

*St. Mary Parish
Strategic Planning Committee*

*5 Saxton Street
Lockport, New York 14094*

November 22-23, 2008

Dear Members of St. Mary's Parish Family,

Philip Gray, our canon lawyer, issued an email this past week announcing the receipt of a letter from the Under-Secretary of the Congregation of the Clergy in Rome, Italy, the first body of the Vatican to review our appeal. The Vatican letter advised that the Roman body found it necessary to extend the time limits involved in acting on our appeal until February 6, 2009, in order to reach a studied decision in this matter. The Under-Secretary also called upon our canon lawyer to inform the Roman Congregation if some development should have taken place in this matter.

Mr. Gray advised that the time extension does not indicate anything bad for us, and could indicate something good. He feels that the Congregation delayed the case because it presents certain legal arguments and situations not usually found in parish closure/merger cases.

Mr. Gray cited the situation in Olean where a parish slated to close will remain open as an oratory after intervention by area pastors. Mr. Gray also made the following points:

- St. Mary's is growing substantially during the appeal process, a rare circumstance.
- Father Gary's participation, consistently respectful of the Bishop, encouraging the ministry of priests, and focused on the spiritual good of parishioners, is considered an essential element by the Congregation in its mission to protect the ministry of priests, and this factor cannot be underestimated. Mr. Gray, in researching this factor, declared that his contacts never had a case such as this in which the pastor is in full support of opposing the closure. Mr. Gray feels that this has caused some concern in Rome.

- Procedurally, the Bishop did things during procedure with St. Mary that he did not do with the Olean parish, and that is, amending his original decree to establish All Saints parish as both territorial and personal.
- The huge number of mandates (over 90% of eligible parishioners) sent to Rome does send a moral message. The Congregation does take into account the opinions of parishioners, especially when large numbers hold the same opinion.

Mr. Gray is considering responding to the Congregation and sending copies of additional mandates. This past week, St. Mary's Strategic Planning Committee contacted the nearly 100 families who joined our parish in the past year, asking that they personally write Bishop Kmiec of their decision to join St. Mary and also asking that they sign and return the mandates that so many of you signed last year. To that end, we are asking that if you have not as yet signed a mandate to please do so. If you have already signed a mandate, please do not sign another one. Copies of the mandate are available in the back of church and can be returned to the rectory, handed to one of our ushers, or placed in the collection basket. As Mr. Gray stated, this is a powerful statement to the Vatican. Please keep in mind that signing a mandate authorizes Mr. Gray to represent us in the appeal process and in no way obligates you legally or financially.

It is also important to note that the decision regarding the Olean parish came first, even though their appeal was filed AFTER ours.

We wish to express our deepest gratitude to the parishioners of St. Mary who have faithfully supported our efforts to appeal the Bishop's decision and we ask for your continued prayers.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

St. Mary's Strategic Planning Committee