



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Auxiliary Bishops and myself have met this past week with the priests of our five pastoral regions to begin a process to revitalize and renew parish life. I see this process as a way for the diocese to look toward its future.

The Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie serves the spiritual needs of Roman Catholics who live in the territory from Temagami in the east to Manitouwadge in the west, including Manitoulin Island. The majority of people and the greatest number of parish churches are found in the major centres of North Bay, Sudbury, and Sault Ste. Marie. During the period between 1950 and 1970 there was a significant increase in the number of priests and in the general population. This prompted the opening of new parishes. However, several factors have evolved over recent decades which contributed to the change of this trend.

A number of parish profiles have changed drastically due to a number of factors: the shifting of parishioners from original neighborhoods, a significant decline in the number of parishioners attending services, fewer parishioners to assist with the upkeep and support of aging churches, and, the decline in the number of priests available to serve existing parish communities. As a result of these challenges, the diocese has, over the past two decades, taken steps to group two or more parishes served by a single priest. The Diocese has also closed eighteen churches. After due study and consultation, I realize that the diocese has to continue the process of revitalization and renewal in order to ensure the best pastoral care for all parishioners.

I will be inviting parishes to reflect on ways to provide for more effective pastoral planning to meet the challenges of parishes registering a drop in general population and fewer practicing parishioners. I will also ask thirty parishes of the diocese to examine their present and future viability. In a particular way, the larger centers of the diocese will have to consider the number of churches and parishes within each area. Ultimately, this reflection will lead to a number of possible decisions, including the changing of present parish territorial boundaries, the amalgamation of two or more parishes, examining the need to maintain some national or ethnic parishes and the closing of some churches. The following parishes will be up for review:

Parishes in the North Bay/Nipissing region

Ss Anges, St-Vincent-de-Paul, La Résurrection, Sacré-Coeur, Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix, Corpus Christi, Holy Name of Jesus, St. Rita, St. Alphonsus, Our Lady of Sorrows

Parishes in the Sudbury region

St-Mathieu, St. Ignatius of Loyola University, St. Stanislaus, St. Anthony, St. Pius X, St. Christopher, St. Casimir, Sveti Marko, Holy Trinity, St-François-Xavier, St. Bartholomew, St-Etienne-Martyr, Our Lady of Peace

Parishes in the Sault Ste. Marie/Algoma region

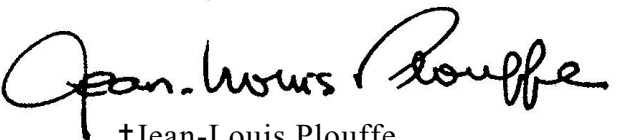
Ste-Marie, Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, St. Joseph the Worker, Our Lady of the Highways, St. Andrew Bobola and Ste-Marie-du-Sault.

Further consultation will take place with the Jesuits in order to consider how best the parishes on Manitoulin Island and Birch Island should be configured.

I realize that this process is calling us to see the bigger picture, and to primarily consider the good of all. The closure of a church is like the selling of a family home. It is not easy, but a times, it must be done. Parishes affected will be asked to respond to the review process by March 2010. After further consultation, I will announce by May 2010 the necessary changes in all pastoral regions. All changes will be implemented by December 31, 2010.

I am asking all those directly involved in the process and all the faithful throughout the diocese to cooperate, pray, and support the work that has to be done at this time in the history of our diocesan church. My hope is that this process of reorganization will meet the pastoral needs of our people now and into the future.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

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†Jean-Louis Plouffe
Bishop of Sault Ste. Marie

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Bishop's Office