

ST. JOSEPH PARISH

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October 9, 2015

Dear Parishioners:

It was a little over a month ago when I wrote to you and spoke at the weekend Masses concerning the need to make some difficult but necessary decisions in light of the recent engineering studies of our parish facilities, our parish survey, and our continuing deteriorating financial position. I submitted the engineering reports to the Parish Capital Improvement Committee (PCIC) of the Diocese of Allentown for review and the PCIC responded with a recommendation that Saint Joseph Church be closed and its status changed under Church Law, so that it may be demolished. I discussed the PCIC recommendation with our parish finance committee and they concurred with the recommendation. Also, I discussed the recommendation with my Pastoral Advisory Committee and their consensus was that the existing parish facilities on the Saint Ann and Annunciation campuses for the foreseeable future are adequate for meeting the pastoral needs of our parish.

Having studied the reports, parish finances, the recommendations of the aforementioned committees and with much prayerful reflection I have petitioned Bishop Barres for the permanent closure of Saint Joseph Church and its status changed under Church Law, so that it may be demolished. My petition and the information concerning the situation of our parish was reviewed by the Council of Priests and they recommended to Bishop Barres the permanent closure of Saint Joseph Church, its status changed under Church Law, and its demolition. As of the date of the writing of this letter, I am awaiting notification of the bishop's decision concerning the petition for the closure of Saint Joseph Church.

Although, we do not yet have a final decision about Saint Joseph Church, it is prudent for us, due to the approaching cold weather and lack of a functioning boiler, to prepare for a final Mass and the appropriate farewell rituals for the church that has served this parish community since 1912. Pending the bishop's formal response, the final Mass at Saint Joseph Church is scheduled to be celebrated at 11:30 AM on November 1, 2015 - the Solemnity of All Saints. All Saints Day, what a fitting day to say farewell to the church in which countless parishioners have encountered Christ our Lord in the Sacraments and who through God's great mercy have been welcomed into the company of the Saints.

During this time of pain and sadness, as we say farewell to that familiar place where we gathered at Christ's invitation to receive Him and become what we receive, may we experience the consolation of the presence of Christ. For as the priest and author Henri Nouwen reminds us: "Mourning makes us poor; it powerfully reminds us of our smallness. But it is precisely here, in that pain or poverty or awkwardness that the Dancer invites us to rise up and take the first steps. For in our suffering, not apart from it, Jesus enters our sadness, takes us by the hand, pulls us gently up to stand, and invites us to dance. We find the way to pray, as the psalmist did, "You have turned my mourning into dancing" (Ps 30:11), because at the center of our grief we find the grace of God."

While the closure of a church is a time of sadness within a parish, there are always those for whom the church holds special memories. I know this to be true for Saint Joseph Church and I know that some of you will experience the pain of this closure most deeply. Maybe some will not understand those deep feelings of attachment, but I am sure we can all be sensitive to the fact that for many of our parish families Saint Joseph Church has been a spiritual home, sometimes for generations. And I believe there is a great spiritual beauty in that sense of devotion to the place where we come together as a community to experience the presence of God. I pray that each of you may know in the depths of your hearts the profound power of God's healing grace.

Recently, one of the weekday Gospels presented the story of Martha being anxious about many things while her sister Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to Him. While there are many more things for us to be busy about and anxious over as we look to the future, I just want to let you know that, for right now, our Mass time schedule will remain the same with only the slight change being the last Sunday Mass beginning at 11:30 AM.

In order to reduce winter heating costs I have received permission to celebrate our parish Saturday and Sunday Masses in Saint Ann's Church beginning the weekend of November 7th and 8th. Please be patient with one another as we all adjust and adapt accordingly so we too may come before the Lord ready to receive Him with hearts full of wonder and praise in His presence.

God Bless!

Fr. Robert Finlan
Pastor

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