

DIVINE MERCY PARISH and
THE MISSION OF SAINT BERNADETTE
592 South Main Street, Central Square, New York 13036
315-676-2898 | divinemercury@syrdio.org | divinemercury.org

January 21, 2023

Dear Friends,

Greetings in the Lord!

Last week we had our second Town Hall Meeting to discuss the status of The Mission of Saint Bernadette. About 35 people attended the meeting.

At the meeting, I reviewed the factors we considered at our first meeting: (1) our continued annual operational deficit, (2) the pending diocesan and parish chapter 11 settlement for past abuse of minors by clergy, religious, teachers, coaches, employees, volunteers, etc., (3) the average weekly Mass attendance, (4) the shortage of priests, and (5) the situation of parishes without a priest.

We asked ourselves once again, “what is our ‘end game’ and how do we want to get there?”

We discussed the possibility of completing the transition to Divine Mercy Parish that began when the two parishes were linked in 2015. This would involve a canonical merger known as an “extinctive union / amalgamation.” This means that the parish of Saint Bernadette would be merged with Divine Mercy Parish to become not a new parish, but one parish, namely, Divine Mercy Parish and The Mission of Saint Bernadette.

We then discussed the fact that a merger with Divine Mercy Parish would necessarily lead to the relegation of the church building of Saint Bernadette to profane but not sordid use so that it could be sold. The reason for this, we recognized, is twofold: (1) there is not enough money in the operational budgets of each parish, even when combined, to sustain two church buildings and (2) there will eventually not be enough people or priests to justify keeping and maintaining both church buildings. A suggestion was offered and well-received: that a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the church of Saint Bernadette be used for improvements to the Shrine of Saint Mary in Cleveland as well as for charitable purposes in the local community.

We also discussed the blessings of our current relationship with the parish of Divine Mercy: (1) almost all of our sacramental celebrations apart from our weekly anticipated Mass for Sunday take place at the church of Divine Mercy and the majority of the parishioners of the parish of Saint Bernadette participate in them there, (2) the children of the parish of Saint Bernadette receive their faith formation through the parish and at the church of Divine Mercy, (3) parishioners of the parish of Saint Bernadette care for the poor of our parish community by volunteering at the Scotty Thrift Shop, located at the church of Divine Mercy, (4) parishioners of the parish of Saint Bernadette are

involved in various social events at the church of Divine Mercy (e.g., fish fry, volunteer dinner, etc.), and (5) parishioners of the parish of Saint Bernadette are involved in the administration of the linked parishes that takes place at the church of Divine Mercy (e.g., staff, pastoral and finance councils, money counters, etc.).

In response to this discussion, one parishioner expressed a desire for the parish and church building of Saint Bernadette to remain as it currently is for as long as possible. In other words, it was proposed that we “wait until the end” to make the final transition to Divine Mercy Parish. A discussion of the pros and cons of this option ensued.

Other parishioners then expressed their desire for the parish and church building of Saint Bernadette to make the final transition “now, while we have the time to do it in a way that will save and even benefit the parish community.” A discussion of the pros and cons of this option ensued.

By the end of the meeting, it was the consensus of the parish trustees, the members of the pastoral and finance council, and the overwhelming majority present that we do not wait to make the final transition to Divine Mercy Parish until we “have to.” Consequently, we will meet again on 11 March 2023 to discuss this course of action.

In the meantime, it was suggested that the parish census be updated and include pictures. It was also suggested that a study be done of the distance parishioners would need to travel to attend Mass at Divine Mercy Parish and whether they might need assistance with transportation.

I am deeply grateful to all who have participated in the past two Town Hall Meetings. Their comments, suggestions, and the spirit with which they have approached this difficult decision have been extremely positive. This whole process to date has been centered on discerning where the Lord is leading us at this time. It is certainly not an easy reality to face and there is a certain sadness present. However, there is also a vibrant, hope-filled attitude among all as we continue to move forward, a sign of the Holy Spirit at work!

Continued gratitude and prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CRS', written in a cursive, stylized font.

Father Christopher R. Seibt

Pastor