



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Brooklyn

310 Prospect Park West
Brooklyn, New York 11215

December 11, 2010

Dear Friends in Christ:

At the beginning of 2010, I issued a pastoral letter to the people of our Diocese, calling for the start of a comprehensive, strategic planning process called *Christ Jesus our Hope*. The main purpose of this strategic planning process is to identify the challenges we face within our Church and to identify means and resources by which those challenges can be addressed. A central part of the process is the need to assess each of the Diocese's 197 parishes for the purpose of evaluating both their pastoral vitality as well as their financial viability.

I deemed this evaluative process necessary because of my pastoral commitment to engage in the efforts of the New Evangelization, so often encouraged in the teachings of both the Venerable John Paul II, as well as our current Holy Father, Benedict XVI. I have made the New Evangelization the theme of my episcopal ministry since becoming Bishop of Brooklyn. In order to ensure that the Diocese has the ability and necessary resources to effectively continue the work of proclaiming the Gospel to the men and women of Brooklyn and Queens, it has become imperative for us to address many issues and challenges that often impeded our efforts to effectively engage in the work of the New Evangelization.

Through a highly consultative process that sought to engage the pastoral leadership as well as the parishioners of every parish community, each parish was asked to submit a self-study that examined every aspect of its life, including pastoral ministry, finances and the maintenance needs of the parish's buildings. The self-study was designed to highlight both the strengths and challenges each parish faces. Further analysis was done by the Diocesan Parish Task Force and Planning Commission, taking into consideration such factors as demographics, clergy availability, geography and infrastructure.

Two of the financial criteria by which all parishes of the Diocese are being evaluated for their viability are an ability to maintain a sustainable balanced budget and, where applicable, to create a realistic plan for the repayment of any debts. Pastoral criteria which are signs of parish vitality include but are not limited to levels of weekly Mass attendance, reception of the sacraments, processes such as the R.C.I.A. and evangelization initiatives which draw people into the parish community and the sacramental life of the Church. While we need to be fair and objective in the general criteria for evaluating all of our parishes, I am committed to maintain a Catholic presence in every part of our Diocese, which may at times require extraordinary financial or pastoral measures, particularly in our poorest communities.

With respect to the **Parish of Saint Mary, Star of the Sea and Saint Gertrude**, three challenges in particular were highlighted throughout the strategic planning process. An immediate need is for the parish to maintain a sustainable balanced budget, after operating with a deficit for many years. The second challenge is to create a realistic, multi-year plan to repay the parish's debts. Finally, a comprehensive strategy that addresses both the long term maintenance needs of the parish's buildings and related real estate issues must be adopted to ensure the long term viability of the parish

During its lengthy deliberations, the Diocesan Commission concluded that these challenges, while serious in nature, can be effectively addressed without the need for any reconfiguration of the parish. Further, the Commission noted that the leaders of the parish have already instituted a number of important measures that have made progress in addressing these challenges.

After serious reflection, allow me to inform you that I have accepted the recommendation of the Diocesan Commission that Saint Mary, Star of the Sea and Saint Gertrude Parish be required to submit a strategic plan of action, consisting of specific annual goals and objectives, designed to decisively address these challenges in a reasonable period of time. Once completed, this strategic plan of action will be forwarded to the Diocesan Planning Commission for review and submission to me for final approval. In order to assist Monsignor Bracken in this important task, a committee of lay leaders and staff members will be assembled to assist in creating this strategic plan of action under his direction.

I have made this decision motivated by my responsibility to ensure that your pastoral needs will be provided for in a sustainable manner, allowing the Church's divine mission to continue at Saint Mary, Star of the Sea and Saint Gertrude Parish for many years to come.

Allow me to express my sincere thanks to Monsignor Bracken for his pastoral leadership and generous service to you. I am also deeply grateful for your continued support of the parish.

During the days of Advent, I entrust you and your families to the care and intercession of Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church. May our Blessed Lady allow Saint Mary, Star of the Sea and Saint Gertrude Parish to prosper with renewed life unto the glory of Father, in the name of Jesus the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn

cc: Reverend Monsignor John Bracken
Most Reverend Frank Caggiano, VG
Reverend Monsignor Edward Scharfenberger, VE
Reverend Monsignor Paul Sanchez, VE
Reverend Monsignor Jamie Gigantiello, VE