

The Reverend Robert T. Begin
St. Colman
2027 West 65th St.
Cleveland, OH 44102-4394

Dear Father Begin,

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.**

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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 Sagrada Familia, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, St. Colman, St. Stephen, and St. Procop Parishes:

- Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and Sagrada Familia Parishes will continue.
- St. Colman and St. Stephen Parishes will merge as a territorial parish, with the worship site at St. Stephen and other issues to be addressed in further discussion with Bishop Lennon.
- St. Procop Parish will close.

The rationale for these decisions is as follows:

- These decisions address the cluster realities with regard to demographics and the total number of people and households served by parishes in this cluster. Moreover, the decisions respond to the long term financial realities of parishes in this cluster. Having only three parishes will provide for pastoral care in an equitable manner.
- These decisions provide merged and continuing parishes to strengthen evangelization and to sustain and build upon the social and community services now offered that serve the poor and give hope to the people of the surrounding neighborhoods.
- The decisions provide continuing parishes to serve the Hispanic and Italian communities who have need of their language and tradition to deepen their practice of the Catholic faith.
- I recognize how difficult it may be for the parishioners of St. Procop to leave their parish, and I respect how much the presence and ministry of this parish has meant to both parishioners and people in the wider community whom they have served. As a diocese we are committed to assist parishioners from parishes that close or merge in being welcomed by the members of other parishes. It is my earnest hope that these parishioners will find and contribute to new life and vitality in their new parishes.
- I also recognize how difficult it may be for the parishioners of St. Colman to leave their present worship site. However, I believe the merger with St. Stephen provides an opportunity for new life and revitalization that can bring together the experiences, resources and hopes of parishioners from each parish in creating a new community that fully embraces everyone.
- It will be important to coordinate with continuing parishes in the adjacent cluster to the south to address how the community services at St. Procop may be sustained. In the merger of St. Colman and St. Stephen, care will need to be given as to how existing community services may be sustained in the merged parish and by continuing parishes in this and adjacent clusters.

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 affirm the past collaboration and encourage further efforts to cooperate regarding the *Church in the City* Vacation Bible School, RCIA, PSR, shared Lenten programs, and coordination of various programs.
- I appreciate the careful thought given to the steps for promoting active participation in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy and sacraments. The celebration of the Mass according to the Church's teaching must be the priority in inviting people to the community of faith.
- I encourage the good practical steps proposed for the work of a cluster evangelization team, an outreach team to provide a wide range of social and community services that serve the poor and the surrounding neighborhoods, an education team to enhance catechesis, and leadership development. Consideration can also be given to the possibility of enhancing these services through continuing *Church in the City* partnerships that can be further developed on a cluster-cluster basis.
- I appreciate the continued cooperation to support strong, stable Catholic schools at Metro Catholic and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. At the very least, a clear visible model of inter-parish and inter-school collaboration will be essential to sustaining the long term presence of Catholic schools in the city.

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, administrators and parish life coordinators of each parish, and a more comprehensive report no later than 30 June 2010, again signed by the respective pastors, administrators and parish life coordinators. 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,



Bishop of Cleveland



Chancellor

12 March 2009