



Diocese
of
Cleveland

Cathedral Square

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

17 April 2012

To the Faithful of the Diocese of Cleveland,

During these Easter days, I often think of Jesus' first words as he appeared to the Apostles after rising from the dead: "Peace be with you." I now say, it's time for peace and unity in the Diocese of Cleveland.

I will not appeal the recent decrees from the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome regarding the closing of certain parishes. Appealing to the Apostolic Signatura would prolong the process for a number of years and would create more uncertainty and continue to divide our Catholic community. Therefore, I will move forward and carry out the Congregation's directives regarding the parishes in an orderly manner.

More than ever, this is a time for all Catholics to come together with God's help and strive to strengthen our diocesan church's serving the pastoral and spiritual needs of all the Faithful.

The clustering and collaboration process, which began in 2007, reflected a proactive strategy to address three major challenges we faced – population shifts in the region, financial hardship for many parishes and fewer priests available for ministry.

We certainly were not alone in facing such challenges. The Catholic Church in the United States has undergone a profound change in the past decade. According to Georgetown University research, through a combination of closings and mergers, the number of parishes in our country declined from 19,000 parishes in 2000 to 17,800 in 2010. Downsizing has occurred in many dioceses in the Midwest, including those in Detroit, Buffalo and Toledo.

Here in our Diocese, closings and mergers resulted in a net reduction of 50 parishes. While change is difficult, thousands of Catholics found new parish homes over the past three years. As we reported to you in January of this year, clergy and laity, working together, are experiencing parish communities that are better able to provide pastoral and spiritual leadership and presence to the Faithful and to the wider community.

The tasks for the Church are to worship God fittingly, to bring the message of Jesus Christ to all people, to reach out and serve the poor and marginalized among us, and to help people to become holy and more closely united with God. I pray that together we can fulfill these important responsibilities.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
+ *Richard G. Lennon*
Bishop of Cleveland