

8 June 2022

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His Excellency
The Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne
Archbishop of Seattle
710 9th Ave
Seattle, WA 98104-2017

Your Excellency,

By way of introduction, I serve as Procurator for the Catholic Faithful of Saint Mary Parish and Church in Seattle, who seek recourse against ‘the strategic planning of the South-Central Deanery’ (2014-2022) to suppress the Parish factually and formally (**Attachment 1 – Mandates**). On Sunday, 29 May 2022, Parishioners were notified that a Decree of Extinctive Union, dated 27 May 2022, had been issued in which Saint Mary Parish is to be suppressed by extinctive union with Saint Therese Parish effective 1 July 2022. A cover letter, also dated 27 May 2022, accompanied the Decree. The cover letter nor the Decree mentioned the notable alterations made to the Parish starting in 2015. Instead, references to meetings and discussions are made as if involving the parish community. Such meetings enacted changes to parish administration and life thereby creating the very situation that is now cited as ‘just cause’ to suppress Saint Mary Parish. In the May 27 Decree, you cited the following causes:

1. A general downward trend exists in the reception of sacraments, pointing to the need to revitalize a sense of missionary discipleship to ensure a robust community in the future;
2. Few registered parishioners live within Saint Mary geographical parish boundaries, but travel from a distance to attend liturgies and parish meetings;
3. There are several nearby parish churches in Seattle in close proximity to Saint Mary Parish Church, including one that offers liturgies and pastoral care in the Spanish language;
4. The Parish has experienced a continuing reduction in income from regular collection, relying overwhelmingly on rental income to cover expenses; and,
5. A merger with Saint Therese Parish in Seattle would allow the communities to combine resources for the benefit of all.

And, the following procedure was recorded in the decree:

1. The necessary information and proofs were considered, having heard all those whose rights might be injured (cf. c. 50), through regular meetings: with the Parish Stakeholder Team on 12 March 2021, and listening session with parishioners on 29 April 2021, 19 May 2021, 26 May 2021, 11 August 2021, and 17 May 2022; and,
2. On 10 March 2022, the Presbyteral Council was consulted.

The Decree lacks a sufficient cause specific to Saint Mary Parish; and what is not stated within the Decree reflects the fact that you did not hear those persons who would be most affected by this Decree (*contra* c. 50). **Therefore by this letter I file *remonstratio* against the 27 May 2022 Decree for violations regarding the motivation of the decree (*in discernendo*) and the procedure used to enact the decree (*in procedendo*).**

OBJECT OF RECOURSE

The object of recourse is the 27 May 2022 Decree. It also includes the notable alterations enacted against Saint Mary Parish by competent authority prior to the Decree.

IN DECERNENDO

It is common knowledge that the number of those who practice the Faith are on a ‘downward trend’; and as those numbers decline so do priestly and religious vocations. It is also common knowledge that the acts of ecclesiastical authorities are not always motivated for the welfare of the People even after they have made known their spiritual needs and wants. Instead, many bishops are motivated by secular models and metrics foreign to the mission of the Church. The Congregation for Clergy issued an Instruction *Pastoral Conversion of the Parish community in the Service of the Evangelizing mission of the Church*. You referred to it in the 22 October 2022 Press Release.

While the entire document explores the various contours a parish, and the lawful models possible for a parish to respond to the contemporary circumstance, the Congregation states, “***The suppression of Parishes by extinctive union is legitimate for causes directly related to a specific Parish. Some causes are not sufficient, such as, for example, the scarcity of diocesan clergy, the general financial situation of a Diocese, or other conditions within the community that are presumably reversible and of brief duration (e.g., numerical consistency, lack of financial self-sufficiency, the urban planning of the territory). As a condition for the legitimacy of this type of provision, the requisite motivations must be directly and organically connected to the interested Parish community, and not on general considerations or theories, or based solely ‘on principle’***” (n. 48).

The May 27 cover letter and Decree lacks all specificity to Saint Mary Parish (*contra* the Congregation for Clergy, Prot. N. 2013 1348). In fact, the Archdiocesan website has published other recent decrees (cf. 6 May 2022 Decree of Extinctive Union for St. Rita Cascia Parish, Tacoma; 20 May 2022 Decree of Suppress for Our Lady of Mount Virgin). Both the May 6 and 20 Decrees read almost identical to the May 27 Decree. All the decrees cite a downward trend in the reception of sacraments, reduction in income, and that a merger would benefit all involved. No numbers are included and no contextual details to substantiate the decline, reduction, and purported benefit of merging parishes.

Regarding the ‘just causes’ cited in the 27 May 2022 Decree:

1. In the May 27 cover letter, you acknowledge that the parish “*has been a welcoming refuge for immigrants, dedicated to social justice and outreach to the poor.*” Historically, Saint Mary Parish is known as an ‘immigrant parish.’ There is also little to no mention of the charisms specific to Saint Mary Parish by which it expresses *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27—a citation so readily placed at the beginning of the May 27 Decree—and *Pastoral Conversion*.

Now you must know that the pastoral activity specific to Saint Mary Parish (or any parish of its nature) does not comport with secular models and metrics. The sacramental life of our Parish is not only the English-speaking persons with domicile (which comprises only ~40% of the Parish). The sacramental life of the Parish includes multi-national, predominately Spanish speaking immigrants who are not yet American citizens (~60% of the Parish). Pastoral activity is not simply providing a Spanish-speaking priest, a Spanish Mass and then tallying the number of baptisms, marriages, and funerals to determine a general trend. There are structures necessary to pursue the displaced and the undocumented, which the established parishioners of Saint Mary Parish have worked to do since the 1980s. It includes bilingual catechesis, corporal works of mercy (i.e. Food Bank, St. Vincent de Paul Society), adapting to a variety of Spanish-speaking *cultures* and the circumstances of non-citizens.

In 2014, the Pastor of Saint Mary Parish (of 20 years) retired.

The former Archbishop of Seattle, the Most Reverend James Peter Sartin appointed auxiliary Bishop Eusebio Elizondo Almaguer as Pastoral Administrator; and a Father Bryan Dolejsi as Parochial Vicar. A Transition Team, comprised of diocesan personnel, facilitated a modification of the parish structure under the guise of facilitating the ‘transition’ of sacred pastors. Bishop Elizondo, although Spanish-speaking, did not support the mission of Saint Mary Parish. Then, a Pastoral Coordinator, Olaf Valderrabano, was appointed. He did not have the credentials to take on the specific needs of the Parish (of which the Archdiocese was informed repeatedly. And no intervention was provided.) Consequently, ecclesiastical communion was disturbed; parish leadership was alienated; and parish programs, commissions, and resources were mismanaged. All this contributed to a de-stabilization of the parish structure *not the parish community*. Moreover without the parish structure, ~60% of the parish community is unaccounted for. Without the parish structure, the Parish is impeded from its missionary discipleship.

Then in 2020, the Archdiocese announced Saint Mary Parish would be suppressed as a step in the reconfiguration plan of the South-Central Deanery. Imagine the message that this sent to persons who had already been nationally displaced. By losing Saint Mary Parish, the Archbishop was acting to displace them from the only semblance of home since their immigration to the United States.

The current “*downward trend of the reception of sacraments*” is reversible and of relatively brief duration. It can be reversed with the proper Pastor, credentialed employees, and participation of parish leadership. Therefore Cause 1 is not sufficient cause to suppress Saint Mary Parish. To not consider the specificity of Saint Mary Parish is a failure to appreciate the evangelical dynamic that is needed when adapting the parish structure to both established parishioners within the territory and those going beyond parish limits to reach those in need.

2. Cause 2 contradicts Cause 1. you assert that a decline in the reception of sacraments indicates a need to go beyond itself and engage in missionary discipleship. Yet you cite the fact that many Parishioners live beyond the territorial limits of Saint Mary Parish, “*traveling from a distance to attend liturgies and parish meetings,*” as just cause to suppress it. Many Parishioners live beyond the territorial limits and travel because they are engaging in missionary discipleship *as a member of Saint Mary Parish*. “*Pastoral activity needs to go beyond merely the territorial limits of the Parish, to make ecclesial communion more clearly transparent by means of the synergy between ministers and diverse charisms, structuring itself as a “pastoral care for all”, at the service of the Diocese and of its mission*” (*Pastoral conversion*, 123).
3. Having several parishes proximate to Saint Mary Parish is not sufficient cause to suppress a parish. Moreover having “*one [parish among several parishes] that offers liturgies and pastoral care in the Spanish language*” is also not sufficient cause. This does not ensure that 60% of Saint Mary Parish will be cared for. In fact, because actions were taken to factually suppress Saint Mary Parish, the current situation simulates the South-Central Deanery with one parish that offers liturgies and pastoral care in the Spanish language. It is not adequate to conglomerate the Spanish-speakers who again are not homogenous but multinational and multicultural. Small communities are a source of enrichment for the Church and more adept to missionary discipleship for these pastoral circumstances.
4. To not consider the specificity of Saint Mary Parish is a failure to appreciate the demands of its mission on parish resources (pastor, employees, and finances). Again, as an immigrant

Parish, Saint Mary Parish is not able to rely solely on income from regular collections. This is not a cause for suppression. The non-citizens of the Parish are not able to secure the type of employment that would allow for this. As a result, Saint Mary Parish depends on its members who are citizens with employment, fundraisers, external support, and other modes of income generation, e.g. rental income.

It is important to remind you that on 17 November 2021, the Archdiocese introduced the Catholic Real Estate Initiative ‘as a collaboration between the archdiocese, parishes, schools, Catholic Community Services (CCS) and Catholic Housing Services (CHS) to evaluate Church-owned properties and determine potential sites’ in order to address the housing challenge faced by many people. Beginning with your predecessor, Saint Mary Parish spent \$100,000 on a study of the seismic upgrade needed on the vacant school of Saint Mary Parish. The original plan involved a long-term lease to supplement our ordinary income. Despite the investment, the Archdiocese abruptly halted all movement forward. So if the Archdiocese seeks to rely and benefit from the re-purposing of church property, then why is it not possible for Saint Mary Parish to do so? If it is just cause to suppress Saint Mary Parish because of the dependence on rental income, what of the Archdiocese of Seattle?

It is also important to remind you about the unqualified personnel (cc. 1282, 1284), about whom the Archdiocese was made aware. For over two years, financial reports were not provided to parishioners (c. 1287 §2). More curious, a large portion of financial (and demographic) data is missing from 2003-2013, and it would counter the assertions made by the Archdiocese in the 22 October 2020 Press Release. So, on 29 March 2022, I contacted the Camille Davidson, Assistant Archivist/Records Manager, to request a copies of Saint Mary Parish annual reports for complete record of data. On 31 March 2022, Ms. Davidson responded to me, “*I cannot give you access because collections less than 25 years old are closed to researchers.*” I am not a researcher; I am a parishioner and a donor who should have been given an account of ‘the goods offered by the faithful to the Church,’ i.e. Saint Mary Parish, per c. 1287 §2.

5. Cause 5 is the anticipated or hoped for effect of the merger and therefore logically cannot be a motivating cause for the merger. Cause for parish modification must arise from actual conditions in the present, not anticipated circumstances related to the future. Further, because Cause 5 is an anticipated circumstance related to the future, it is conjecture. The assertion of it does not make it true. Given the acts to factually suppress the Parish, the simulation of a formal suppression has already demonstrated that the opposite of Cause 5 is true. A factual merger has not benefited the Faithful, so accordingly a formal one will not. Therefore Cause 5 is not sufficient cause to suppress Saint Mary Parish.

IN PROCEDENDO

The violations *in decernendo* preclude any procedure by which to suppress a parish despite the procedural elements recorded in the 27 May 2022 Decree.

Regarding the procedural elements recorded in the 27 May 2022 Decree:

1. You never sought information, nor did you hear or listen from the those whose rights could be injured by this decree before its issuance (c. 50).

On 19 April 2021, the Archdiocese announced that the Strategic Planning Committee led by then auxiliary bishop and Director of Pastoral Planning, Bishop Daniel Mueggenborg would work with Saint Mary Parish “*to discuss a new direction and vision*” for the parish. “*While the*

Archbishop and the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) set the vision, how it is implemented and realized will be co-created with the parishioners of each parish.”

On 29 April 2021, at the first “listening session” (that you list in the May 27 Decree), the vision set by the Archbishop (and SPC) was to suppress Saint Mary Parish. Therefore the listening sessions can in no way be construed as a consultation per c. 50 or ‘co-creation.’ A vision, a decision, set by the Archbishop was made. Thus, notable alterations to the Parish were made by the SPC. The SPC has no juridic role in the alteration or suppression of Saint Mary Parish.

If anything, the SPC co-opted the voice of Saint Mary Parishioners, who then individually and collectively, petitioned you. We presented alternative proposals that would afford independence and preservation of our parish and parochial mission. On 9 August 2021, we wrote of our disagreement, a startling lack of consultation and collaboration, and your choice not to meet us face-to-face. The petition included three requests all of which would have constituted a true consultation or listening session, collaboration for the benefit of souls, and with that said, a co-creation.

Instead, on 26 August 2021, you silenced us (“*Whenever we try to supplant, silence, look down on, ignore or reduce into small elites the People of God in their totality and differences, we construct communities, pastoral plans, theological accentuations, spiritualities, structures without roots, without history, without faces, without memory, without a body, in the end, without lives. To remove ourselves from the life of the People of God hastens us to the desolation and to a perversion of ecclesial nature,*” *Pastoral conversion*, 37). You denied all requests including the opportunity to be heard and to genuinely participate in a collaborative, pastoral process. You redirected us to the ‘current process.’ You said the reconfiguration “*comes at a time when we also have limited resources, vastly changing demographics and an urgent need to engage young people.*” It is ironic. The Archdiocese as a whole, is afforded an interim to restructure itself with limited resources, changing demographics, and at the same time, to engage in missionary discipleship. It is the essence of our three requests for Saint Mary Parish.

On 30 December 2021, you wrote, “*It is my deep desire that all of you maintain your relationship with Jesus and find a place that works for you to fully live out your Catholic faith. This may be at one of the parishes St. Mary’s will merge with – or it may be at another parish that will help you experience the love and joy of our Savior and encourage you to pass that love on to other.*” In other words, the concern is not for us. The concern is for the pre-determined vision. You will not heed anything expressed to you that would not support the decision to suppress Saint Mary Parish. In retrospect, it is difficult to understand this sequence of communications as a consultation or collaboration. A decision was made, and our participation of the ‘current process’ was merely to be told how it would be imposed upon us from above (*Pastoral conversion*, 37). Therefore, those whose rights could be injured were excluded from the procedure.

2. If the diocesan bishop has cause to erect, suppress or notably alter a parish, “*The essential elements established by the universal law regarding the Parish as a juridic person must be observed and from which the Bishop cannot dispense*” (*Pastoral conversion*, 47). In addition to his seeking the necessary information and proofs, and consult those whose rights can be harmed, the diocesan bishop must hear the Presbyteral Council which “*must be genuine, and should consider relevant arguments both for and against the proposed modifications*” (Congregation for Clergy, Prot. 2013 1348, n. 1-i). There is no evidence that the Presbyteral Council was presented with all proposals for Saint Mary Parish including those did not involve its suppression. Moreover, c. 515 §2 requires that the Bishop hear the presbyteral council

before a decision is made. This is required *ad validitatem*. This did not occur. A decision was made as of 29 April 2021 and then confirmed by you henceforth. Therefore due to the notable alterations of Saint Mary Parish prior to the 27 May 2022 Decree, and the fact that a decision to suppress Saint Mary Parish occurred before the Presbyteral Council Meeting on 10 March 2022, I argue the 27 May 2022 Decree is invalid.

3. Reducing the number of parishes in the Archdiocese reduces the number of parishes that can be taxed. Consequently each Decree of Extinctive Union worsens the patrimonial condition of the Archdiocese. In the May 27 Decree, there is no indication that you consulted the diocesan Finance Council or the College of Consultors per cc. 1292 §1 and 1295.

The faithful have right to expect that the diocesan bishop will observe the norms of law. If not, the principles of law afford them the discipline by which to vindicate their rights and seek repair of the harm done by a wrong act or a wrongfully placed act (cf. c. 221 §1 and 128).

With that said, I ask Your Excellency to:

- 1. Reconsider your decision as communicated first on 29 April 2021;**
- 2. Revoke to notable alterations of Saint Mary Parish following 29 April 2021;**
- 3. Reconsider and revoke your formal decision, the 27 May 2022 Decree of Extinctive Union, as communicated on 29 May 2022;**
- 4. Approve the release of financial documentation to allow the opportunity for the People to develop an alternate proposal with the necessary data;**
- 5. Come meet the Faithful of Saint Mary Parish separate from the SPC, celebrate Mass with us, and consider an alternative to our suppression. With the proper structures, and a reasonable timetable, Saint Mary Parish historically meet and can meet once again your standards of parish vitality; and,**
- 6. Appoint a Pastor who supports the special mission of Saint Mary Parish.**

Respectfully,

Wendy Kimball
Procurator

Copy: Mandators