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To the Parishioners of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with a sense of profound sadness that I write this letter. I had hoped that you, the parishioners of Assumption Parish, would hear of this decision directly from me. I apologize, that instead, you read of it in the local newspaper.

Since 2009, two comprehensive campaigns sought to raise the funds needed to repair and restore this beautiful church. I am sincerely thankful to the professionals and many volunteers who gave of their time, skills and passion to these initiatives.

Unfortunately, however, neither the first campaign, which ended in 2012, nor the current one, which just recently ended, were successful in generating the funds we require to proceed with the restoration. Our hopes, yours and mine, have not been realized and it is heartbreaking.

The inability to proceed with the repairs to this building requires that I make a difficult decision concerning the future of this church. After prayerful consideration and careful deliberations, I am announcing today that, effective November 3, 2014, Our Lady of the Assumption Church will close and Assumption Parish will relocate to Holy Name of Mary Church.

The last Masses will be celebrated in Assumption Church the weekend of November 1-2, 2014. More information will be provided as we move closer to these dates. I realize that this decision will be disheartening and painful for you as parishioners who have been praying and working for a different outcome. I share these feelings.

These fundraising campaigns demanded a significant outlay of the parish's energy, creativity and time. In the midst of our disappointment, I invite you to find strength in our faith and to refocus your energies, skills and talents to what is at the core of our faith, the Gospel mission that has been entrusted to us by Jesus.

I am thankful to Fr. Riegel and to his pastoral team and staff who worked diligently on the fundraising campaign while fulfilling their pastoral responsibilities. Fr. Riegel is receiving a new appointment, and I wish him many blessings.

I am also grateful to Fr. George Smith, C.S.B., Superior General of the Basilian Fathers, for the continued Basilian commitment to Assumption Parish. I look forward to welcoming Fr. Donald McLeod, C.S.B., to the Diocese of London as your interim pastor. He will journey with you as you move forward with this transition.

Please pray for each other as you enter into this new stage as a parish community and be assured of my prayers for all of you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London

A New Way Forward for Assumption Parish

Difficult Decision, Different Location, Renewed Vision, New Pastor

After seven years and two fundraising campaigns, the leadership of the Diocese of London and the Basilian Fathers have come to the difficult realization and decision that the future of the Assumption parish community requires a different location with a renewed focus on mission and ministry.

Assumption church has a unique place in the hearts and minds of both Catholics and non-Catholics in the Windsor area. The parish was originally founded as a mission in 1728 and is the oldest parish west of Montreal. The current church, the fourth Assumption church, was built in 1842 with additions completed in 1925.

Effective November 3, 2014 Assumption Church will close and the parish will move to Holy Name of Mary church located on McEwan Ave.

When Holy Name of Mary parish closed in 2008, the church was retained by Assumption in the event that Assumption parish would have to relocate, temporarily or permanently. For those unfamiliar with Catholic structures, a parish consists of a membership of Catholics within a set of geographical boundaries. A church is the physical building(s)/structure(s) where parishioners gather as a place of worship.

In 2007 we learned that Assumption church needed \$9.8 million in extensive restoration repairs. This was well beyond the means of the parish community. In 2012, a re-assessment of repair costs saw this amount rise to approximately \$15 million. Diocesan policy dictates that a parish whose church building(s) requires repair or renovation beyond its ability to pay is required to merge with another parish or to close.

With the hope of being able to raise enough funds to restore the church, an exception to the policy was made. Assumption church was kept open and a high-profile fundraising campaign with professional fundraisers and a foundation that reached beyond the parish began in 2009. A foundation board, committee members and volunteers worked tirelessly, attempting to raise funds. In 2012 parish and diocesan leadership came to the conclusion that the campaign was not successful and made the difficult decision to end it. That was not an easy decision to make, and resulted in hurt feelings and relationships that we are still trying to mend, along with a \$500,000 debt that was repaid by the parish and diocese.

In 2013, a second fundraising attempt brought together a new team, integrated directly with the parish leadership focused on raising funds only for the restoration of the church building. Unfortunately the new campaign team's efforts did not achieve the results all had hoped for.

Many volunteers worked very hard in an effort to make this project succeed. We would like to thank all the parishioners, donors, board/committee members and volunteers who gave so generously of their time, talent and treasure. Their tireless efforts are greatly appreciated and we are very grateful for the leadership, skills and efforts they provided.

Scenario Research and Due Diligence

While the support to repair Assumption church was high, it did not translate into the millions needed to restore the church. Parish and diocesan leaders went through many scenarios and options, spending countless hours trying to find one that restored the church in some fashion while not subjecting the community to a debt that could never be paid off.

Some of the questions and options considered included:

What could be done with \$3, \$4 or \$5 million? Since the restoration required is comprehensive, and so many items are tied to each other, a partial restoration would still result in a church that would need to be further restored or closed in the next 10-15 years, or sooner.

What if \$7 million was raised and the parish borrowed the remaining \$3 million? We ran the numbers multiple times and the result was the same: the parish would struggle to pay off a \$1 million loan. A \$3 million loan would take decades to pay off, if it could be paid off at all.

Why can't the diocese cover some/all of the costs of the restoration? The Diocese of London is a charitable non-profit organization, with the majority of assets comprised of churches and the land they stand on, some additional real estate, and the PENTECOST 2000 endowment funds. We are rich in faith and in our temporal assets, but are cash poor.

Why does the church need so much work? Much of the work needed wasn't fully known until an extensive and invasive building condition assessment was completed in 2007. The work required is very serious, and must be completed by professionals skilled in restoring historic buildings and to historical standards. A partial list includes repairing and repointing the masonry; renovation and restoration of exterior facades; reinforcing the roof structure where it bears on the masonry walls; replacing the roof, eaves and gutters; reconstruction of load bearing walls in the sacristy; plaster repair; upgraded fire separations and other life safety issues; barrier-free access; removal of asbestos; a new storm drainage system and new mechanical and electrical systems.

Why close the church now? The building is essentially on life support. Is the building unsafe? No. We have taken precautions to ensure the safety of parishioners and staff, but the deterioration will continue. A fence has been installed around the perimeter of the building to safeguard against any potential falling debris. A team of professionals examined the building and removed any loose stone, etc. that could potentially fall.

These resulted in more questions, additional scenarios and even more questions:

- Who would support a church that was on life support?
- Would parishioners accept being in an indefinite debt situation?
- What ministries or programs would suffer as a result?
- How long will the parishioners tolerate the future of their church being undecided?
- What effect does the added stress and unknown future of the church have on the parish leadership, staff and volunteers?
- What benefits does Holy Name of Mary church have over Assumption church, and vice versa?

- With Pope Francis encouraging the Catholic church to get back to it's roots, being with the people and serving the poor, does our focus need to change from the building proper to the community of people?

Where Do We Go From Here?

It has been seven years since the deteriorating condition of the building became known, four years of running two fundraising campaigns and many hours in consultation and prayer. Fundraising campaigns cannot go on indefinitely. We had to explore other options. A decision needed to be made, one that had to focus on the future viability and vitality of the parish community, and no longer on the building.

Bishop Ronald Fabbro and the Basilian Fathers envision a new way forward for Assumption parish, a future that will see the parish community located at Holy Name of Mary church with new leadership and a renewed focus on mission and ministry.

Although this was a difficult decision, it is hoped that this new focus will lead to greater stability, renewed vitality and involvement in the larger community.

Assumption church will close effective November 3, 2014 with the campaign and restoration project coming to an end. Donors will be contacted later this year. The church building will be preserved in its present condition to the extent possible, using revenues from the parking lot next to the church.

The present pastor, Fr. William Riegel came to Assumption parish as the first fundraising campaign ended. His leadership and generous service made it possible to initiate the second campaign while providing pastoral care to parishioners. Bishop Fabbro thanks Fr. William Riegel and the pastoral team he brought together for his pastoral service to the parish at this difficult time. An interim pastor has been assigned and a new, permanent pastor and associate pastor will be assigned to the parish in the near future.

Diocesan and parish personnel understand that this decision will be difficult to accept. While some people will understand and agree with the decision to move to the Holy Name of Mary church, others will not. Some people will feel that Assumption should never close and that it should be given another chance while others will feel that Assumption should have closed years ago.

Details surrounding the transition are still developing. Bishop Fabbro and Fr. George Smith are making this announcement at this time as a sign of our commitment to transparency. We will keep the Windsor community apprised of any future developments.

Sincerely in Christ,

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Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London



Very Rev. George Smith, C.S.B.
Superior General, Basilian Fathers

Background Information:

Difference Between a Parish and a Church: A parish consists of a membership of Catholics within a set of geographical boundaries. Assumption parish consists of the territorial boundaries of the former St. Patrick parish, Holy Name of Mary parish and Blessed Sacrament parish as well as Assumption parish. A church building is the physical building(s)/structure(s) where parishioners gather as a place of worship.

Assumption Parish: “The Mission of Our Lady of the Assumption among the Hurons of Detroit” was founded as a mission in 1728 and was established as a parish in 1767. Assumption parish currently has two worship sites: Assumption church (360 Huron Church Road) and Holy Name of Mary church (681 McEwan Avenue). Assumption parish is a parish of the Diocese of London. The Basilian Fathers have served Assumption parish since 1870.

Assumption Church: The church today is the fourth Assumption church building. A chapel was built in 1749, followed by new church buildings in 1767, 1787 and 1845. The 1845 building forms the nave of the current church, which was completed in 1925. Assumption church is owned and operated by the Diocese of London.

Assumption church specs: seating for 850 people, small chapel, located next to University of Windsor, offices and rectory next to the church, no adequate meeting space, in need of \$15 million in restoration work. In 2013, on average each Sunday, approximately 1,300 parishioners in total attended the four Masses celebrated in this parish.

Holy Name of Mary church specs: a stone church built in 1926-1927, designated as an historic site by the City of Windsor under the Ontario Heritage Act, seating for 800 people, houses social programs, meeting rooms and hall in basement. The church is located a couple of kilometers east of Assumption church.

Bishop of London: The Bishop of London, currently Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, CSB, has the responsibility to govern, teach and sanctify people of faith located within the geographic boundaries of the Diocese of London.

Diocese of London: The Roman Catholic Diocese of London serves the faithful located in nine counties in southwestern Ontario: Elgin, Essex, Huron, Kent, Lambton, Middlesex, Norfolk, Oxford and Perth. The Diocese of London has 120 parishes and Catholic communities.