



July 10, 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I write to inform you of the status of the appeal (“hierarchical recourse”) to the Vatican against my decree of the merger of Saint Stephen Parish into Saint Joseph Parish issued December 13, 2019. In March of this year, the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, the highest court of the Catholic Church, issued a Definitive Sentence in favor of my decree.

The chronology of events regarding recourse is as follows:

- My decree on the merger of the parishes was issued December 13, 2019.
- On February 4, 2020, the petitioners opposed to my decree presented hierarchical recourse to the Dicastery for the Clergy at the Vatican.
- In November 2020, the Dicastery decreed that the petition for hierarchical recourse had no foundation and was rejected.
- In March 2021, the petitioners requested hierarchical recourse from the Supreme Tribunal against the decree of the Dicastery of the Clergy.
- In October 2021, the Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal rejected the recourse presented by the petitioners.
- The petitioners appealed a second time to the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura for hierarchical recourse.
- On March 24, 2023, the petitioners were rejected again by the Signatura saying their case had no merit. As this is the highest court in the Church, no further appeal is possible.

After four years, I recognize this has been a challenging experience for all concerned. If you have not read my recent letter about pastoral planning, I



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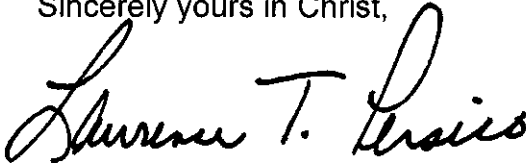
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encourage you to spend time reviewing it at www.eriecd.org/planning.html. In it, I reiterate that the primary reason we continue to plan is that all Catholics deserve to be part of vibrant, dynamic communities that help them grow in their relationship with Christ. I cannot emphasize strongly enough that although our structures may change, the mission Christ gave us to go forth and make disciples remains.

As inspiring as that sounds, we all know it requires a great deal of sacrifice, generosity and willingness to walk through challenges with the faith that Christ accompanies us. We must face our realities with confidence, faith and hope.

Now that this period of hierarchical recourses is concluded, I pray that the prayer of Jesus, that "all may be one," will be in the hearts and on the lips of all Catholics in Oil City. We all need to experience the forgiving and merciful God in order to be true to our baptismal call. We, as followers of Jesus, must pray for unity, and direct all efforts towards the goal of a unified, reconciled, and vibrant parish community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of Erie