

NOTICE OF COMMUNICATION TO PARISHIONERS OF SAINT TERESA OF CALCUTTA PARISH

MARCH 1 & 2, 2025



For the last five years, the Diocese of Scranton has been working proactively to address the realities of our local church while striving to meet the opportunities and challenges of the coming decade. Acknowledging that fewer parishioners are supporting the mission of the church, in addition to a diminishing number of ordained priests and many parishes facing financial challenges and infrastructure issues, the Diocese created its *Vision 2030 Pastoral Planning Process*.

This planning process addresses the ongoing needs of parishes through the lens of four distinct priority drivers:

- Vibrancy of Parish Life (Mass Attendance & Sacraments)
- Condition of Facilities
- Financial Viability of a Parish
- Distribution and Availability of Clergy

When a concern regarding one or more priority drivers is present in a parish, or deemed critical by the needs of the parish or diocese overall, the Diocese of Scranton looks to make modifications to parishes in a proactive way so that the Gospel can be announced and the Church's sacraments celebrated in vibrant parish communities.

In November 2023, the linked parishes of Saint John Neumann and Saint Paul of the Cross consolidated into Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish, maintaining two church buildings, the primary worship site being Sacred Hearts of Jesus & Mary Church, 1217 Prospect Avenue, Scranton, and the secondary worship site being Nativity of Our Lord Church, 633 Orchard Street, Scranton.

During the last 15 months, Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish has continued to face enormous challenges, stemming from aging and declining membership, which has resulted in declining finances, which has impacted the maintenance of the two facilities. Critical maintenance issues at both sites combine would cost well in excess of \$2 million.

The Pastor, Pastoral Council, Finance Council, and Hispanic Committee have been actively discussing the financial realities of Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish. When considering changing community demographics, including fewer people attending Mass, the availability of Masses at the parish's principal church, as well as all of the costly infrastructure projects on the horizon, they determined that maintaining two church buildings has become too costly and was coming at the expense of the mission of the parish.

In the spirit of the *Vision 2030* process, conversation and consultation have taken place within the parish community and Father Jonathan Kuhar has collaborated with parishioners regarding the closure of Nativity of Our Lord Church (defined in canon law as "relegated to profane but not sordid use"). The consultation has included, but is not limited to, the following:

- Extensive discussions with the Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils, as well as with the Hispanic Leadership Committee and parishioners, regarding critical priority drivers impacting both churches have taken place between **July 2021-February 2025**.
- On **September 14/15, 2024**, parishioners received a detailed pamphlet highlighting the financial challenges facing Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish and inviting parishioners to provide feedback regarding the possible closure of a worship site.
- Beginning **September 16, 2024**, Father Kuhar began connecting with parishioners via phone calls, personal and small group meetings and home visits. To date, more than 100 parishioners have participated in these consultative opportunities.
- During **September and October 2024**, the Saint Teresa of Calcutta Finance Council, Pastoral Council and Hispanic Leadership Committee continued to discuss the financial, structural and pastoral challenges they face. On **October 26 & 27, 2024**, a parish survey was conducted to seek people's feedback. More than 500 responses were received.
- On **November 12 & 14, 2024**, town hall meetings (one in English and one in Spanish) were held by Father Kuhar to propose closing Nativity of Our Lord Church. The meetings were attended by approximately 125 people overall who were allowed to ask questions or express their feelings about the possibility of closure.
- At all weekend Masses on **November 16 & 17, 2024**, Father Kuhar explained to all parishioners the proposal that was highlighted at the town hall meetings. Since that time, discussions with the Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils have continued.
- On **January 21, 2025**, Bishop Bambera consulted the Diocesan Presbyteral Council (a consultative body of priests from throughout the Diocese) regarding the closure of Nativity of Our Lord Church. Following a presentation of data, the Presbyteral Council voted and provided a favorable recommendation for closure.

As a result of this conversation and consultation, on **February 24, 2025**, Bishop Bambera signed a formal decree (which is a document that formalizes a decision within the Church) to best address the spiritual needs of the faithful as well as the needs of the Diocese of Scranton. The decree states Nativity of Our Lord Church, 633 Orchard Street, Scranton, would be permanently closed as of **June 8, 2025**. The future of the property will be determined by Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish, in consultation with the Diocese of Scranton, but will conform with Catholic faith and morals and with its dignity as a former place of divine worship.

According to Church law, diocesan bishops alone have the power to "erect, suppress or alter parishes" but can only do so after speaking to the Presbyteral Council and consulting parishioners. Throughout this process, the diocesan bishop needs to be certain that people will have access to another nearby place of worship. In this case, Bishop Bambera has determined that Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish has already proven it has more than adequate resources to serve the liturgical and sacramental needs of the parish community.

The full text of the official decree regarding the relegation of Nativity of Our Lord Church is available on the *Vision 2030* page of the Diocese of Scranton website and is available upon request from Father Kuhar at Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish.