

## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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October 15, 2015

Dear Parishioners of Saint Joseph Parish,

On July 1, 2013, you began a new chapter in the history of the Catholic Church in Frackville, when the parishioners of Annunciation B.V.M. and Saint Ann Parishes became part of Saint Joseph Parish. At that time, the merger of the parishes was necessitated by the lack of priests to staff all three parishes, the declining number of parishioners, the financial stress of operating three separate parishes, and the hope of creating one strong parish. However, at the time, no decision was made about which church or churches should be retained for use. More study needed to be done.

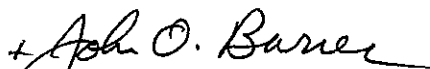
Since 2013, Father Robert Finlan, assisted by the finance council and later by the parish advisory council, has continued to study the situation. The retention and use of all the parish buildings, especially the use of three churches, could not long continue given the financial condition of the parish. Father Finlan, who has done an outstanding job at pastoring the parish and especially in the various studies he had undertaken and the thorough assessment he has made, has also made a concerted effort to keep you informed along the way. He has prudently sought the expertise of the members of the diocesan Parish Capital Improvement Committee, the Pastoral Planning Commission, and Alfred A. Benesch Consulting Engineers to assess the physical condition of all the parish buildings in order to ascertain which could/should be utilized for parish use. Finally, acting upon the recommendations of those with whom he consulted, he asked that Saint Joseph Church should be closed because of the great expense it would take to repair the church building. The parish does not have the funds to make the necessary repairs without stressing even more the parish's fragile financial status and its ability to continue ministering to the Catholic faithful of Frackville.

Observing the requirements of Church law, I presented his request to the Council of Priests at its recent meeting. The Council discussed Father Finlan's request and recommended that I accept it and close Saint Joseph Church. After studying the facts of the case and the information presented to me, I have accepted the Council's recommendation to close Saint Joseph Church and issued the necessary decree. The final Mass, as Father Finlan has announced will take place on Sunday, November 1, 2015. The church will be closed that day.

As Father Finlan stressed in a recent letter to you, this closing will cause heavy hearts because the church building has been a cherished “member” of your family and faith lives for many years. It is natural to mourn for such a loss. But as followers of Christ we can draw strength from our sorrow: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” While a building will close, the comfort of the Christ is still readily available through the fervent and fruitful living of your faith in Jesus Christ, as you proclaim the good news of salvation and especially through the grace of the sacraments, which are the infallible signs of God’s grace and presence with us.

During these next few weeks and months, as you face this loss with courage, I and the faithful of the Diocese of Allentown will stand with you in prayer. I will remember you and your families in my celebration of Mass and invoke Mary, Mother of the Church, and Saint Joseph, your heavenly patron, to carry your sorrow to the presence of God where it may be turned into the joy of God’s abiding presence with you.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John O. Barres". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.

Most Reverend John O. Barres  
Bishop of Allentown