



THE MOST REVEREND
GREGORY J. HARTMAYER, OFM CONV.

August 2, 2022

My dear friends in Christ,

Peace and All Good Things!

I want to sincerely thank you for the many emails that I received which have expressed your concerns and disappointments. I would encourage you to reflect upon the growth and the accolades received by the Pius students and faculty. We have a lot for which to be proud.

I wanted to give you an update on the pastoral care for the students and staff at St. Pius. In addition to the work your campus ministry team has been doing to coordinate visits from priests, I have called some local pastors and we are happy to announce that seven local priests as well as all three bishops for the Archdiocese of Atlanta have committed to serving the school this year.

Bishop Joel Konzen, S.M.; Bishop Bernard Shlesinger, III and I will all be at the school during this school year. Joining us to offer Masses, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, retreats, talks and visits are Father Avery Daniel from Athens, a St. Pius alumnus; Father Rey Pineda, a former chaplain for the school as well as our director of vocations; Father Gerardo Gonzalez-Ceballos, who is also the director of the Office of Divine Worship for the archdiocese and my priest secretary; Father Robbie Cotta, parochial vicar at Immaculate Heart of Mary; Father Ben Thompson, parochial vicar at St. Benedict; Father Joe Wagner, parochial vicar at the Cathedral of Christ the King; and Father Paul Nacey, parochial vicar at St. Jude.

Please know that the bishops do not take priest assignments lightly and we do not make them without a great amount of consultation. The priests themselves get a say in their assignments.

Not every priest is suited for campus ministry. Priests, just like lay people, do best in a job that fits their talents and personalities. This is what makes the shortage of priests even more challenging.

I wish we had enough priests to staff every ministry in this archdiocese. The sad reality is that we do not. Last year eight priests left active ministry for this archdiocese for retirement, assignment outside the archdiocese, sabbatical or a leave of absence. We ordained four new priests this past May. Unfortunately, this has been the pattern for the last few years.

I received some questions about assigning one of our young priests to the University of Georgia. Campus ministry for both UGA and Georgia Tech were staffed by Franciscans for more than 60 years. There were always two priests at both posts. Three years ago, the Order reassigned those priests outside of Georgia as part of their realignment of priorities. The Franciscans are also suffering from a decline in vocations. The archdiocese had to find four priests to staff these critical campus ministry positions that have been in existence for decades. The UGA Campus Ministry Center is as large if not larger than some of our parishes. This year, one of our priests assigned to UGA retired.

I am saddened about having no priests at any of our high schools this year, but we had to make some hard decisions. We felt that high school students still have the support and guidance of their parents. College students do not have anyone to get them up on Sunday for Mass and take them to church; to lead them in prayer around the dinner table or to model what it means to take their faith out into the world. Those who leave home are getting their first taste of independence. This is where we lose so many of our young people for the practice of our Catholic Faith. We have to have a strong priestly presence on these campuses. Many of our current seminarians are from the Campus Ministry programs at our state schools.

There is hope. The administration team at St. Pius, the Office of Catholic Schools and the bishops are working to support a strong faith life at the school. I have personal knowledge of Susan Baker, your new campus ministry leader. St. Pius is fortunate to have her on campus. She has a true gift for youth ministry and she has my full confidence. The faculty team joining her are enthusiastic and have an amazing plan for spiritual development and support this year. Susan sent me the following information about the plans she has so far. I have no doubt she will continue to make more announcements as the year progresses:

"The Campus Ministry team is excited for all the activities planned for the year. This includes the Domini Sumus fall retreat, boys' retreat, girls' retreat, and four off-campus class pilgrimages. In addition, we will be going on a domestic mission trip during the summer of 2023 and during the 2023-2024 school year, we hope to participate in international and domestic mission trips. We will be putting a focus on service projects throughout the year as well as Bible studies for students and faculty. More than anything, the Campus Ministry team is looking forward to the return of students, faculty and staff! St Pius X, pray for us." Susan Baker, campus minister, St. Pius X high school

Last Wednesday night, while St. Pius was at its "back to school" meeting, I was at Christ our Redeemer parish admitting nine young men to candidacy for ordination. Their parents and families joined them for Mass and dinner. This is an important step in the formation process for seminarians. These young men have completed their philosophy studies and will now move on to theology. While their ordination is a few years off, this step is a gift for the archdiocese. It represents the hard work of our vocations team here in the archdiocese. Your prayers for these young men are more important than ever. I hope that we will be able to fill the unfilled ministries as we ordain more men to the holy priesthood.

On that topic, I encourage you to speak with your sons and daughters about considering a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. These seeds are planted at home and nourished at your parishes and schools. In fact, this was one of the reasons we decided to invite local parochial vicars to help out this year. We hope that your sons and daughters will deepen their relationships with the priests from their parishes, which can inspire conversations about vocations and strengthen your child's connection to their home parish.

On June 30, I was pleased to meet with Mr. Sant Perez, the chairperson of the St. Pius X Advisory School Board, and other board members. We had a fruitful discussion and we were able to clarify some of the misinformation that has caused some confusion.

I am sorry that this situation has caused distress for the St. Pius community and I thank you for your deep love for your Catholic school. The bishops and the school administration will continue to consider creative solutions to continue to provide a priestly presence at St. Pius during the school year. In the meantime. Let us focus on the students, faculty and administration as we pray for a successful school year.

With prayerful best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'G' and 'H'.

Most Reverend Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.
Archbishop of Atlanta