



The Reverend Gary D Chmura  
Our Lady of Peace  
12503 Buckingham Ave.  
Cleveland, OH 44120-1498

Dear Father Chmura,

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.**

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 Epiphany, St. Cecilia, and Our Lady of Peace Parishes:

- Our Lady of Peace Parish will continue.
- Epiphany and St. Cecilia Parishes 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, and the ability to support only one parish in this cluster.
- These decision recognize the available financial resources of the Church for the long term, and addresses financial solvency given the levels of existing and projected debt as well as the capacity to meet operating costs in the years to come.
- The decisions also address diocesan trends regarding the limited number of priests and the need to assign priests in an equitable manner given the overall needs for priestly ministry in the diocese.
- Our Lady of Peace will be able to provide a strong, vibrant and stable Catholic presence and offer the pastoral care and community services needed in an equitable manner in the coming years.
- I realize the importance of the Thea Bowman Center on the site of Epiphany, and its services to the Mt. Pleasant community. The diocese will discuss with interested parties the possible steps to support the continued operation of the center.
- I recognize how difficult it may be for the parishioners of St. Cecilia and Epiphany to leave their parishes, and I respect how much the presence and ministry of these parishes has meant to parishioners and people in the 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.

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:

- Our Lady of Peace will be responsible to strengthen evangelization and offer the social and community services needed to serve the poor and the surrounding neighborhoods. It will be important to continue efforts to provide a welcoming and evangelizing presence for the racially and culturally diverse population of this area. Efforts will also need to be made to address ways to sustain as much as possible the community services now provided by St. Cecilia and Epiphany in their area of the cluster.
- Consideration will also need to be given to the possibility of enhancing service to the wider community through a *Church in the City* partnership developed on a cluster-cluster basis.
- Given that Our Lady of Peace will be the only remaining parish in this cluster, parish leaders will need to consider collaboration with parishes in adjacent clusters.
- I encourage Our Lady of Peace to do all that is possible to engage all of the faithful in regularly attending and participating in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy. The celebration of the Mass according to the Church's teaching must be the priority in inviting people to the community of faith.
- The school at Our Lady of Peace will be a part of a planning process involving 13 Catholic schools on the east side of Cleveland coordinated by the Office of Catholic Education. 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.

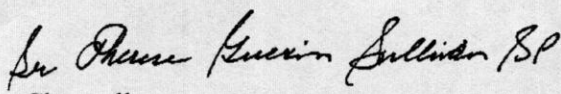
In addition to the *Consolidation Manual*, the diocese will also be providing a booklet of *Prayer and Care Resources for Parishes in Transition*. Later in April, a *Welcoming Manual* will be made available for all parishes in the diocese to assist in providing pastoral care for every parishioner affected by the consolidation.

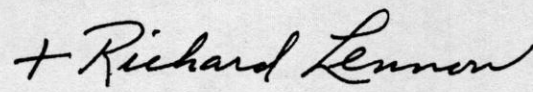
In order to coordinate the needed diocesan support for the closing and merging of parishes, the pastors, administrators and parish life coordinators of parishes to close or merge will need to consult with their parish pastoral council and submit a suggested date for the closing or merging of the parish 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 no later than 30 October 2009 jointly signed by the pastors of each parish, and a more comprehensive report no later than 30 June 2010, again signed by the respective pastors. 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,

  
Chancellor

  
Bishop of Cleveland

12 March 2009