

THE DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

February 2, 2019
The Presentation of the Lord

Dear Father Ptak,
Dear Parishioners of the **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** of St. John the Baptist Parish, St. Clement of Rome Parish and St. John Nepomucene Parish:

May the Peace of Jesus Christ be with you!

As you know, during the last eight years the entire Diocese has been involved in **THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**. This plan, which is gradual, dynamic and tailored to each pastoral situation, is designed to strengthen the Catholic Church in southern Illinois. This will make it easier to face the challenges of the future. I have explained our situation many times to all of our parishes. For more than twenty-five years, the Diocese of Belleville has grown smaller as the number of Catholics, priests, and seminarians has continued to decline for a variety of reasons. In many parishes, the same small groups of parishioners, who are growing older, are called upon to give their time, talent, and treasure to their parishes as younger families move away or choose not to remain active and involved in their parishes. As a result, it has been necessary to gradually close or merge a number of parishes. If you have been reading our Diocesan newspaper, *The Messenger*, you have seen the announcements of these changes. We now have 106 parishes and only 48 incardinated active Diocesan Priests. More than half of these are more than 50 years old. Were it not for our generous *fidei donum* missionary priests from abroad, like the Administrator of your parishes, many of our parishes like yours would not have a priest at this time.

THE PASTORAL PLAN has arranged the parishes in small groups, or **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS**, with the goal of bringing the parishes together in a manner that will enlarge the parish community and make it possible for the parishes to be served by one priest. I know that in recent years, the parishioners in your **PARISH PARTNERSHIP**, under the leadership of Father Slawomir Ptak, have been seriously thinking about, talking about and, most importantly, praying about what is best for your long-term future. When my Vicar General, Monsignor McEvelly, my Chancellor, Deacon Boyer, and I met with a large number of parishioners from your three parishes on October 6, 2018, at St. John Nepomucene, most of you expressed some degree of acceptance of the idea of bringing your parishes together in a greater structural unity. You made it clear that you are to agree on a recommendation to me concerning how this restructuring should look. Indeed, many of you not only urged me to make the decision myself but also you stated that I should have made the decision at the beginning of the process in order to spare you the tensions that have been a part of this consultation.

Office of the Bishop

222 South Third • Belleville, Illinois 62220-1985
Phone (618) 277-8181 Ext. 108 • Fax (618) 277-0387
E-mail: ebraxton@diobelle.org

The many letters that you have written to me before and after our October meeting underscored how difficult your situation is because the parishioners in each parish have a great love for and dedication to their individual parish community and church buildings.

As all of you know, Father Ptak is not a priest of our Diocese. He is a Priest on loan to us from the Diocese of Tarnów, Poland. At some point, perhaps sooner rather than later, His Excellency, The Most Reverend Andrzej Jezhe will call him home to a different ministry. Unfortunately, when that happens, it is most unlikely that we will have another priest to assign to your parishes. You will probably be served by a priest in a neighboring parish. It is imperative for the restructuring decision to be made while Father Ptak is with you in order to assist and guide you through the transition.

This letter is to inform you that I have made a decision after many parish-wide discussions of this question, after the NEXT STEP meeting with me and my Vicar General and the leadership of your parishes, and my October 6th meeting with many of you at St. John Nepomucene in Dahlgren, I have made the decision about which you declined to make a recommendation.

Therefore, after consultation with my Vicar General, Monsignor John W. McEvilly; with Monsignor John T. Myler, Chairman of the Priests' Personnel Board; with The Very Reverend Mark D. Stec, my Vicar Forane for the East Vicariate; and after prayerful discernment, my difficult but final decision is that St. John the Baptist Parish in Piopolis will become the "Mother church" in your communities. I am suppressing St. John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren and St. Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro as parishes and designating them as Chapels of St. John the Baptist Parish in Piopolis whose boundaries will now embrace the two former parishes.

All weekend Masses must be celebrated at the "Mother" parish. This also means that there will no longer be joint Councils, but St. John the Baptist Parish Pastoral Council, which you may enlarge if that is deemed necessary. There will no longer be joint Finance Councils, but one Finance Council. There will be only one set of two Trustees. With this decision, the terms of the current Trustees are terminated. The two new Trustees, which must be recommended to me, can be drawn from the current Trustees, but they need not be. If it is helpful, the former Trustees may be added to the new Parish Pastoral Council.

The three cemeteries will not be affected by this change. The funds of these cemeteries may continue to be managed as they are. However, they will be in the name of St. John the Baptist Parish, since the new Chapels will no longer have a legal status.

My decision is based on a detailed evaluation of the overall situation of the communities in Hamilton County. This decision is made with great concern for and sensitivity to the faithful of St. John Nepomucene Parish and St. Clement of Rome Parish. There are no “winners” or “losers” in this challenging process. After looking carefully at the big picture and seeking to discern what is best for the long term future of the entire area, I selected St. John the Baptist Parish. My decision is in no way “against” St. John Nepomucene Parish and St. Clement of Rome Parish and “for” St. John the Baptist Parish”. I am for all of you and for the wellbeing of the entire Catholic community in Hamilton County.

The effective date of my decision will be Monday, March 4, 2019. This means that the last weekend Masses to be celebrated in the individual churches will be Saturday-Sunday, March 2nd and 3rd. There may be NO exceptions to these dates. This means that ALL Ash Wednesday services should be held at St. John the Baptist Parish. Your first Sunday Masses together will be Saturday and Sunday March 9th and 10th, 2019, the First Sunday of Lent. This schedule allows St. John Nepomucene Parish and St. Clement of Rome Parish sufficient time to plan a special “Closing Mass Celebration” any week before the effective date, if that is desirable. No sacramental records may be entered in the parish books of the suppressed parishes after Sunday, March 3, 2019. The books should be marked CLOSED and stored with the books of St. John the Baptist Parish. All future sacramental records should be entered in St. John the Baptist Parish books.

Now that the decision has been made, there are inevitably many questions and small details that must be attended to. These can be addressed gradually in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation.

I want you to know that I read every letter parishioners have sent me. Many letters contained serious, reasonable arguments. A number of you said you were praying for the Holy Spirit to guide my decision. Many said that they would embrace my decision whatever it might be and that it was time to move forward. Sadly, a few said that if their parish was not the “Mother Church” they might stop going to Mass, or even join the nearest Protestant church. I certainly hope and pray that this will not be the case. After all, the center of our Catholic faith is Jesus Christ, His Word proclaimed for our hearing and His Body and Blood feeding us in our spiritual journey from God to God.

I should mention that I was a little disappointed that many of you referred to your Catholic parishes by the name of the civil community in which they are located and **NOT** by the ecclesial names given to the parish by the Bishop. Remember that these are the names of sacred persons from the Communion of Saints. Going forward, I urge all of you to think of your patron saint, John the Baptist and kinsman of Jesus with the reverence he deserves and proudly say, **“I’m from St. John the Baptist Parish in Piopolis:” NOT “I’m from the Piopolis Church.”** Your parish name links you with the Body of Christ, the worldwide Catholic Church.

Obviously, this has not been an easy decision for me to make just as it is not an easy decision for some of you to accept. Please pray to the Holy Spirit to guide you as you embrace my decision with a spirit of acceptance and cooperation. Pray that ALL of you may come together to form one stronger parish with two Chapels. I ask all of you to pray and work with greater dedication and urgency for vocations to the priesthood from the "new" St. John the Baptist Parish. May the Lord Jesus Christ, who begins this new work in you, bring it to fulfilment!

Prayerfully and appreciatively yours in Christ,

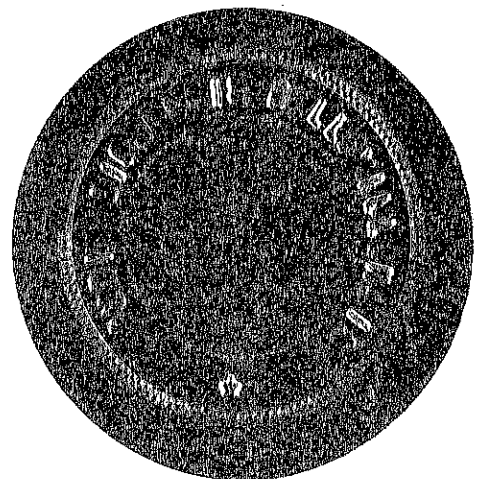


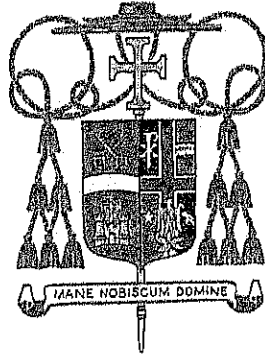
The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville

Copies: The Reverend Monsignor John W. McEvelly, Vicar General
The Very Reverend Mark D. Stec, Vicar Forane, East Vicariate
The Reverend Monsignor John T. Myler, V.F., S.T.D., Chairman, Priests' Personnel Board
Mr. Michael D. Gibbons, Chief Finance Officer, Diocese of Belleville

P.S. This letter should be read at all the Masses at St. John the Baptist Parish in Piopolis, St. Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro, and St. John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren the weekend of February 9-10, 2019. It should also be printed back-to-back and inserted in all the Parish Bulletins. The appropriate Decrees should be inserted in the bulletin as well. The parishioners should be urged to read the letter in its entirety. All of these documents should be posted on the websites of each parish.

The Reverend Slawomir Ptak
Administrator
St. John the Baptist Parish, Piopolis
St. Clement of Rome Parish, McLeansboro
St. John Nepomucene Parish, Dahlgren





We, EDWARD K. BRAXTON,
By the grace of God and the favor of the Apostolic See,
BISHOP OF BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS Now

DECREE

That

For the welfare of the People of God and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we have deemed it necessary to suppress Saint John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren, Illinois.

We do this after consultation with the Administrator of the Parish, The Reverend Slawomir Ptak and the leadership of the parish community due to the current pastoral needs of the of the Parish and the Diocese and the work of the Pastoral Plan for Parish Renewal and Restructuring which concluded that the future pastoral needs of the Catholic community in Hamilton County could be best served by the suppression.

Therefore:

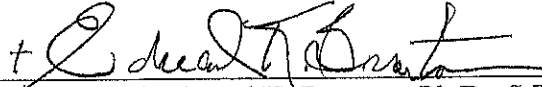
Having heard the Presbyteral Council during the meeting of November 5, 2018, and in accordance with the prescripts of the Code of Canon Law, especially Canons 500 and 515§2, we hereby decree the suppression of Saint John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren, Illinois.

We further decree that the parishioners of Saint John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren, Illinois will become parishioners of the "Mother church", St. John the Baptist Parish in Piopolis, Illinois.

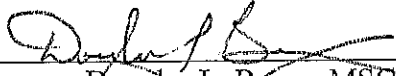
The parish records and other historical documents of Saint John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren, Illinois, will be retained at St. John the Baptist Parish, 7598 Piopolis Road, McLeansboro, Illinois.

This Decree takes effect on Monday, March 4th, in the Year of Our Lord, 2019.

The publication of this Decree in the official Diocesan newspaper, The Messenger, shall serve as the official notification of our action. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

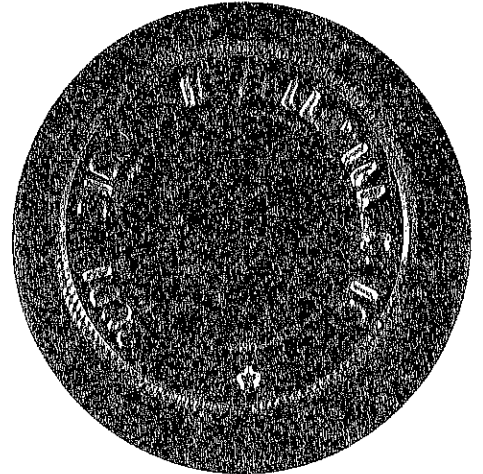


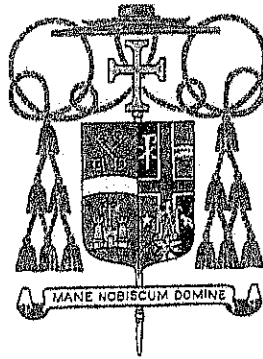
The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville



Deacon Douglas L. Boyer, MSCM
Chancellor

Given from the Diocesan Curia on this 2nd day of February, The Presentation of the Lord, in the Year of Our Lord, 2019





We, EDWARD K. BRAXTON,
By the grace of God and the favor of the Apostolic See,
BISHOP OF BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS Now

DECREE

That

For the welfare of the People of God and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we have deemed it necessary to suppress Saint Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro, Illinois.

We do this after consultation with the Administrator of the Parish, The Reverend Slawomir Ptak, and the leadership of the parish community due to the current pastoral needs of the Parish and the Diocese and the work of the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING** which concluded that the future pastoral needs of the Catholic community in Hamilton County could be best served by the suppression.

Therefore:

Having heard the Presbyteral Council during the meeting of November 5, 2018, and in accordance with the precepts of the Code of Canon Law, especially Canons 500 and 515§2, we hereby decree the suppression of Saint Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro, Illinois.

We further decree that the parishioners of Saint Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro, Illinois, will become parishioners of the "Mother church", St. John the Baptist Parish in Piopolis, Illinois.

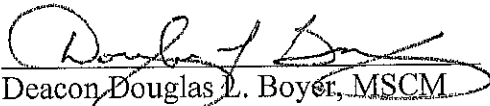
The parish records and other historical documents of Saint Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro, Illinois, will be retained at St. John the Baptist Parish, 7598 Piopolis Road, McLeansboro, Illinois.

This Decree takes effect on Monday, March 4th, in the Year of Our Lord, 2019.

The publication of this Decree in the official Diocesan newspaper, The Messenger, shall serve as the official notification of our action. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

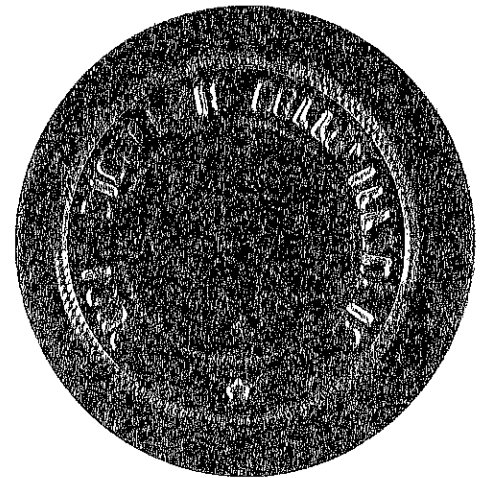


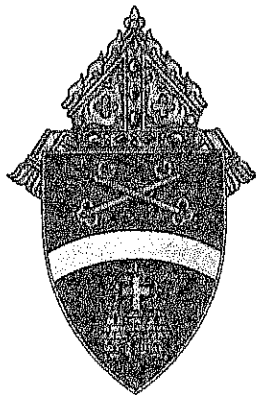
The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville



Deacon Douglas L. Boyer, MSCM
Chancellor

Given from the Diocesan Curia on this 2nd day of February, The Presentation of the Lord, in the Year of Our Lord, 2019





Diocese of Belleville
Decree

His Excellency, the Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville

Decreases a change in the boundaries of St. John the Baptist Parish in Piopolis so as to embrace the former boundaries of the now suppressed St. Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro and St. John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren (both now designated as chapels of St. John the Baptist Parish) in accordance with Canon Law.

Canon 515 §1. A parish is a certain community of the Christian Faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the Diocesan Bishop.

§2. It is only for the Diocesan Bishop to erect, suppress, or alter parishes. He is neither to erect, suppress, nor alter notably parishes, unless he has heard the Presbyteral Council.

NAME: St. Clement of Rome Parish
ADDRESS: 7598 Piopolis Road, McLeansboro, Illinois
YEAR ERECTED: 1881

NAME: St. John Nepomucene Parish
ADDRESS: 7598 Piopolis Road, McLeansboro, Illinois
YEAR ERECTED: 1893

The mandate from Bishop Braxton's FORMAL RESPONSE to THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING states:

ST. JOHN NEPOMUCENE, DAHLGREN / ST. CLEMENT OF ROME, MCLEANSBORO / ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, PIOPOLIS

Upon the recommendation of THE COMMITTEE, the Bishop directs these parishes to continue the STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL of three parishes served by only one priest making every effort to bring the parishes together in even greater collaboration.

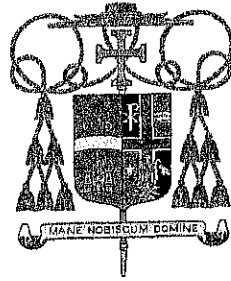
Timeframe: A report on new initiatives to achieve this is due December 31, 2013.

THE DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING

After many years of discussion among themselves, the parishioners came to the reluctant conclusion that it was not feasible to maintain three free-standing parishes for these small communities of faith. Eventually, they accepted the idea of having one parish with two chapels where weddings, funerals, and social activities may take place. To implement this restructuring, we deem it wise to alter the boundaries of **St. John the Baptist Parish** to embrace the chapels of **St. Clement of Rome Parish and St. John Nepomucene Parish** for the good of souls and in keeping with the mandates of **THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**.

The Administrator of these three Parishes, The Reverend Slawomir Ptak, is not a priest of our Diocese. He is a *fidei donum* priest on loan to us from the Diocese of Tarnów, Poland. At some point, perhaps sooner rather than later, his Bishop will call him home to a different ministry. Unfortunately, when that happens, it is most unlikely that the Diocese of Belleville will have another priest to assign to these parishes. Most likely, they will be served by a Priest in a neighboring parish. It is imperative for these restructuring decisions to be made while Father Ptak is in place in order to assist and guide the Christian Faithful through the transition to become one parish with two chapels.



Diocese of Belleville
Office of the Bishop

OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

His Excellency, The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Bishop of Belleville, makes the following announcement.

THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING

Suppression of Two Parishes in the PARISH PARTNERSHIPS of Hamilton County

In accord with the Code of Canon Law, especially Canons 500 and 515§2, we hereby suppress St. Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro and St. John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren and designate the former parish churches as Chapels of St. John the Baptist Parish in Piopolis.

This action is taken after consultation with the leadership of St. John the Baptist Parish in Piopolis, St. Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro, and St. John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren, and hearing the points of view of many of the parishioners, and after careful consideration of the pastoral situations of the three parishes in Hamilton County with the Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia, Reverend Monsignor John W. McEvilly; and the Vicar Forane of the East Vicariate, The Very Reverend Mark D. Stec. At the same time the boundaries of St. John the Baptist Parish are changed to embrace the former parishes of St. Clement of Rome Parish in McLeansboro and St. John Nepomucene Parish in Dahlgren.

These changes are effective on Monday, March 4th, in the Year of Our Lord, 2019.

