



ST. PATRICK PARISH

Bridge Avenue

July 12, 2023

Dear Parishioners of Saint Patrick,

Since December 2019 I have been serving as Administrator of Saint Malachi Parish in addition to serving as Pastor of Saint Patrick Parish. During this time many of Saint Malachi's parishioners raised concerns about their future. The pandemic and post pandemic realities heightened these concerns as the parish continued to experience attrition of membership and shrinking revenue by way of collections and other sources of income.

With these critical factors in mind, Saint Malachi received permission to begin a strategic planning initiative in order to study these issues and prepare for a viable future. With the guidance of Ms. Rosie Dolan-Baker, an experienced strategic planning leader and life-long Catholic, and with the accompaniment of The Reverend Gary D. Yanus, Judicial Vicar for the Diocese of Cleveland, the strategic planning was conducted in three phases: 1) the formation of a Steering Committee who would recommend a process, 2) the formation of Working Groups and Options Teams, and 3) a comprehensive review by Parish Council who discerned the proposals to be made. This process took place from May 2022 through April 2023 at which time a Proposal Report was presented to Bishop Malesic.

Since April, Bishop Malesic and his staff carefully reviewed the submitted proposals and concurred with the plan's findings that the parish cannot continue as it is. **Therefore, with due consideration for the material presented and out of pastoral concern for the Catholic community here on the near west side, the bishop envisions that the church of Saint Malachi will become an oratory, a place for regularly scheduled worship as well as funerals, weddings, and baptisms, under the pastoral and administrative care of Saint Patrick Parish and its pastor.**

To be clear, it is a union of the parishes such that the mission of Saint Malachi Parish is embraced by Saint Patrick Parish. **The name of the church of Saint Patrick will remain unchanged as does the name of the church of Saint Malachi. The unified parish will minister to the faithful and residents of the near west side as Saint Patrick Parish, assisted and supplemented by the Oratory of Saint Malachi.**

There are a number of key considerations the bishop weighed when proposing his vision:

- **Saint Malachi would no longer be a parish with a territory and a neighboring parish will assume the pastoral care of its former territory.** It would make sense that Saint Patrick, already sharing territorial borders with Saint Malachi, is simply expanded to ensure that pastoral care continues. This includes caring for any residents and healthcare facilities within its new expanded parish boundaries.
- Bishop Malesic expressed that the reality of available clergy personnel at this time is a concern. **With the pastor of Saint Patrick already assuming the role of Administrator of Saint Malachi, his taking the pastorship of the united parish would be a natural development. It is the current norm for smaller parishes to share available clergy.** There is a need for both communities to further identify shared staffing, including deacons and pastoral ministers.

- Bishop Malesic also cited that the ministries of charity present at **Saint Malachi and Saint Patrick will continue to serve the needs of the local community, especially with regard to the hunger meals, food pantry services, and the partnerships both parishes have with other organizations.** This includes Malachi Center, Stella Maris and Saint Vincent de Paul. Although each of these organizations are independent entities, they are enriched because of their connection to Saint Malachi and Saint Patrick

So, what are the direct implications for Saint Patrick Parish? First, the parish territory would expand to include the territory of the former Saint Malachi Parish. Second, Saint Patrick Parish would assume the pastoral and administrative responsibilities of the newly formed Oratory of Saint Malachi. Third, Saint Patrick Parish would be called to embrace a stronger collaboration with the members of the oratory including aspects of parish life. It is imperative that we work together to strengthen the pastoral care and activity in this area. A gradual approach for discovering the needs and implementing them will be an important part of this process.

I realize that this may come as a surprise to you. Unlike Saint Malachi parishioners who have been engaged in a year long process, this vision of the bishop will be news to everyone at Saint Patrick. As both parishes take time to absorb the vision of the bishop, we will develop – again, with the assistance of Rosie Dolan-Baker and Fr. Gary Yanus - a process in order to address the many components to this new relationship. A number of technical and practical items will arise and we will need to address them as they surface. We will need to develop a number of committees, along with our Parish Councils and Finance Councils.

I welcome the opportunity to hear from you. **Please join me after the 4:30pm Mass on July 22 and after the 8:30am or 11am Masses on July 23.** Your reactions, hopes, concerns, and questions are encouraged, although at this time, we will have more questions than answers. We will have many more opportunities to give input in the future should you be unable to join us this particular weekend

Meanwhile, life here at Saint Patrick Parish continues. We are preparing for a new year with Metro Catholic School and our ever growing Parish School of Religion program. We continue with *Built of Living Stones*, a year-long study of our beautiful church building. We continue to implement our observance of the *Eucharistic Revival* and we look forward to our Parish Picnic next month as we celebrate our parish's 170th Anniversary. While we will have much work to do as we enter this new chapter, Saint Patrick Parish will always remain committed to the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments, spiritual and faith formation, performing works of charity, and enjoying communal fellowship.

Please keep our parish communities in your prayers during this important time of discernment. May Mary, Mother of the Church, Saint Patrick, and Saint Malachi intercede for us as we discover the possibilities awaiting our parish.

Respectfully yours in Christ,



Rev. Michael K. Gurnick
Pastor

**Cc: Most Reverend Edward C. Malesic, Bishop of Cleveland
Rev. Gary D. Yanus, Judicial Vicar, Diocese of Cleveland
St. Malachi Staff, Saint Malachi Parish & Finance Councils, and Strategic Planning Leadership**