

Diocese of Fall River
Office of the Bishop
Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.

LETTER FROM BISHOP DA CUNHA TO PARISHIONERS OF ST. ANNE'S PARISH

October 13, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Since my installation as your Bishop here in the Fall River Diocese I have made as my priority the revitalization and renewal of our parishes, to move them as I have often said from maintenance mode to mission mode. Over the years, a number of factors have greatly affected our parishes, particularly those in our cities where so many of our churches are concentrated; among these factors are changing demographics and linguistic needs; a decline in parish membership and participation; fewer priests; and aging facilities.

As you know, St. Anne Parish has been impacted by all of these things and has been without the use of its upper church since 2015 because of its critically deteriorating condition. In response, I met late last year with Father David Deston to ask to him to assemble a representative group of parishioners to begin a study of the parish and its landmark church.

A parish Planning Team was formed in March and a parish-wide assembly held in April to provide parishioners with a report on recent parish statistics and an architect's study on the scope of work needed to repair the church. That study estimated that a complete renovation and restoration of St. Anne Church would cost \$13.5 million while the cost alone to make the upper church suitable for use would be approximately \$5 million. Parishioners were then invited to ask questions and offer their advice and counsel.

In the months following, the Planning Team worked very hard to explore all options regarding the feasibility of fundraising, including reaching out to over 50 identified potential major donors with the resources to contribute at the level of giving required for such a large capital campaign. The Diocese provided the services of a professional planner and fundraiser to support the work of the Planning Team.

I received a letter from Father Deston and the Planning Team in the summer in which they shared that the response of major donors to fundraising efforts was tepid at best and the prospect of raising the money unlikely. Acknowledging that they could not reach a consensus on any formal recommendations, they left to me the decision on the future of the parish. Shortly thereafter, I met personally with the team; they asked that my decision be done in a timely manner to avoid any continuation of the uncertainty.

In late summer, I also asked Mr. Nick Christ, who is the President and CEO of BayCoast Bank, to bring together a group of business and community leaders in order to ascertain their collective assessment of the success of a local capital campaign to repair the church. Both Father Deston and I attended; the consensus was that there are not sufficient resources to restore and maintain the iconic church.

After prayerfully considering all of the information at hand - relevant parish statistics on parishioners and finances, the architect's report, the work of the Planning Team, and input from the community leaders - I must share with you, dear parishioners of St. Anne's, the difficult decision that St. Anne Parish should close. I do this with heavy heart, knowing the genuine deep loss you will all feel.

I understand how strong a symbol St. Anne's Church is to this parish and to the community as a whole. It is my intention to form an ad hoc committee whose singular mission will be the re-use of the St. Anne Church building. This Committee for the Adaptive Re-Use of St. Anne's will support the Diocese in its efforts to explore other uses for the building that will preserve its architectural heritage in line with the needs of the community. It will include both members of the parish and business and community leaders. Again, I have asked Mr. Nick Christ to assist with its formation.

The final Mass at St. Anne's will be on November 25th, the Church's celebration of the feast of Christ the King which closes its liturgical year. As your shepherd, it is my intention to be with you on that day, to celebrate that Mass and to share in this moment of grief. I have asked Father Deston to form a committee of parishioners to plan the final Mass as well as any other observances that it believes will help the community to remember and celebrate its proud heritage and to prepare to move forward. This committee will also consider ways to continue the use of liturgical items of St. Anne's within the Diocese and beyond.

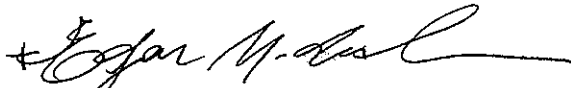
I am grateful to all of the St. Anne's community for its patience through this process. I express particular appreciation to members of the Planning Team and to Father Deston for their work and dedication over many months on an understandably difficult task.

This process at St. Anne Parish went on as strategic planning on a wider scale took place involving several neighboring parishes, and I thank as well those parishioners of St. Anne's who took part. From those efforts has come important movement toward a unified collaboration which is being announced this weekend. You will find from a letter from me explaining it near the doors of the church, and I encourage you to please read it. It is my prayer that you will continue your journey of faith as a member of one of the parishes to be part of this Catholic Community of Central Fall River, namely, the parishes of Good Shepherd, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Mary Cathedral, and St. Stanislaus. I am convinced that we will be better positioned as a community of faith to confront our challenges collaboratively, not separately often struggling alone as individual parishes.

I understand that all of these changes are hard and may take time to accept, but God is with us, always, including through these challenging times.

Know too that I am with you, and as your shepherd, I am praying for you and with you.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V.
Bishop of Fall River