ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
240 E. ONONDAGA STREET. SYRACUSE. NY 13202-2608

November 4, 2026
St. Charles Borromeo, Bishop

Dear Diocesan Family,

On Pentecost Sunday this year I shared with you a letter reflecting on our continued growing vision of what it means to be "church" in a diocese whose demographics have changed over the course of time; and yet, is called to continue in the flesh Christ's commission to be a living gospel for all people to hear. In it I wrote:

"When we look at the origins of the Catholic Church, it goes from focusing on oneself in an Upper Room to directing one's attention to the other – in Rome, in Spain, in India, in Persia, etc. In terms of today, it means we cannot just focus on the needs of one parish, but the needs of the entire Church of Syracuse from Oswego, Pulaski, and Camden to Boonville, Rome, and Utica, from Central Square, Syracuse, and Lafayette, to Fayetteville, Chittenango, and Cazenovia, from Cortland, Whitney Point, and Greene to Windsor, Binghamton, and Endicott."

These words ring truer than ever for me, especially as I call to mind on his feast day the great pastoral bishop of the Church of Milan in the 16th century, St. Charles Borromeo. His focus on the morals and spiritual life of the clergy and laity, diocesan effectiveness, educational programs (especially through catechesis), the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, and the sacramental life of the parish is the framework for the continuing mission of the Diocesan Church of Syracuse in this time and place.

As faithful stewards of the gifts entrusted to us through our baptism and strengthened by the other Sacraments of the Church, you and I are continually called to discern how we can best fulfill our core mission of Worship, Evangelization, and Service in light of current realities and needs in our diocese. I also desire that together we remain a church filled with faith, hope, and love as we continue to accompany one another on our journey to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Since 1989, the Diocese of Syracuse has been responding to the significant changes that have taken place in the life of the Church – locally, nationally, and universally. We have moved from a time when Christianity and the surrounding culture were largely in sync ("Christendom"), and our churches were full, to a time when the Good News of God's love and salvation needs to be proclaimed anew ("Apostolic Mission").

From 1989 to 2019, 43 parishes in our Diocese were modified (e.g., merged) and numerous churches were relegated to profane but not sordid use (i.e., closed). From 2019 to 2025, another 28 parishes were modified and 14 churches relegated. During the past two years, an additional 15 parishes were modified and 8 churches relegated.

This pastoral planning process continues. Since 1970, the number of Catholics in our Diocese has decreased by 50% and the number of priests by 65%, while the number of parishes has decreased by only 31%. Today, we have 103 parishes, 130 churches (worship sites), 65 active diocesan priests (average age of 57), and 15 extern or religious order priests. In many instances, parishes that have come together to share resources and the living of the Christian life have been able to better focus on the mission.

Therefore, in response to changing demographics and available clergy, I am seeking with the help of clergy and laity alike to provide a comprehensive Pastoral Plan to address both the immediate and future (but known) needs of our diocesan Church. Key will be the fostering of closer collaboration among neighboring parishes which includes the sharing of ministerial resources and greater coordination of parish schedules and programs with the ultimate focus being spiritual vitality.

Canon 526§1 of the *Code of Canon Law*, provides for neighboring parishes to share a single pastor and ministerial staff which offers the opportunity to share resources and better foster the living of the Christian life. Each parish retains its own identity, which includes its name, finances, and legal incorporation. However, what changes is that these parishes will work under the common leadership of one pastor, seeking to better coordinate the pastoral care and parish ministries of the territory they serve, including a Mass schedule that one priest can service. This model is already being used in areas of the diocese.

It is important to note that the parameters of a parish's Mass schedule are set out in Canon Law regarding the number of Masses a priest may celebrate on a given day. Canon 905 directs:

Can. 905 §1. A priest is not permitted to celebrate the Eucharist more than once a day except in cases where the law permits him to celebrate or concelebrate more than once on the same day.

§2. If there is a shortage of priests, the local ordinary can allow priests to celebrate twice a day for a just cause, or if pastoral necessity requires it, even three times on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

The scope of Canon 905 shows that in general a priest celebrates Mass once on a weekday and no more than three times on a Sunday. It also accounts for those weekdays when a priest may have a funeral, wedding, or other special Mass. What is important to note is that the celebration of Mass twice in one day by a priest is "for a just cause" and not the daily expectation. I think both clergy and laity keeping in mind the generosity and intent of this canon is essential in discussing Mass schedules when parishes are sharing a priest.

With these preliminary explanations, I wish to share with you a Pastoral Plan that will begin to be enacted on January 1, 2027. Not all aspects of the plan are complete, but it demonstrates both

the thought and preparation that I, as your bishop, and my collaborators in Diocesan Administration, are seeking to become the normative so that our mission to, "Go out to the world and tell the good news!" can bear much fruit.

The following assignments and parish linkages will take effect in the coming months. There will be other retirements and pastoral changes on July 1st, but they will be announced in early 2027:

Effective January 2nd

- All Saints & St. Lucy (Syracuse): Upon the retirement of Rev. James Mathews and Rev. Fred Daley, Rev. John Manno will serve as Pastor of both parishes, effective January 2. The weekend schedule will be organized to three total Masses across both sites, working toward a shared staff and programs. Fr. Manno will also continue to work with parishioners of these parishes who have been laboring to produce a collaborative vision of ministry entitled, the "Costello Project" that focuses on the preferential option for the poor and marginalized in the City of Syracuse.

Effective January 23rd

- Holy Family Church & St. Marianne Cope Parish (Fairmount/Solvay/Lakeland): Rev. Zachary Miller will serve as Pastor. Staff and operations will eventually be combined while parish leadership evaluates facility needs across the three sites.
- Pope John XXIII, Christ the King & Epiphany Parishes (Liverpool): Rev. Matthew Rawson will serve as Pastor for Pope John XXIII and Christ the King, while completing the merger and closing process for Christ the King Church. **On July 1st**, Fr. Rawson will become the pastor of both Pope John XXIII and Epiphany parishes. This will require a change in Mass schedules.
- Mary, Mother of Our Savior Parish & St. John the Evangelist Church (Utica/New Hartford): Rev. Jason Hage will serve as Pastor of both parishes and Rev. Pawel Zmija as Parochial Vicar. Weekend schedules will be adjusted, and staff and ministries will eventually be shared.
- St. Mary Church, St. Anthony - St. Patrick Church, & Annunciation Church (Clinton/Chadwicks/Clark Mills): Rev. Daniel Caruso will serve as pastor of these communities assisted by Kathy Poupart, Parish Life Director at St. Anthony - St. Patrick. Total weekend Masses across the three churches will move from six to four.

Effective July 1st

- St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, St. Mary Church, & St. Augustine Church (Baldwinsville): Rev. Kenneth Kirkman will serve as Pastor, with support from Rev. Daniel O'Hara as Senior Priest, continuing the work toward shared staff and ministry programs.
- St. John the Evangelist Church & St. Patrick Church (Camden/Taberg): Upon the retirement of Rev. John Hogan, Jr. and Rev. Francis Wapen, Rev. Benjamin Schrantz will serve as Administrator of both parishes. Mass schedules will adjust from five to three total Masses across both sites.
- St. Mary of the Assumption Church & St. Paul Church (Binghamton): New pastoral leadership for these parishes which will be announced at a future date.

I would be remiss if I did not express my sincere gratitude to my brother priests named in this letter for their willingness to assist me in my episcopal ministry of teaching, prayer, and shepherding the People of God in the Diocese of Syracuse. I appreciate their openness to receive whatever God wants for them in their exercise of sacred ministry.

In closing, I would like to share with you some "Maxims" written by Syracuse native, Sr. Laura Bufano, CSJ, which inspired the vision which I hope our diocesan family can have as we continue to journey as one family of faith after 140 years of service in central New York:

"We desire to make the gospel come alive.
We awaken others to the gift of God's presence.
We invite people to pay attention to everything.
We become aware of the interconnectedness of all that is.

"We lead with heart and rejoice in possibility
We strive to be present to the person in front of us.
We accompany people on their journey.
We hold a mirror up to their gifts.
We love to see them shine.

"We thrive on collaboration
We explore ways to build trust and confidence
We engage people in the adventure of living.

"We work shoulder to shoulder with people who
labor behind the scenes for the good of the whole.
We appreciate those able to anticipate need and
are inspired by teams who handle details with aplomb.

"We live life with gratitude
from a place of abundance not scarcity.
We try to hold things lightly,
We celebrate beauty in the ordinary and
are dazzled by the extraordinary."

Be assured of my continued prayers for all members of our diocesan family and for our neighbors here in central New York. May God continue to prosper the work of our hands!

In the Name of Jesus,

+ Douglas J. Lucia

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse