



January 28, 2023

Dear beloved Parishioners of Annunciation Parish,

Since 2009, the Oblates of St. Joseph have served at Annunciation Parish. It has been an honor and a privilege to celebrate the sacraments for the community, to organize parish activities and ministries, and to witness the immense faith present in Hazleton and especially in Annunciation Parish. We are grateful to God for the gift of staffing this parish for nearly fourteen years. We have also recently discerned that the time has arrived for us to return administration of the parish back to the Diocese of Scranton.

It is never easy for us as Oblates to make such a significant decision. When we agree to work at a parish, we do so knowing that we will invariably form friendships with the faithful and become part of the parish family itself. All the Oblates who have been assigned here over the years—Fr. Gregory Finn, Fr. Daniel Schwebs, Fr. Chummar Chirayath, and of course, Fr. Mariusz Beczek and Fr. Victor León—have experienced this firsthand, and I too am extremely grateful to know many of you personally and to share in this family spirit with you.


But it is also a spirit of family that has led us to our discernment and to this decision. The way of life we have embraced as Oblates of St. Joseph calls us not only to serve the People of God in the simple ways that we are able, but first and foremost to live our spirituality together as brother Oblates in community, living together as did the Holy Family in Nazareth, and to witness to the world the importance of communal and family living. Concretely, this means that every Oblate is supposed to live in a community of three or more men, so that we support each other, challenge each other, give witness to the gospel by our way of life.

Unfortunately, for several years this community life has not been possible for our house in Hazleton, due to the limits of our personnel situation. I wish we had more vocations and more active priests to assign, in order to maintain all of our ministries in our Province, but instead we find ourselves having to accept what Divine Providence allows us to do with the limited personnel we have. The world needs good examples of families in our day, and our commitment as Oblates today is not only to preach this from the pulpit, but above all to witness to this in our daily life as Oblates in community.

On behalf of my religious community of the Oblates of St. Joseph, I give thanks to God for the graces he has bestowed on us all during the time we have been blessed to serve in Hazleton. I thank Bishop Bambera too for the opportunity to serve you in Hazleton over these years, and for his commitment to you that the good work taking place at the parish will continue, as the Oblates make way for a new pastoral team to take over after our departure on June 30, 2023.

Be assured of the Oblates' continual prayer for each one of you and for the parish family as a whole. I also ask your prayers for the Oblates of St. Joseph working in the United States, that this transition will not be a parting of ways, but a continuation and even strengthening of the spiritual ties we have been able to share over these many years together.

In Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,


Fr. Matthew Spencer, O.S.J.
Provincial