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August 30, 2019

Bishop Milan Lach, S.J.
Eparchy of Parma
5000 Rockside Road, Suite 310
Independence, OH 44131

Dear Bishop Lach,

Glory to Jesus Christ!

I hope this letter finds Your Grace well. I write today on behalf of the faithful of **St. John the Baptist Cathedral Church**. I write in response to Your Grace's letter dated July 30, 2019.

I wish to thank Your Grace for your kindness in responding to our petition. I take Your Grace's quick response as a sign of good faith dialogue with the faithful of St. John the Baptist parish. I also wish to thank Your Grace for clarifying that St. John the Baptist Church is not in danger of being closed or suppressed but, rather, that the plan calls for a possible merger of the parish with neighboring parishes. This information is helpful and most appreciated.

I do wish, however, to reiterate some of the points from our petition to Your Grace dated July 24, 2019. Especially, I wish to reiterate my position and that of the faithful of St. John the Baptist Cathedral Church, that the parish not be consolidated or merged at this time. Furthermore, I wish to reiterate our position that the Church of St. John the Baptist remain as the Cathedral Church for the Eparchy of Parma.

As stated in our petition, I do not write this without acknowledging the present ecclesial and social realities. The faithful of St. John the Baptist and myself recognize that certain changes may be necessary, including the possible consolidation of St. John the Baptist parish.

With that being said, I do not feel that the present time is opportune for making such a decision.

I understand that Your Grace feels that the Christian faithful of St. John the Baptist parish have had opportunity to discuss the possible changes to their parish with Your Grace. However, the faithful themselves do not share that sentiment. To the contrary, the faithful of St. John the Baptist feel as though the process being used to potentially merge their parish with neighboring parishes has been quite opaque and without collaboration.

The Christian faithful fully support Your Grace and the difficult decisions you have to make for the benefit of the Eparchy and for the good of its individual members. We recognize Your Grace's authority and the heavy burden it entails in caring for the good of the entirety of the Eparchy of Parma. The faithful of St. John the Baptist Church wish nothing more than to have a transparent, open, and honest dialogue with Your Grace surrounding the future of their church and of their parish. It is only through such a transparent process that the faithful can come to understand Your Grace's position and the possible changes necessary to St. John the Baptist parish. It is only with such an open and forthright process that myself and the faithful members of St. John the Baptist parish can come to understand the need for and support the decision of Your Grace to merge the parish. Without this type of process, the faithful simply cannot support what they view as an overbearing, non-collaborative decision to date.

Let me also respond to another point in Your Grace's letter. Your Grace indicated that the faithful of St. John the Baptist parish lack a wider and richer understanding of the local church due to their care for and attachment to their individual parish. The parish is not simply an organizational tool for the local church. To the contrary, the parish has great significance for the local church and for the members of it as a definite community of the Christian faithful.¹ As a community of the faithful, it is established on a "stable basis" in the eparchy which means it is not to be changed or altered without significant reason.

¹ Can. 279 A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis in the eparchy, whose pastoral care is committed to a pastor. Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches: Latin-English Edition, Canon Law Society of America, 2001

Furthermore, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council describe the great importance of the parish community. “Among these the parishes, set up locally under a pastor who takes the place of the bishop, are the most important: for in some manner they represent the visible Church constituted throughout the world.”² Thus, the parish holds a place of great import for the local church and for the Christian faithful as it is in the local parish that the Church itself is made visible to the world, and to the members of the people of God. The parish, therefore, is not just an organizational body but a theological reality that must be respected and protected.

In conclusion, let me reiterate my thanks and appreciation for Your Grace’s dialogue with myself and the members of St. John the Baptist parish. However, this dialogue, important as it is, is simply not enough. The Christian faithful of St. John the Baptist need an open and transparent process with Your Grace by which they can fully understand the position of Your Grace and of the Eparchy as well as the opportunity to make their own voices heard in a spirit of collaboration. This collaborative approach to decision-making is supported in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, as well as the statutes of the Eparchy of Parma. It is through such a transparent and collaborative process that the best possible decision can be made while at the same time safeguarding and protecting the faith of the members of St. John the Baptist parish. The faithful of the Cathedral Parish have given their time, talent and treasure to the parish and Eparchy. Their sincere hope, desire and intention is to fully participate in solving problems and avoiding further harm to the Eparchy or the Cathedral Parish. Their intention in my writing is to participate in a healthy, proper and beneficial manner to find solutions to maintaining the Cathedral Parish in a collaborative way, with their input received and valued. Canon 15, §2 states explicitly, “The Christian faithful are free to make known their needs, especially their spiritual needs, and their desires to the pastors of the Church”. Through this letter, through their involvement and their various forms of communicating with each other within the Eparchy, the parishioners that have presented mandates to Your Grace seek to honor both the letter and spirit of this canon

² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

in action and intent to find a solution beneficial to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist and parishioners which also respects the goals and needs of the Eparchy.

I thank Your Grace for your time and attention to this matter. Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully yours,



Robert J. B. Flummerfelt