CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY
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August 14, 2026
Memorial of St. Maximilliam Mary Kolbe

Dear Parishioners of the Church of the Nativity

On Thursday August 13, 2026, a town hall meeting was held at St. Joseph's Church on the subject of pastoral planning for our four parishes. In all, 77 people attended this town hall which was conducted by Fr. Christopher Seibt, the Vice Chancellor of the Diocese of Syracuse. Danielle Cummings, the Chancellor and Director of Communications for the diocese was also present.

Overall, the meeting was very positive and hopeful. In his presentation, Fr. Seibt presented many slides of data which show us the demographic trends in our churches, including the decline in parishioners and even more drastic decline in the number of priests who serve our diocese. He also included financial, demographic and sacramental data for our four parishes. Throughout the presentation, Fr. Seibt polled the audience using a green/yellow/red card system to gauge their understanding of the data. Ideally, the goal of having this information is to work together to move the mission of the Church, strengthen our faith communities while acknowledging the limited resources we currently have.

During the question and answer portion of the evening, a couple of subjects were brought up that are worth clarifying. Questions were asked about our four parishes' contributions to the Victims Trust Fund as a result of the clergy abuse settlement in 2024, specifically about the amount of money that was contributed by each of our four parishes. You may recall at the time of the settlement, Bishop Lucia wrote to the diocesan family that all parishes would be asked to contribute to the Victims Trust fund as "it our moral obligation to provide reparation and share a role in bringing healing and reconciliation to the survivors. "If one part of the body suffers, all parts suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

In total, our four parishes contributed over $1 million to the Victim's Trust. These amounts were determined by the amount of unrestricted funds each parish had. Parishes with higher amounts of unrestricted funds paid a higher percentage than those with lower amounts. For this reason, Immaculate Conception paid out about $30,000 while St. Joseph's contributed more than $640,000. IC had much lower money in savings, and to have taken on more would have created an immense

financial burden. This prorated scale was enacted to prevent any one parish from taking on a greater financial burden than they could handle.

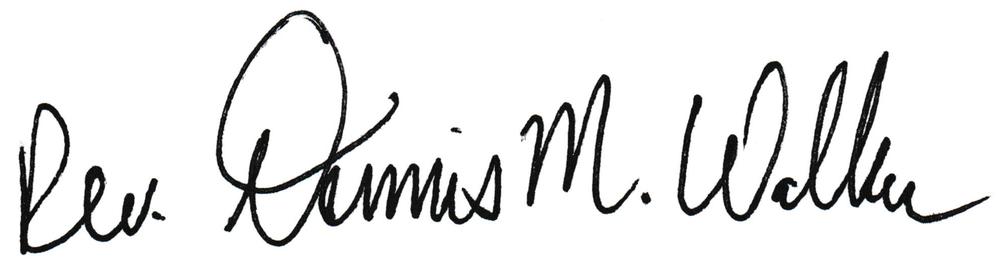
Paying into the Victim's Trust was the most prudent fiduciary decision our parishes could have made weighing the alternatives. In 2010, a victim sued an individual parish in Delaware over abuse that occurred in the 1960's. The Kent County Superior Court awarded $30 million to the victim as settlement for the case.[i] In Syracuse, our contributions gave us protection against further litigation as part of a channeling injunction. Basically, if any parish in the diocese opted out of the channeling injunction and thus paying into the Victims Trust, they would have exposed themselves to a greater liability and the potential for a lawsuit like the one in Delaware.

Another question was raised about whether the diocese already has a plan for our parishes. This is not the case. In regard to our situation, we are responsible for creating a plan to chart our future. The purpose of the Town Hall was to present information to the parishioners so that we may better understand the situation in the Church universal, our diocese and in our parishes. Having this data is crucial to helping us make informed decisions on charting our future.

During the presentation, a sizeable majority of "green cards" were raised when Fr. Seibt asked whether we were ready to move forward and whether we understood that the status quo can no longer be maintained given the state in which we find ourselves. Throughout the Town Hall and afterwards, I heard many people say that they are ready to move forward with planning for the future in our churches. Right now, we don't know what that looks like, so the next step is to develop a plan. In the coming weeks and months, I will convene meetings with our parish trustees, existing parish council presidents, employees and other determined parishioners to talk about a plan. I especially want to include our younger parishioners, who are the future and who will be having roles in lay leadership in our parishes in the future.

To everyone, I would like to thank you for your faithfulness. Change is inevitable in regard to every part of our life, but we can trust that if we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, he will give us "a future full of hope" (Jer. 29:11).

In Christ,



Rev. Dennis M. Walker
Pastor
Church of the Nativity

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[i] "Goldstein, Laurie. *"30 Million Is Awarded Over Abuse by Priest."* The New York Times. December 1, 2010. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/02/us/02church.html