



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

240 E. ONONDAGA STREET, SYRACUSE, NY 13202-2608

August 15, 2023

+Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The mission of the Church continues in new and creative ways, particularly during this difficult and challenging time. The parishes and churches of Saint Joseph the Worker and the Immaculate Heart of Mary have been tending to the pastoral needs of the people of Liverpool since 1890 and 1950 respectively. Indeed, your parishes have remarkable and beautiful histories. More importantly, they are places where God is worshiped, the Good News of his love and salvation are lived and shared, and those in need are served.

It is unfortunate that the number of faithful who gather for the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, in the Liverpool area and who take an active part in the mission of the Church through their involvement at your parishes has experienced a significant decline. Sadly, the same decline is present in many of the parishes and in all the vicariates of our diocese.

In order to better navigate the pastoral challenges of our time, the parishes of Saint Joseph the Worker and the Immaculate Heart of Mary came together in 2011, eventually forming Epiphany parish in 2019. Since then, great work in the care of souls has been accomplished in the Liverpool area and beyond!

Nevertheless, Epiphany parish finds itself at another crossroads. In 2020, the parish trustees, along with members of the parish council began considering the future of the parish. The result of their deliberations, presented to you at various town hall meetings, was that maintaining both church buildings of your parish is no longer possible. This realization is based on the needs of the parish for the care of souls, the condition of the buildings and the continual maintenance they require, and the limited resources (financial and other) available.

Consequently, your pastor, Father O'Hara, accepting the recommendation of your parish trustees and pastoral council, has requested from me that the church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary be relegated to profane but not sordid use (closed) so that it can be alienated (sold). This request was motivated by a desire to continue pastoral ministry in Liverpool as Epiphany parish at the campus of the church of Saint Joseph the Worker for as long as it is needed or as long as it is possible.

Faith • Hope • Charity

Therefore, I have decided to grant this request. A decree effecting this change will be available on September 8, 2023. You can access it on the diocesan website (<https://syracusediocese.org/>), in the Catholic Sun (print and online - <https://thecatholicsun.com/>), and on the parish website (<https://liverpoolnycatholic.org/>). It will also be available at all Masses on the weekend of September 9th and 10th when it will be discussed.

I am grateful to your parish trustees and parish council and to Father O'Hara not only for tending to your pastoral needs, but for leading you through this difficult and challenging time. I am confident that this decision will help to strengthen the vitality of the parish so that it may more effectively continue the mission of the Church.

Church buildings are a significant part of our history and tradition and the loss of the church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is certainly sad and something to be mourned. At the same time, it is a reminder that the Church is not merely a building, but the Body of Christ. When we are united in him we experience God's love and salvation – a tremendous grace and blessing that transcends all space and time!

The "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*) of the Second Vatican Council reminds us that "the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the Christian life" (no. 11) and is a "sacrament of unity." St. Peter Julian Eymard, a priest who devoted his life to helping people appreciate the Holy Eucharist, has stated: "Know, O Christian, that the Mass is the holiest act of religion. You cannot do anything to glorify God more, nor profit your soul more, than by devoutly assisting at it, and assisting as often as possible." I would like to take this opportunity to invite you not to forget the importance of the Mass in your life as a Catholic Christian and the importance of joining in its celebration on Sundays (the Lord's Day) and Holy Days of Obligation at a parish church near you.

A final Mass of Thanksgiving will be celebrated at the church of Immaculate Heart of Mary on September 23, 2023 at 4:00 PM. Please join me in giving thanks to God for the great gift that this church has been for so many years. And let us together ask the Lord to bless you that, as you begin a new chapter in our history, he may fill you with the grace you need to be his witnesses so that your parish will be a beacon of faith, hope, and charity to the people of Liverpool and beyond. -

Be assured of my continued prayers and support for you and your community during this difficult, yet hope-filled time.

In the Name of Jesus,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Douglas J. Lucia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse