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Dear brother priests and faithful of the Diocese of Oakland,

In 2021 we began the Mission Alignment Process, (MAP) a diocesan-wide effort to engage our clergy and our parishioners in a process of self-reflection and renewal.

I write to you today regarding the next phase of MAP and the important role each one of us must play in aligning our operations with our sacred mission. With God's help and with the resilience of our common faith, we press on in making our parishes places where people encounter Christ in the celebration of the Sunday liturgy, in our living the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and in our witness as missionary disciples.

We do this important work not in a vacuum, but in light of the diocesan-wide trends in declining Mass attendance, participation in the sacraments and Catholic school enrollment began in the early 2010s. We are also at an all-time low of priests assigned to our 80 parishes, and the average age of our priests continues to climb. Some parishes and schools are struggling with financial sustainability. Meanwhile, some parishes are seeing growth, as demographics in the East Bay are changing.

While many of our parishes were built to serve the Catholic Church of 1965, we now have far fewer priests and parishioners. Not all parishes can afford to pay for a support staff to fully serve the parish and our missionary aspirations. Others are surviving on rental of parish parking lots or empty school facilities.

Our parishes were not created to be monuments to the past. As described in *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), "The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community" (No. 28).

Our clergy and lay parish leaders participated in 2021-22 in a deep and extensive MAP consultation, looking at parish data that revealed where our parishes are struggling most.

The results of that consultation require significant change, change which is challenging for all involved. And, if we are open to the Holy Spirit, this change can also bring new life and blessings. Our Savior tells us, "See, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). We rest in that promise as we remind ourselves that, "if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be 'the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters'" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 28).

This renewal begins with an effort to refocus on missionary work, therefore aligning our daily work with our divine mission. We must focus on the activities that foster prayerful celebrations of the Mass, prioritize works of mercy, and form missionary disciples.

The status quo is not sustainable nor is it serving God's people.

FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD

We have successfully closed worship sites in the past. With considerable consultation and sustained prayer, I have determined it is necessary to close the following parish sites and pastoral center, and provide welcoming accommodation of all affected parishioners at another convenient location.

- Mary Help of Christians, Oakland
- Our Lady of Guadalupe site at Blacow Road, Fremont
- Our Lady of Lourdes, Oakland
- Sacred Heart, Oakland
- St. Albert the Great, Alameda
- St. Andrew Kim Korean Pastoral Center, Oakland
- St. Augustine, Oakland
- St. Barnabas, Alameda
- St. Paschal Baylon, Oakland
- St. Patrick, Oakland
- St. Rose of Lima, Crockett
- St. Stephen, Walnut Creek
- Transfiguration, Castro Valley

As I have full responsibility for the pastoral care of every Catholic in our diocese, it is my priority to ensure all affected parishioners are welcomed at a nearby parish. Many of these parish sites are already currently merged or clustered with another parish. I am committed to working with all to find the best solutions in each situation.

In addition, I want to say the following regarding MAP and the bankruptcy process. As you know, we are currently seeking bankruptcy court approval of our proposed plan of reorganization. Regardless of that outcome, we must face the realities described above and proceed with these closures.

I deeply understand the sacrifice this will require. We cannot allow nostalgia and sentimentality to hold back the message of the Gospel. While we love our local church building, the church has never been solely a building. The church has always been a people called by God and united in faith. The faith of our people will continue, just in a different place and with new people.

I ask all to join me in praying for those immediately affected by these changes. I also make a heartfelt plea to the "receiving" parishes to open your hearts wide to your fellow Catholics who will be joining you. Love them, make room for them not only in the pew alongside you, but in the activities of your parish. Welcome them as your own, for we are all one as Christ's body.

Together, we will fulfill Christ's mission to go and make disciples, to the ends of the earth, as we rely on His promise that He will be with us always.

With the assurance of my prayers and blessing, I am

Yours sincerely in Christ,



The Most Reverend Michael C. Barber, S.J.
Bishop of Oakland