upkeep), income, expenses, liabilities and assets. The Task Force also evaluated liturgical space for worship and other space for programs and ministries for growing a vibrant parish.

The Task Force met eleven times over seven months, including multiple meetings with the Finance and Pastoral Councils to present their results and offer a recommendation. These and many more details may be found in the Task Force evaluation PowerPoint on the parish website.

I want to acknowledge that this has not been an easy undertaking for the clergy team, Task Force or advisory councils. I deeply appreciate their time, dedication and service to you, their fellow parishioners.

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Despite their diligent work, including one meeting with me and a number of meetings with members of my Senior Staff, consensus even within the Task Force around which church building would best serve the needs of your parish has not been achieved. Instead and in fact, at Saint Maria Goretti Parish there is significant unrest and strong disagreement related to the selection of a church building and facilities that would best serve the parish.

As your Bishop, I am troubled by the serious divisions in your parish. I have received hundreds of letters, emails and phone calls from members of your parish. I have read all of these messages, and I can tell you that there is a clear divide of equal parts as to which church building you would recommend to use for worship. This divide has created a serious division in your parish, and this reality has caused me significant concern.

We together as Church have the serious responsibility of reaching out to each other, especially when there have been disagreements among us. As Church, we cannot do anything less. Jesus Himself, together with the Holy Spirit, intends the Church to be the source of unity. Unity of heart, mind and spirit must be our goal.

Thus, in the absence of consensus and with the hope toward unity in the future, before I make any decision about a church building in Bloomfield, the bonds of peace and harmony must be strengthened at Saint Maria Goretti Parish. This can only be accomplished through prayer, listening, dialogue and true reconciliation. Otherwise, how can there possibly even be a parish?

Additionally, I have instructed Father Harvey to begin the final process of merging the two parishes of Saint Maria Goretti and Our Lady of the Angels, effective July 2022. This must be a collaborative effort aimed at building one new parish community that will be able to thrive for decades to come. After these goals have been accomplished, establishing unity at Saint Maria Goretti and merging the parishes, I will revisit a decision regarding Immaculate Conception and Saint Joseph Churches. In the time being, the church buildings will remain open.

This is a critical time in what I trust will be a very hopeful and deliberate effort to unify the community of faith to which Jesus calls us.

This Pentecost, please be assured of my prayers that God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ may help you to move to a much needed unity. I am personally praying for that intention daily.

Grateful for our efforts together in being *On Mission for The Church Alive!*, and for our belief that "Nothing is Impossible with God," I am

Your brother in Christ,

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Most Reverend David A. Zubik  
Bishop of Pittsburgh

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