

The Reverend Robert T. Begin  
St. Colman  
2027 West 65th St.  
Cleveland, OH 44102-4394

Dear Father Begin,

In this Lenten season we are called to a time of prayer, fasting, repentance, and sacrifice so that we might strengthen our faith and better fulfill our Baptismal commitment as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a fitting time to reflect upon our prayer and sacrifices as a diocesan Church so that we also might strengthen our mission and pastoral care, and lay a foundation that will serve the mission of Christ for many years to come.

I want to express my gratitude for the work that you and your Cluster Planning and Coordination (CPC) Team have done over the past many months in preparing your proposed cluster plan in consultation with your parish leaders and parishioners. Following my review of all the plans, it is clear that parish leaders across our diocese have taken the planning seriously, and have given much careful study and discernment in seeking to better serve the mission and ministry of the Church. I also want to recognize the valuable counsel given to me by the *Vibrant Parish Life – Phase II* Committee, by my cabinet staff in their review of all the plans, and by the Presbyteral Council in their deliberations regarding clusters where there was a call for consolidation.

Please understand the fundamental importance of evangelization and the celebration of the Eucharist as the foundation of who we are and what we do. The implementation of every cluster plan must lead to bringing the Gospel message into people's lives by helping people to find more life and hope in their relationship with God and in the Church. We must focus on truly making the celebration of Mass, in accord with the mind of the Church, the summit of what we do as Church so that it may be the source of our faithfulness to Jesus' mission.

Since we began this process, our region and our world have encountered economic changes and difficulties that were not anticipated. These conditions have adversely impacted every aspect of the Church – the lives and enterprises of our people, the financial support of parishes and schools, our Catholic Charities services, and the value and sale of closed properties. History has also shown that in difficult times people turn more to their faith – the potential evangelizing moments will need to be responded to with much care. We will need to move forward in ways that give witness to understanding and compassion for what these economic realities mean in people's lives, while recognizing the need for careful stewardship in how we equitably use the limited resources we have. The economic realities only intensify some of the challenges with regard to changing demographics, finances and fewer priests, and compel us to take the necessary steps now that will enable us to provide a strong and lasting Catholic presence in every area of our diocese. **Guided by the Holy Spirit we must embrace our unity as Church and transcend whatever might divide us for the greater good of Christ's mission.**

Page 1 of 3

