



DIOCESE OF PEORIA

Saint Michael the Archangel Parish

513 South Shabbona Street

Streator, Illinois 61364

1 September 2023

My dear parishioners,

When I arrived here at Saint Michael the Archangel Parish in 2011, several matters stood out in my mind as being especially significant for our future. In particular, I wondered what would become of our parish in general, what would become of our grade school, and the location of our permanent place of worship. The intervening years have brought greater clarity.

In terms of the parish itself, no pastor could ask for a more wonderful faith community than Saint Michael the Archangel Parish! As you have heard me say, our parish is a plum, and I am both very happy and very proud to be your pastor. A number of noteworthy statistics have also stood out. We have averaged 44 baptisms per year over the past decade, though we have seen a decline in the number of people receiving First Communion and Confirmation. In the last decade, we have averaged nine weddings per year. But the statistic that particularly stands out is the number of funerals we celebrate. Since I arrived, we have had nearly 1,400 funerals. That, in turn, has naturally had an effect on Mass attendance. According to our October Mass Count (where we count all the people at Mass on a designated weekend in October), we have declined about 100 people per year over the past decade. In October 2011, we had 1812 people at Mass. Last year, we had 807. Fortunately, because of the tremendous generosity of our parishioners, our annual income has remained relative steady at about \$1.1 million each year. I mention these statistics because they must be included in our thoughts and plans for our future.

As far as our grade school is concerned, it is worth noting that although overall school enrollment in the State of Illinois has been on the decline for a number of years, the enrollment at Saint Michael the Archangel School has remained strong. In the 2011-2012 school year, the pre-K through 8 enrollment was 114. This year, it is 185. We owe a debt of gratitude to our principal, teachers, staff, volunteers, and benefactors who continue to make Catholic education possible in Streator.

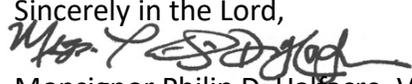
The most pressing issue facing us at the present moment concerns our church buildings. Since the time I arrived here in the parish, the question surrounding the future of our churches has remained unresolved. As you know, Saint Michael the Archangel Parish presently has three functioning churches: Saint Stephen, Saint Anthony, and Saint Casimir. And the question that we have been considering all along is simply this: What will be our long-term home? The parish trustees and I have been reflecting on this for a long time and we have reached the point where a decision must be made. The effect of our climate's freezing and thawing is clearly evident to anyone who looks carefully at our brick-and-mortar buildings. While bricks themselves can potentially last for centuries if the bricks are of high quality (i.e., sufficiently hard, and not porous), the mortar between the bricks disintegrates sometime between sixty and one hundred years – especially when the building experiences freezing and thawing seasons as we do. Tuck-pointing a building – the process of removing the old mortar and replacing it in the entire brick structure – is a major undertaking.

As we have been considering the condition of our buildings, we have also had our buildings professionally evaluated by engineers. Even more problematic than the need for Saint Stephen Church to be tuck-pointed from top to bottom is the issue with its foundation. The foundation of the church has slowly been deteriorating over time and the engineers have told us that it is reaching a critical level. If it were feasible to fix or replace the foundation, we would seriously consider doing so – but it is not. For that reason – for the sake of public safety – we will permanently abandon Saint Stephen Church at the end of September. You may recall reading in the news that this past July, the former Saint Patrick Church in Peoria (that was most recently owned by United Fellowship Ministries) simply collapsed. We are not going to risk catastrophic disaster. Our last Mass will be at 10:30am on Sunday, 1 October 2023. After that, the liturgical events for Saint Michael the Archangel Parish will take place in Saint Anthony Church. Saying farewell to a parish church is difficult and painful; it is akin to saying farewell to the family home. Some of the most significant events of our life take place there. And when I walked for the last time through the home where I grew up, I wept. But the fact that a family home or parish church must be abandoned does not erase the good and beautiful things that took place there; they are written in the Book of Life.

As we prepare for this move, I hasten to point out that though Saint Anthony Church does not have immediate life safety issues, it does indeed have significant problems that cannot be ignored as we move forward. We envision this move as a temporary solution to our immediate problem. We recently engaged an architectural firm from Naperville, Healy-Bender-Patton-Bean, to evaluate Saint Anthony Church and to give us a realistic estimate of the cost of repairing it – both the exterior and the interior. We have been using this church for our school Masses for twelve years. And while it is a beautiful church, we face a great challenge with regard to the exterior of the building. Long ago, a material was applied to the exterior of the church giving it the appearance of being a stone structure. However, the continuous deterioration of the outermost surface has allowed water to infiltrate causing the exterior to fail. In 2021, we undertook the tedious process of examining the entire exterior to remove loose pieces. Healy-Bender-Patton-Bean estimates the total cost of repairing Saint Anthony Church to be approximately \$4,000,000. That does not include the cost of any repairs that would need to be done to the steeple.

We will continue to consider our options as we consider the principal place of worship for Saint Michael the Archangel Parish. I hope that very soon we can have a proposal to bring to you for moving forward. As you likely have heard by now, the seminarian who was here for the summer, Justin Ramza, MD, will be ordained a deacon here in our parish this December. You may recall that he is originally from Streator and received his sacraments at St. Stephen's. When I told him about the move and asked him what he thought, he said, "My attachment is to the people, not to a building." We look forward to welcoming Bishop Tylka here to Saint Michael the Archangel Parish and having a beautiful ordination for Doctor Ramza in Saint Anthony Church. Let us continue to stand with one another and pray for one another as we move forward in faith and welcome what Our Lord brings into our life.

With my warmest personal regards, I remain,

Sincerely in the Lord,

Monsignor Philip D. Halfacre, V.G.
Pastor