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March 3, 2017

My Dear Friends in Christ,

With a heavy heart, I write to let you know of the report I received on the physical status of the Saint Francis church building. As you know, since my arrival, first as administrator and then as pastor, it has been our goal to review where we are as a community and then to set priorities accordingly. Part of those efforts was to examine in detail all of our buildings and properties so that we could assess the true financial cost of any necessary repairs and if we could afford to pay those costs. One need only look up at the ceiling at Saint Francis or at the slightly lop-sided steeple at Saint Mary to appreciate that much maintenance over the last few years (even decades) has been delayed. God bless our Facilities Committee that has done so much to keep our buildings in as good a state as they are.

We looked at the buildings of Saint Francis – Saint Mary on our own to determine what needed to be done and when and how much it would cost. To begin that process, we hired Matonak Snyder and Associates (MS&A), a structural engineering firm, to assess the structure and foundation of the church building at Saint Francis. Their response was far worse than anticipated.

In summary, the foundation of the Saint Francis church building requires significant structural repair to reestablish the structural integrity of the walls. MS&A recommended that we cease using the building until such time that repairs can be made. Wanting to confirm their findings, I ordered a second inspection. Adtek Engineering in Frederick was subsequently retained to perform a second, independent assessment of the structure. They too, recommend that the building not be occupied or used and confirmed the findings of MS&A. Both firms recommended this be done immediately.

Unfortunately, even the cost of repairs necessary just to make the building safe are beyond our means. All of the work that is outlined in the report by MS&A would cost several hundred thousand dollars and would only make the building safe for occupancy. It would not address any of the other needs (space, usability, painting, etc.). We will be determining what can and should best be done with the building to serve our needs.

Given the threat to health and safety posed by the structural instability of the building and the associated costs of the needed repairs, it is necessary immediately and permanently to close the church building. I have been working closely with Ms. Christin Kinman and Mr. Nolan McCoy, of the archdiocesan Department of Facilities Management, both of whom came out expressly and personally to inspect the building. I have also been in contact with Bishop Adam Parker, our Vicar General, with Monsignor Jim Hannon, our Western Vicar. All concur with my decision.

This is a great loss for many in our community and, as your pastor, I share in the sadness this will cause. You have celebrated the joys of baptisms and marriages, of encountering Jesus and making disciples who love and serve Him. Within these walls we have said farewell to those who have died, and supported one another through challenging times. Many families have been members of the parish for generations and the building has been a part of our community for over a century. Its closure is, indeed, painful. But as we know, Saint Francis – Saint Mary, indeed the whole Church, is not a structure of bricks and mortar, but a community of living stones, believers on life's journey. Our work as a Christian community must continue.

Starting immediately, Saint Francis – Saint Mary will hold all Masses and services at Saint Mary church. With gratitude to God and our predecessors, we have another building to meet our immediate and long term needs. Saint Mary church building, also examined in this process, was constructed in a better manner and there are no structural concerns (even though the building is older). I am grateful that both our Pastoral Council and our Finance Council had already begun to ask the questions of what we needed as a community and how we would meet and support those needs. The conversation on our needs will continue so that Saint Francis - Saint Mary will move forward reaching out to those around us to make disciples as Jesus has commanded us. Our recent efforts, including working together with Holy Family as a unified pastorate, will assist us.

With Bishop Parker and Monsignor Hannon, the Western Vicar, we will celebrate Mass at Saint Mary on Saturday, March 4 at 5:00 p.m. We'll be on hand to answer questions you may have. No doubt, this is difficult, even challenging, but God will continue to guide us and will show us how to proceed. Together as a community, as family, we will move forward. I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Jaskot". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

(Rev. Msgr.) Robert J. Jaskot,  
Pastor