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March 31, 2017

Rev. Frank Bass, Pastor  
St. Pius X Catholic Church  
6380 Hooper Road  
Baton Rouge, LA 70811-2499

Dear Father Bass and the Lay Faithful of Saint Pius X Parish:

*"Jesus raised his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me'..." (John 11:41-42).*

With these words from the Gospel for this Fifth Sunday of Lent, we see Jesus himself, in the midst of the pain that he felt at the death of his friend Lazarus. This is especially our belief during times of pain and loss. It is true, as well, that the faith of the Diocese of Baton Rouge has been strengthened and enriched throughout the years by the people of Saint Pius X Parish. I give thanks to God for their witness to the Gospel and for the pastoral care and leadership that you have offered as pastor.

As the season of Lent offers us an opportunity to reflect on the sacrifice offered once for all by our Savior Jesus Christ, we celebrate the sacrifices that we as a diocesan church have made throughout our history for the sake of the Gospel. Since its founding in 1963, St. Pius X Parish has contributed in a unique and enduring way to the life of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

As you are aware, the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Task Force has been engaged in the process of discerning the needs of our diocese, given the increasing number of Catholics and, at the same time, the decreasing number of priests available for pastoral leadership. Also, changes in demographics, both within and beyond the Baton Rouge area, have significantly affected the financial strength of some of our parishes. St. Pius Parish and School experienced financial difficulties in the late 1980's, resulting in the decision to close the parish school and join the parish together with St. Isidore the Farmer Parish in Baton Rouge (Baker). Since then, St. Pius has encountered further extreme financial difficulties and a decline in the number of registered and active parishioners. The faithful of this parish are to be commended for their constant efforts to help sustain the life of the community. Nonetheless, at this time, based on the recommendation of the Pastoral Planning Task Force and the Auxiliary Pastoral Planning Committee, the decision has been made for St. Pius X Parish to cease functioning as a parish of the Diocese of Baton Rouge as of May 31, 2017 and to be

united and amalgamated with St. Isidore the Farmer Parish in Baton Rouge (Baker). Fr. Trey Nelson, Chair of the Task Force, will assist the parish with the pastoral dimension of this transition. Fr. Paul Yi, Chancellor and Chair of the Auxiliary Pastoral Planning Committee, will assist with canonical steps associated with the Extinctive Union and Amalgamation.

The reasons for this decision are numerous: a significant decrease in the number of parish families in St. Pius Parish, a continual and extreme decrease in parish income and the lack of funding necessary for the parish to meet its regular operating expenses, a significant decline in Mass attendance and the celebration of sacraments, and, by necessity, a reduction over the years in parish staff.

In a recent conversation with parish leadership, Fr. Trey Nelson (Chair of the Pastoral Planning Task Force), along with Fr. Paul Yi (Chancellor), Fr. Jamin David (Canon Lawyer), and Mr. Joseph Ingraham (Chief Financial Officer of the Diocese of Baton Rouge) expressed the necessity for this decision and welcomed responses from those present. The majority of those in attendance expressed their understanding and, at the same time, their sadness. I truly appreciate their honesty and courage as we face this transition. The Presbyteral Council, with whom I consulted the next day, also has expressed agreement with this decision and the need to move forward.

Regarding the Diocesan Hispanic Ministry currently housed at St Pius Church Campus, the diocese is partnering with the same professional consulting company currently assisting the diocese in creating the overall diocesan pastoral plan. This consultation process is to assess the Hispanic Apostolate operations, systems and ministry structures with recommendations given to the diocese at a later date. While this assessment is underway there is no plan for a change in the Hispanic Apostolate Ministry.

In conclusion, I would ask that you, Father Bass, coordinate an appropriate weekend for me to visit the parish, to celebrate Masses, and to spend some time with the parishioners. I thank you and the entire St. Pius community for your faith and commitment to the Gospel. Please be assured of my continued prayers for all of you as we continue our journey together into the future, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Yours in Jesus, our ultimate Good Shepherd,



Robert W. Muench

Bishop of Baton Rouge