



**Diocese of Worcester**  
**Office of the Bishop**  
49 Elm Street  
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

May 9, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Many years ago, Saint Francis knelt beneath the large wooden crucifix in the church of San Damiano in Assisi and prayed asking, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” Francis’ eyes were fixed firmly on the cross when he heard the unmistakable voice of Jesus answer saying, “Francis, go and rebuild my Church.” It took some time for Francis to realize that the Lord wasn’t asking him to repair the brick-and-mortar structure that had fallen into disrepair (although he would do that too), but Francis was being called to labor for the spiritual renewal of the Church. Some eight-hundred years later, we, like Francis, are likewise being called to participate in the work of “rebuilding” the Church.

Beginning July 1, 2021, we will embark on a mission of parish renewal in the Blackstone Valley Region. Leading this effort will be Fr. Nicholas Desimone, who in addition to his responsibilities as pastor of St. Mary Church in Uxbridge will also serve as administrator of Good Shepherd Church in Linwood, St. Augustine Church in Millville, and St. Paul Church in Blackstone. Fr. Desimone will be assisted by two additional priests who will be assigned at a later time. Fr. Thien Nguyen will remain the pastor of St. Theresa Church in Blackstone and will also be participating in the parish renewal process along with Fr. Desimone. I am deeply grateful to them both for their enthusiasm for this new initiative as well as to Frs. Dennis O’Brien and Victor Sierra who have been tremendously supportive as well.

Why do we need parish renewal? Our parishes face a number of challenges—the parishioner base of some parishes is small; the number of school-aged children in the area has decreased; we have fewer priests; some of our parishes are not able to carry on the mission of the Church; and many parishes have had to defer maintenance for many years resulting in unaffordable capital needs. Because of this, we are led to ask the question: Does our current structure of parish life serve the Church’s mission, or is it holding us back?

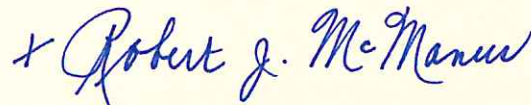
Through a process for parish renewal, we will engage each of the five parish communities in prayer, conversation, and discernment as we envision a vibrant future for the Church in the Blackstone Valley. Representatives, chosen by the pastors/administrators of each of the parishes, will meet regularly with Frs. Desimone and Nguyen to begin the vital work of “rebuilding”. Regular updates will be shared with each parish throughout the process. Because there are fewer active priests in the diocese today, and many more are expected to retire in the near future, I anticipate there being only two priests available to serve the parishes in Blackstone, Linwood, Millville, and Uxbridge at the end of this process. This means that we must also consider alternative models for parish configuration including clustering (each parish remains a separate entity but shares a pastor) and merger (several parishes unite as one new parish entity with one or even multiple campuses). As we prepare to adapt to this new reality, I hope it will bolster the apostolic identity of the entire people of God who, endowed with their own unique gifts, participate in the Church’s mission.

I recognize that the idea of change can be challenging, but I hope that all parishioners will also experience the enthusiasm that comes from imagining the possibility of belonging to a parish renewed by vibrant worship; rich community life; ever-deepening formation in the faith; service to the poor; and a tireless commitment to the work of evangelization, the Church's essential mission. In his apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis reflects:

I dream of a 'missionary option,' that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything so that the church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.

With our eyes firmly fixed on the cross and by the grace of God we embrace this missionary impulse and boldly commit ourselves to the work of rebuilding the Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert J. McManus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Robert J. McManus  
Bishop of Worcester