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To the Faithful in the Chatham Catholic Family of Parishes

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Following my pastoral visit to your Family of Parishes in June, I wish to say what a joy it was to be with you. I was pleased to meet so many of you at the celebrations of the Eucharist and in my meetings with your pastoral team and staff, and with the Parish Pastoral and Finance councils of the Family.

I congratulate you on your commitment to the mission that Jesus has entrusted to us -- the mission of evangelization, of witnessing to the joy of the Gospel in our families, our communities, and the world. Father John Jasica and the pastoral team have led you through an excellent process which has resulted in the formulation of a pastoral plan called "Ignite the Mission". It captures the essence of what it is to be mission-oriented, and to make many disciples of Jesus in your various communities. Through the unfolding of Ignite the Mission, all of you will be invited to deepen your awareness of your role in the mission of the Church.

As you commit to this missionary thrust and look to the future of your Family of Parishes, it will be important to take stock of your resources, spiritual, human and financial. This will mean the development of your Spirit and Life Centre as one locus for the unfolding of your pastoral plan. When I met with your pastoral team and staff on my pastoral visit, they told me that you are considering all of the church buildings and where you may need to close one or more. I acknowledge that the process of clustering and closing parishes undertaken 15 years ago was not done carefully in all instances. Most realize that the Chatham parishes fall into that category. I am sorry that your Family of Parishes is now dealing with a problem that should have been taken care of by others long ago. During my visit with you, I pointed out that the Diocese now has a policy which spells out the process that must be undertaken if any Family of Parishes anticipates the closure of a parish or a church.

In particular, I was asked about St. Joseph's Church. I need to inform you from the start of my decision that St. Joseph's Church will not be considered as one that could be closed in this process. There are several historic churches in the Diocese like St. Joseph, and these we need to maintain for their intrinsic architectural value, their places in the broader communities in which they are situated, and the part these churches have played in the history of the Diocese. A policy regarding historical churches in the Diocese is being developed by Senior Leadership and will be published in due time. Changes will necessarily be made to the current policy for closure of parishes or churches that I referred to above.

This decision will cause concern for some members of your Family, but one I ask you to think about in the broader picture of your mission. I envision St. Joseph's Church and the Spirit and Life Centre together as a major hub for the City of Chatham and the Family of Parishes.

This mission-oriented work and the long-term vision for evangelization, for the sake of your grandchildren and great-grandchildren and other future generations, is exciting and calls for sacrifices on the part of the members of all parishes in the Family. I am confident in the leadership of Father Jasica and his whole team to be able to make this a reality in your midst and as part of the larger community of the Diocese of London.

I assure you of my prayers and best wishes. May the Holy Spirit set your hearts on fire with his love and "ignite the mission" which Jesus has entrusted to us of proclaiming the Gospel to the world.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Ronald Fabbro, CSB

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, CSB
Bishop of London