



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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**COPY**

*January 21, 2025*

*Memorial of Saint Agnes, Virgin and Martyr*

Reverend and dear Fathers, Deacons and Lay Leadership:

I write to acknowledge your letter dated January 15, 2025, with an enclosure, received at my office on Saturday, January 18, 2025, as I was about to begin my parish and school visitations. These visitations help me to consider prayerfully the Recommendations of the Charlotte/Greece/Hilton Pastoral Planning Task Force (henceforth: Recommendations) which you submitted.

Allow me to begin by expressing my deep gratitude for the time and effort made in proposing the Recommendations, which reflect a genuine love for pastoral ministry and a sincere desire to continue this ministry into the future with the mind and heart of Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest, and our Good Shepherd. On Sunday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, I celebrated Holy Mass at All Saints Church in Lansing, which was followed by a reception. Once again, I experienced the love our people in these rural communities have for their parishes. I only informed Father John F. Gagnier, Parochial Administrator of Saint Anthony Church, Groton, New York, Holy Cross Church, Dryden/Freeville, New York, and All Saints Church, Lansing, New York, on the Thursday prior, January 16, 2025, of my intention to come to All Saints Church. With this rather short notice, I experienced the parish, as it is, a true community of the faithful. The reception following Mass was extraordinary, but, as I understand it, customary at the parish, which needed no advance notice to be outstandingly hospitable.

This same very warm welcome was extended to me this morning, January 21, 2025, at Saint Agnes Church in Avon, where I celebrated Holy Mass for the Saint Agnes School Community on the occasion of the School's and Parish's Patronal Feast Day and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Saint Agnes School. Once again, I was graciously received by the Pastor, Father Michael G. Fowler, Deacon Peter S. Dohr, Mrs. Elizabeth Dowd, Principal, and the faculty, staff, students and supporters of Saint Agnes School. How very hard they all work to keep the doors of the School open!

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**The Charlotte/ Greece/ Hilton Pastoral  
Planning Task Force  
c/o The Reverend Father John A. Firpo  
Saint Charles Borromeo Church  
3003 Dewey Avenue  
Rochester, New York 14616**

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I mention the above simply to reinforce the foundation upon which all pastoral planning must rest: the motto of our first Bishop, The Most Reverend Bernard McQuaid, "*Lex suprema, salus animarum,*" "*The supreme law is the salvation of souls.*" (Cf. also canon 1752, *Code of Canon Law*). Efficiency, resources, financial stability and so many other factors are also essential elements of pastoral planning, but always with due consideration for its effect upon the faithful.

Over these last years, along the whole East Coast, a certain malaise, a sense of defeat has seeped into the Church. This has had a devastating effect upon our parishes. Nonetheless, many continue to support our parishes and we must be forever mindful of their support. This same sentiment of defeat, giving up, has affected priestly vocations. The enthusiasm and zeal of priests always will be the necessary ingredients to create a vocational culture in a world now become in many instances self-centered and cylindrical, the individual without the community, self interest rather than selflessness.

In making this reflection, I have noted your consultations with the faithful and your sensitivity to their input, your emphasis upon fostering vocations to the priesthood, your areas of inter-parochial cooperation, which are admirable and should continue, and above all your emphasis upon the Most Holy Eucharist as the heart and center of every parish. You also have given attention to my comments at the July 9, 2024 meeting with members of the Task Force.

Moving now to your scenarios for parish clustering, these can be a resource in determining future parish leadership and assist the Priests' Personnel Board in working with me to provide for the pastoral care of our parishes according to the needs that arise. I did note with satisfaction that "no parishes or churches will close due to these recommendations." At the same time, when clustering might occur, an analysis of the use or non-use of non-church buildings ought to be considered in order to maximize resources.

The next meeting of the Presbyteral Council will take place on March 11, 2025. I invite representatives, as determined by the Task Force, to make a presentation at this meeting. The information that you have sent to me would be sent to the Council Fathers in preparation for your presentation. If you accept this invitation, kindly notify Father Paul J. Tomasso, Vicar General, or Father Daniel E. White, Chair of the Presbyteral Council, and a time will be assigned to you.

In closing, I renew my most sincere gratitude for your concern for the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care and those who assist you in your ministry. I also am

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gratified by your support for the ministry of the Diocesan Bishop and your willingness to participate in the work of evangelization, taking to heart those words: "*The supreme law is the salvation of souls.*"

With an assurance of my prayers and always asking a remembrance in your good prayers, I remain

Devotedly yours in Christ

+ *Salvatore R. Matano*  
*The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano*  
*Bishop of Rochester*

cc: Members of the Task Force as listed on the Recommendations sent to the Bishop's Office through the kindness of Father John A. Firpo  
The Very Reverend Father Paul J. Tomasso, Vicar General and Director of Priests' Personnel  
The Reverend Father Daniel E. White, Secretary to the Bishop  
Mr. Michael Sauter, Diocesan Director of the Office for Pastoral Services