



# Diocese of Youngstown

January 18, 2024

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Reverend Christopher Cicero  
Blessed Sacrament Parish  
3020 Reeves Road NE  
Warren, OH 44483

Dear Father Cicero,

As you know, since 2019 our diocese has been engaged in a regional plan centered on living the mission of the Church. Upon my arrival in 2021, I affirmed this plan, and in the past three years we have all worked together to embrace what Pope Francis calls, and I quote, a “missionary option,” that is, “a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (Joy of the Gospel, #27).

I am grateful for the ways that your parishes have embraced this vision, working together as a collaborative unit to share priests, coordinated Mass schedules, various parish programs, new unfolding possibilities for missionary activity, and a sense of being one family in Christ. Likewise, throughout the diocese, almost all of our parishes are now part of a collaborative unit or exist as a multi-site parish. Additionally, since 2021, as a result of recommendations to me, there have been five instances of formal merger between parishes, where two or more parishes become one official parish community. I want to express my gratitude to all of our clergy and faithful for their work and prayer over many years.

Recently, I have received additional consultation and guidance from the Diocesan Presbyteral Council. At its January 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Diocesan Presbyteral Council formally recommended to me that I begin a process to merge additional parishes throughout the diocese who are already working together in ministry partnerships, Mass schedules, and various parish programs and activities. This includes your own parishes of Blessed Sacrament Parish, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, and St. Mary and St. Joseph Parish as well as eight other parish mergers throughout the diocese.

I have accepted this recommendation and now ask you, Fr. Cicero, and Fr. Stafford along with your parish and finance councils to develop plans for a parish merger within one year from today’s date. These newly merged parishes will be aligned with the structure of other multi-site parishes in the diocese, with Masses and other parish activities continuing to be offered in multiple churches and campuses while ensuring more efficient operations. Please know that this merger will help

ease your burdens and that of other pastors and diocesan pastoral associates throughout the diocese who currently need to oversee the administration of separate entities and attend multiple sets of meetings, including parish pastoral councils, finance councils, and parish staff. The time is right for your particular parishes to come together and form one community. We are better when we are together.

Thank you again for your patience and participation as we move forward in pastoral planning. In your collaboration with one another, you are living the mission of the Church. As I pray for you, I also ask for you to pray for me and for all our priests, deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers, that we grow deeper in missionary discipleship. Above all, let us trust in the Spirit, who leads us into deeper mission, "That All May Be One".

Sincerely in Christ,

*+ David J. Bonnar*

Most Reverend David J. Bonnar  
Bishop of Youngstown

DJB/rs