



NOTICE OF COMMUNICATION TO PARISHIONERS OF SAINT ANDRE BESSETTE PARISH, WILKES-BARRE, PA

MAY 22, 2022

For the last several 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 (Sunday Mass Attendance and other aspects of Sacramental Life)
- Condition of Facilities
- Financial Viability of a Parish
- Distribution and Availability of Clergy

When a concern regarding one or more priority drivers are present in a parish, or deemed critical by the needs of the 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 recent years, the territorial parish of **Saint Andre Bessette in Wilkes-Barre**, which has as its sole church, Saint Stanislaus Kostka, 668 North Main Street, Wilkes-Barre, has suffered a diminishing number of faithful whose donations have helped to sustain the parish. Demographic changes, due to an aging population, have also resulted in a continued decrease in Mass attendance and sacramental participation. The parish also has significant unpaid financial obligations and has infrastructure challenges, which include an aging asbestos roof and a structurally unsound retaining wall surrounding the church that would be expensive to replace.

Over the last several months, in the spirit of the *Vision 2030* process, conversation and consultation has taken place within the parish community, which includes, but is not limited to:

- On **March 14, 2022**, a consultative meeting with the Saint Andre Bessette Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils and staff was held in which, at the prompting of parish leaders, the possibility of closing Saint Andre Bessette Parish was discussed.
- On **March 20, 2022**, all parishioners of Saint Andre Bessette Parish were informed of the prior week's Joint Meeting via letter from the Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton.
- On **March 27, 2022**, all parishioners who wished to discuss the possible closure of Saint Andre Bessette Parish were offered the opportunity to attend a meeting with Diocese of Scranton professionals in pastoral formation and with Monsignor John J. Bendik, Administrator *Pro Tem*, Saint Andre Bessette Parish.
- Between **March 27, 2022 and the current date**, Monsignor Bendik has been available to discuss and pastorally accompany any individual with questions, comments or concerns.

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MAY 22, 2022

(Continued from Front Page)

- On **May 10, 2022**, Bishop Bambera consulted the Diocesan Presbyteral Council (a consultative body of priests from throughout the Diocese) regarding two different matters of importance. The first involved the suppression of Saint Andre Bessette Parish (suppression meaning whether the parish should go out of existence) and second, the closure of the current church building (defined in canon law as the “relegation of a church to profane but not sordid use”). Following a presentation of data, the Presbyteral Council voted in unanimous agreement on both measures.

As a result of this conversation and consultation, on **May 11, 2022**, Bishop Bambera signed two formal decrees (which are documents that formalize a decision within the Church) to best address the spiritual needs of the faithful as well as the needs of the Diocese of Scranton.

1. Saint Andre Bessette Parish, Wilkes-Barre, will be suppressed by an extinctive union with Saints Peter and Paul Parish, Plains, effective July 19, 2022. This means that parishioners previously belonging to Saint Andre Bessette Parish will now belong to Saints Peter and Paul Parish in Plains and the geographic territory of Saints Peter and Paul Parish will reflect this change.
2. Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church, 668 North Main Street, Wilkes-Barre, will be closed (defined in canon law as “relegated to profane but not sordid use”) on Sunday, June 19, 2022. **Clergy and parishioners of Saint Andre Bessette Parish will celebrate a final Sunday Mass at Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church at 11 a.m. on that date.** Furthermore, the future of the property will be determined by the Parish of Saints Peter and Paul, 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 Saints Peter and Paul Parish has more than adequate resources to serve the liturgical and sacramental needs of what will become the newly-configured Saints Peter and Paul Parish.

While change is never easy, the People of God know that a parish is not just a building or piece of real estate, it is the community of people. Let us hold fast to the Lord’s promise that He is with us always, and trust in the fact that He is at work in a special way within our faith community and is creating something new for all of us.

Any parishioner of Saint Andre Bessette Parish who wishes to read the official decrees regarding the suppression of Saint Andre Bessette Parish and/or the closure of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church may do so by contacting Monsignor John J. Bendik, Administrator *Pro Tem*, Saint Andre Bessette Parish.

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Joseph Charles Bambera

DEI ET APOSTOLICAE SEDIS GRATIA
EPISCOPUS SCRANTONENSIS



DECREE

In the name of God. Amen.

WHEREAS, utilizing the Diocese of Scranton's *Vision 2030: Creating Parish Communities Rooted in the Life of Jesus Christ* process, a pastoral planning process addressing the long-range needs and challenges of the Diocese of Scranton that aims to look proactively at the realities of our local church in the present moment while striving to meet the opportunities and challenges of the coming decade, and;

WHEREAS, Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church, located at 668 North Main Street, Wilkes-Barre, was the sole church of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish, a suppressed territorial parish in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania which entered into an extinctive union with Saints Peter and Paul Parish, Plains, Pennsylvania on May 11, 2022, and;

WHEREAS, the Reverend Monsignor John J. Bendik, Administrator *Pro Tem* of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish, with the consent of both the Saint Andre Bessetté Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils and in consultation with the effected parishioners, and with the recommendation of the clergy of the Wilkes-Barre Deanery, has petitioned the undersigned to relegate Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church to profane but not sordid use, and;

WHEREAS, in accord with the norm of canon 1222 §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*, on May 10, 2022 I consulted with the Diocesan Presbyteral Council on the questions of the suppression of the relegation of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church to profane but not sordid use, and;

WHEREAS, in consideration of the question of the reduction of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church to profane but not sordid use, I evaluated the following motivating just causes:

- With the suppression of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish by means of an extinctive union with Saints Peter and Paul Parish, the principal worship site of Saints Peter and Paul Parish, is Saints Peter and Paul Church, 13 Hudson Road, Plains, and is more than adequate to serve the liturgical and sacramental needs of the newly-configured Saints Peter and Paul Parish

WHEREAS, the law requires a grave cause or causes to justify the relegation of a church to profane but not sordid use (canon 1222, §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*), and the Supreme Tribunal of the

Apostolic Signatura held a grave cause was entirely apparent when there were these factors: (1) a financial burden in preserving a church imposed on a parish from the union of several parishes; (2) a church no longer of service to the pastoral care of the faithful due to changed circumstances; (3) new parish burdened from the beginning by a huge debt; (4) ready and effective assistance available to the new parish from the sale of a church; (5) a diminishing number of faithful whose donations principally sustain the new parish; and (6) charity and other assistance to the poor being neglected to preserve a sacred building (*Ministerium Iustitiae: Jurisprudence of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura*, Montreal, W&L (2011): Prot. N. 24388/93 CA, pp. 526-527). In consideration of the question of the reduction of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church, the situation entails these grave factors and more; and

WHEREAS, in consideration of the question of the reduction of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church, I have identified and evaluated the following grave causes:

- The financial burden of preserving a church imposed on a parish (namely, Saints Peter and Paul Parish) through the suppression of a former parish (namely, Saint Andre Bessetté Parish). The aforementioned sustained decreased Mass attendance and offertory collections resulted in the former Saint Andre Bessetté Parish's inability to sustain operational financial obligations (\$700,000 of unpaid financial obligations, \$218,000 annual occupancy cost, deferred maintenance, etc.)
- The retaining wall that surrounds Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church, abutting the neighboring property, is structurally failing and prohibitively expensive to replace
- An estimate of costs indicates that keeping Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church operational and making the necessary repairs would have a detrimental impact on the patrimonial condition of the Saints Peter and Paul Parish, Plains, Pennsylvania
- Due to changing circumstances with the restructuring, Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church is no longer required for the pastoral care of the faithful of the newly structured Saints Peter and Paul Parish
- The community outreach and charity and other assistance to the poor in the area would be adversely impacted by the financial cost to preserve the sacred building
- Ready and effective assistance would be available for Saints Peter and Paul Parish from the sale of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church; and

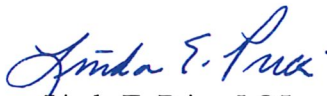
WHEREAS, I have concluded that the economic hardship of maintaining Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church and its lack of usefulness to Saints Peter and Paul Parish constitute grave cause sufficient in law to support the relegation of the church building to profane but not sordid use; and


WHEREAS, according to the norm of canon 1222, §2, having heard the Diocesan Presbyteral Council, which voted unanimously and favorably that Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church be relegated to profane but not sordid use;

THEREFORE, I, the Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L., Bishop of the Diocese of Scranton, having in mind my responsibility to best address the spiritual needs of the Christian Faithful of the Saints Peter and Paul Parish, Plains, Pennsylvania, specifically and the needs of the Diocese of Scranton generally, and after invoking the Holy Spirit and satisfying myself that the good of souls will suffer no detriment, I hereby decree the following:

- Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church, located at 668 North Main Street, Wilkes-Barre, is hereby relegated to profane but not sordid use in accordance with canon 1222 §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*
- This is to be published to the Pastor and the parishioners of Saints Peter and Paul Parish through notification in the Saint Andre Bessetté Parish bulletin on the weekend of May 21-22, 2022, and a notice included that same weekend in the bulletins of the parishes of the Wilkes-Barre Deanery
- On Sunday, June 19, 2022, the clergy and parishioners of the Saint Andre Bessetté Parish will celebrate a final Sunday Mass at Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church, officially marking the suppression of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish by means of an extinctive union with Saints Peter and Paul Parish, and the relegation to profane but not sordid use of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church
- The Parish of Saints Peter and Paul, in consultation with the Diocese of Scranton, shall dispose of the Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church building in a manner that accords with the Catholic faith and morals, and with its dignity as a former place of divine worship.

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Scranton, on May 11, 2022.


Linda E. Price, J.C.L.
Chancellor


Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Scranton



Joseph Charles Bambera

DEI ET APOSTOLICAE SEDIS GRATIA
EPISCOPUS SCRANTONENSIS



DECREE

In the name of God. Amen.

WHEREAS, utilizing the Diocese of Scranton's *Vision 2030: Creating Parish Communities Rooted in the Life of Jesus Christ* process, a pastoral planning process addressing the long-range needs and challenges of the Diocese of Scranton that aims to look proactively at the realities of our local church in the present moment while striving to meet the opportunities and challenges of the coming decade, with the goal of creating vibrant parish communities rooted in the life of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, the territorial parish of Saint Andre Bessetté in Wilkes-Barre, which has as its sole church, Saint Stanislaus Kostka church located at 668 North Main Street in Wilkes-Barre, has suffered a diminishing number of faithful whose donations principally sustain the parish, resulting in the continued inability of Saint Andre Bessetté to sustain ordinary maintenance and operations; and

WHEREAS, Saint Andre Bessetté has also experienced a significant reduction of the Christian Faithful participating in the liturgical and sacramental life of the parish due to an aging population and relocation of residents of the territory, and;

WHEREAS, on March 14, 2022 there was a consultative meeting with the Saint Andre Bessetté Pastoral and Finance Council supporting the suppression of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish by means of an extinctive union with Saints Peter and Paul Parish, Plains, and the relegation to profane but not sordid use of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church; and

WHEREAS, anyone who wished to discuss these changes in person was invited to attend a March 27, 2022 meeting with the Diocese of Scranton professionals in pastoral formation and with the Reverend Monsignor John J. Bendik, the Administrator *Pro Tem* of Saint Andrew Bessetté Parish; and

WHEREAS, Monsignor Bendik, with the consent of the Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils and in consultation with the effected parishioners, and with the recommendation of the clergy of the Wilkes-Barre Deanery, has petitioned the undersigned to suppress Saint Andre Bessetté Parish by means of an extinctive union with Saints Peter and Paul Church in Plains, and;

WHEREAS, on May 10, 2022, following a presentation to the Presbyteral Council by Monsignor Bendik to provide the information necessary to make an informed consultation, in accord with the norm of canon 515 §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*, on May 10, 2022 I consulted with the Diocesan Presbyteral Council on the questions of the suppression of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish, and;

On May 10, 2022 the Presbyteral Council made known they were in unanimous agreement with the suppression of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish, and;

WHEREAS, in consideration of the question of the suppression of Saint Andre Bessette Parish by means of an extinctive union with Saints Peter and Paul Parish in Plains, in accord with canon 51, I find the reasons for the suppression of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish in the following motivating just causes:

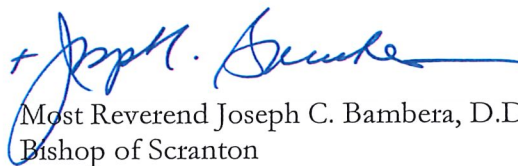
- The demographic changes of the Saint Andre Bessetté Parish community, which have resulted in a sustained decrease in Mass attendance and sacramental participation
- The inability of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish to sustain operational financial obligations (i.e., a large parish debt of nearly \$700,000.00, which has been shared with the faithful weekly in the parish bulletin)
- Fewer priests are available within the Diocese of Scranton to attend to the current number of parishes
- The regional Episcopal Vicar, the Vicar Forane, the Presbyteral Council, the Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils, and the Administrator *Pro Tem* are all in favor of the extinctive union of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish with Saints Peter and Paul Parish

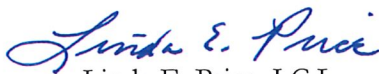
THEREFORE, I, the Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L., Bishop of the Diocese of Scranton, having in mind my responsibility to best address the spiritual needs of the Christian Faithful of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish specifically and the needs of the Diocese of Scranton generally, and after invoking the Holy Spirit and satisfying myself that the good of souls will suffer no detriment, I hereby decree the following:

- Saint Andre Bessetté Parish, Wilkes-Barre, is hereby suppressed by an extinctive union with Saints Peter and Paul Parish, Plains. The parishioners previously belonging to Saint Andre Bessetté Parish will now belong to Saints Peter and Paul Parish in Plains.
- This is to be published to the Pastor *Pro Tem* and to the parishioners of the Parish of Saint Andre Bessetté through notification in the Saint Andre Bessetté Parish bulletin on the weekend of May 21-22nd, and a notice included that same weekend in the bulletins of the parishes of the Wilkes-Barre Deanery.
- On Sunday, June 19, 2022 the clergy and parishioners of Saint Andre Bessetté Parish will celebrate a final Sunday Mass, officially marking its suppression by an extinctive union with Saints Peter and Paul Parish.

I am confident that the good of souls would not be harmed by this decree.

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Scranton, on May 11, 2022.


Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Scranton


Linda E. Price, J.C.L.
Chancellor