

St. Robert Bellarmine and Good Shepherd Parishes

*Dear Good Shepherd parish and St. Robert Bellarmine parish and school communities,
my brothers and sisters in Christ,*

I, along with Fr. Prabhu, want to share with you some coming changes with your priests, and, briefly, some of the reasons behind these changes.

On July 3, Fr. Prabhu will be leaving St. Robert and Good Shepherd and going to St. Mary and St. Joseph parish in Durand (and Gaines) to be parish administrator there. He will be taking over for Dcn. Wayne Corrion as administrator. I am deeply grateful for Fr. Prabhu and our time together. I have come to know him as a man of God, who loves Jesus and His Church. The great sacrifice that he has given in his willingness to serve in our diocese, far away from his own family and people, is such a profound example of self-giving love to me (and hopefully to all of you too!). He has many wonderful gifts and a strong sense of leading and what is important. Please join me in thanking him, offering your love and support, including your prayers for him and the people of St. Mary and St. Joseph parish.

On July 3, I also will be leaving as pastor of St. Robert Bellarmine parish and Good Shepherd parish. I will be going to Holy Spirit parish in Brighton as parish administrator. Fr. John Rocus, the pastor there since 2007, is taking a medical leave of absence as he is battling pancreatic cancer. It is not clear how things will progress, so depending on his long-term health, I will either end up remaining there as pastor, or the bishop will look for another assignment for me. This change is probably more unexpected for you than Fr. Prabhu's leaving. I want to provide some of the reasoning behind this change

Earlier last year, I shared with the bishop some of my concerns and struggles at being your pastor. I expressed my concern that I didn't think or feel I was doing an adequate job of being your pastor. Some of this, in my mind, is because of the challenges of leading two parishes, and my sense that I don't have, at least currently, the capabilities or skills to do an adequate job. Our Bishop was supportive and open to seeing if there is something better for me in my priestly ministry.

As part of an on-going conversation and discernment about this, he recently asked that I would consider going to Holy Spirit, as this would be one parish, and hopefully be a better fit, so to speak, with me, and allow new opportunities for me to grow in health and holiness.

An aspect of this offer was tied to the upcoming year at St. Robert and Good Shepherd: *the bishop does not have a parochial vicar to send to our parishes in July.* He expressed both his concern, and that of our Deans—who advise him on priest assignments—in me remaining here without the support of another priest in ministering to the needs of our parishes. I know that our diocese is blessed with priests who have the skills and wisdom to lead you to carry out our mission more fruitfully.

While there are parts of me that find it difficult to leave you as pastor, because of the discernment that led to Bishop Boyea's suggestion (not all of which have I shared here, of course), I agreed to his offer. While I do believe this is best for both parishes, and for my service to our diocese, this has been a difficult decision because of my love for you, and a sense that this change will require sacrifices this coming year with only one priest. Sacrifices, of course, are not bad; they are a necessary part of growing in love and the path to heaven, but a part of me feels like I am the cause of this suffering, though I know this is not true. Not having as many

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priests as we would like is connected to other realities. (And I have only one life to offer to the priesthood...which I've done. I'd offer two if I could, but that's not how life works!)

So this leads to the other priest assignment announcement:

Fr. Brian Lenz, currently chaplain at Lumen Christi High School, will be coming to St. Robert and Good Shepherd on July 3 as pastor. He will be the only priest here for the two parishes for the coming year: July 2024 - June 2025. With seven men being ordained to the transitional diaconate this May, the bishop's expectation is that there will be a second priest available in July 2025 to come here (when, God willing, these seven men are ordained priests).

As you may remember, several years ago, Fr. Gordon was here on his own for over a year, and Fr. Roy before him for a couple of months. I know that one of the big questions is how will having only one priest here effect the sacraments, especially Masses and confessions. I will be working with Fr. Brian and our parishes' leadership in the coming weeks to decide on a plan for how to handle this coming year sacramentally. I will keep you informed as we move forward. Please keep all of this in your daily prayers.

I know that these changes are in certain ways hard. I want to encourage each of us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is present in our midst, who is our Good Shepherd, the risen and victorious Lord of heaven and earth, who is still leading us just as wisely, mercifully and closely as He has been every day since our baptisms. As He calls us to take up our cross (which is His Cross) and follow Him, He is a God of encouragement, and hope in Him does not disappoint, because the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts. I have witnessed such a strong faith and hope in so many of you, a hope that leads to praise, to thanksgiving in all circumstances, and to joy in the Lord, even on the hardest of days. What an encouragement you are to me because of your faith and hope! May you share your encouragement and hope with one another, and may you and I choose in moments of uncertainty, fear, anger or hurt to turn to Jesus in our hearts—and in the Eucharist!—looking to His mercy and promises, praying, *“Jesus, I trust in You.”*

May God continue to bless each of you and our parishes abundantly this Lenten season and in the days ahead. Be assured of Fr. Prabhu's and my prayers for you today and every day for the rest of our lives, especially at Mass.

—Fr. Jonathan and Fr. Prabhu