



ST. ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY

OUR MOTHER OF SORROWS

Sharing the Peace of Christ in the Heart of Louisville, Kentucky

17 January 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am writing to provide you with a narrative that summarizes a long discussion. It involved data provided by parishes to the diocese as part of the impending diocesan reorganization. This data was self-reported by parishes, and it seemed to be - as one person noted - "data with attached emotion." The numbers might not have been as factually reliable as desired.

The most startling revelation - for me, as a priest - was one discernible bit of information. If one considered all the Catholics from the surrounding parishes¹ who are attending Mass every Sunday, and the diocese closed all of them. All of those Catholics could be served by one priest. He would be saying four masses on a weekend, which is what I am doing. And, that mass could be at any one of those church buildings - except for St. Stephen Martyr, which is too small. That information startled me.

In this document, I'll provide some context, note things that are true about both parishes and then provide a summary of "strengths and weaknesses" that arose from the discussions about each parish. As I close, I'll provide a narrative about our discussion about how a reorganization could affect us.

Some Context

I arrived in June 2019, and we have faced together Covid-19, my own health crisis as the pandemic was concluding, and the realities and closure of St.

¹ St. Brigid, St. James, St. Elizabeth, Our Mother of Sorrows, St. Stephen Martyr, and Holy Family

Therese Parish. Around that time, the diocese announced plans for a re-organization and a twenty percent (20%) reduction in the number of priests in coming years. The question being: what should be done to create financially stable parishes, which are properly staffed, to better serve God's People?

To begin a public discourse about it, the parish provided statistical data about Our Mother of Sorrows and St. Elizabeth Parishes in the bulletin (finances, registrations, baptisms, funerals, etc.). Trends should be apparent. In addition, I preached² about the challenges facing the parishes for four weeks. This included one homily where I directed, "If you are going to be actively involved in twenty (20) years, please stay standing." The visual was helpful in understanding where we are headed if things don't change. I also held an open forum on Sunday, 24 August 2025, to discuss this with parishioners. More recently, I gathered a team of nine parishioners³ and the two deacons. This team met⁴ to examine our data, together with the data reported by our neighboring parishes. We discussed the strengths and weaknesses of both parish locations, and we talked about what recommendations that we might have.

The Parishes of Our Mother of Sorrows and St. Elizabeth

First, it is clear that both parishes are being affected by the broader, current economic situation. People have limited incomes and growing expenses, and they are not always able to give more. Similarly, the parishes are also facing limited income with growing expenses. In many aspects, we are facing the problem of Exodus 5:7, needing to do the same amount of ministry but with fewer available resources. As you should know, we have reduced the staff's hours to reduce expenses; the parish offices are not open on Fridays anymore.

In addition, both parishes have been adversely affected by the turn-over in Pastors. As I noted in my homily series, "...as I began my seventh year, I became the second longest reigning pastor in decades. At Elizabeth, in the past 31 years, only Father Roy Stiles has served longer, at nine years. At

² 3 August 2025, 10 August 2025, 17 August 2025, 24 August 2025,

³ The team included: Dutch Boehnlein, Beth Garr, Greg Herberger, Lynnetta Hornback, Linda Klotter, Paul Moon, Vince Osbourn, Bob Schroeder, Katie West, and the deacons.

⁴ 22 November 2025, 6 December 2025, 20 December 2025, 10 January 2026.

OMOS, in the last 43 years, only Father John Hanrahan has served longer, at 17 years. This 'revolving door' of leadership has had a significant impact."

Both parishes are also struggling with the surrounding demographic (i.e., an aging Catholic population). Although demographics suggest that the neighborhoods are revitalizing, it isn't clear that the incoming demographic is as religious. At the same time, there is some reason in the last few years to hope that this could be slowly changing. It is positive to note that among current parishioners, the data suggested that most parishioners are regularly attending Mass at a rate greater than surrounding parishes. While the younger student population at the University of Louisville seems drawn to Holy Name Parish, Our Mother of Sorrows draws University of Louisville students who married and have a family; they live in the student housing across Eastern Parkway. In addition, St. Elizabeth's Sunday evening Mass draws students and a younger crowd. The simple truth is that both parishes are financially struggling, and both have significant delayed maintenance issues. Our Mother of Sorrows doing slightly better, but without one another both would be failing.

As I indicated from the pulpit, I think that both parishes are effectively where St. Therese Parish was twenty-years ago. If nothing changes, they will be closing in twenty years. At the same time, I have reasons to believe that the community can take steps in the here and now to revitalize that would change the course. And, from my perspective as Pastor, both communities are undertaking a change for the better - including greater involvement in the community.

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Parish

St. Elizabeth's campus is seen as a historic part and integral to the Schnitzelburg-Germantown area, but the campus is less visible from Eastern Parkway. The church building has a traditionally Catholic beauty, but this also comes with the expense of maintaining it. The church is handicapped accessible, but the ramp is more distant from handicapped parking, apart from a few street spots. On-campus parking is limited and relies on neighborhood street parking. The parish utilizes its space with rentals for ministry, including both the Senior Center and the newly renovated Head Start Program. In addition, there is space for ministry in the original school

building, and with the new elevator, the building is handicapped accessible on all three floors. The parish, in regards to all the parishes of the deanery, collects the least in donations and has the least in its savings account. If the parish were to close, the property might be valuable based on location, but it also might be difficult to sell given the structures which would not be easily demolished or renovated.

Our Mother of Sorrows Parish

The Our Mother of Sorrows campus is very visible, practically at the intersection of two main thoroughfares, Eastern Parkway and Preston, and easily accessible from the expressway. The larger campus includes the church and cafeteria, which are handicapped accessible; the offices and school building are not. On-campus parking, which is next to the church, is available. The church is simple in design, but marble interior has minimal maintenance expense. The parish utilizes its space with renting apartments, which supplements income. In addition, in the case of St. Anne's House, the parish, together with Catholic Charities, is providing affordable housing to victims of human trafficking. If the parish were to close, the property might be valuable based on location along Eastern Parkway and close to the University of Louisville.

Looking to the Future

It is clear that the current trajectory has an inevitable conclusion in twenty years. But, there are also signs that we could do things to change that future. Unfortunately, the impending diocesan decision will be based on current trends, not what is potential. I wish to provide a narrative account of the team's consensus, which is not to suggest that everyone agreed on specifics.

Most importantly, it would appear that we would be a stronger Catholic community if we collaborated and worked together more closely. It makes little sense to be duplicating some parochial positions, when we could be providing a greater variety of ministry. The buildings, although very near and dear to us, are not as important as the Catholic community. At the same time, we recognize that buildings are helpful when properly used for ministry and for providing opportunities for community building.

We are not sure that the dynamic along the Bardstown corridor is the same, but it seems clear that there are too many parishes in the immediate area. We recognize that a single parish could serve the area (St. Elizabeth, Our Mother of Sorrows, St. Stephen Martyr, and Holy Family). In many ways, if there were a single campus, St. Stephen Martyr would be centrally located. However, we are concerned that, given the self-reported seating capacity, that the church building at St. Stephen Martyr is too small to meet the needs of any "clustered" community. Without a clear location, one, single parish with a "Watterson Expressway" church campus and an "Eastern Parkway" church and a school campus could be a solution.

It is important to note that we are concerned about the enrollment at St. Stephen Martyr's school. It seems to be below two-hundred (1st - 8th), which historically suggests a grave crisis. If true, it also likely involving a financial component for parochial finances. Our observation is that all the parish schools in the area struggled with this demographic for decades. Our Mother of Sorrows' school closed, proving a boost to St. Stephen's school, and roughly eight years later, Holy Family's school closed, providing another boost to St. Stephen's school. Roughly eight years later, it is facing the long-standing trend without another foreseeable boost. We would very much wish to see a Catholic education in this area preserved and maintained, and we note that surrounding Catholic schools (St. Raphael and St. Agnes) are reported to have a waitlist. A broader vision and direction might provide new life. This might be accomplished if the school were regionally managed or re-established as an independent Catholic school.

Antidotal accounts suggest that neighboring parishes may not be engaging the data as deeply or prepared for such a discussion. A single parish solution might be too drastic at this time. This leads to another possibility where there is a "two parish" solution - a "Watterson Expressway" parish (Holy Family?) and an "Eastern Parkway" (OMOS and/or St E) parish. St. Elizabeth and Our Mother of Sorrows could be - and ought to be - merged. A merged parish would make office work easier - and has been recommended by the Business Manager. In fact, such a merger would reflect what is already occurring on many levels.

The group was concerned about the loss of the traditional architecture found at St. Elizabeth. We have seen this happen across the city, and it has been

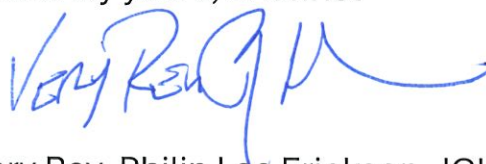
keenly felt in the local area with the closing of St. Therese. The local optic might be troubling. It should be noted that a donor stands ready to make a six-figure donation to St. Elizabeth to repair and improve the facilities. Thus, we have reason to think that the historic building can be preserved at this juncture.

Nevertheless, in a merger, the parish could reduce to one campus if the diocese were to make such a decision. However, without knowing the criteria for any decision making at that level, it isn't clear which campus would be more preferable. There are good arguments for both.

I am going to present this narrative at the open forum on 17 January 2026, and I will provide a printed version to parishioners at the forum. I will take into consideration other perspectives and opinions expressed at the forum, and these will become the foundation for my response to the diocesan "parish recommendations response form." It is my understanding that a diocesan committee will take all "parish recommendations" into consideration and propose a plan for each deanery, which will be further discussed.

Such conversations are hard, but there are two things I draw to your attention. First, the diocesan reorganization is happening. It is better to be part of it and to offer our thoughts on the issue. Second, I truly believe that we are up to the task, no matter how difficult. I am - and I believe that you are - willing to draw the cross to myself if it creates a better future for the next generation of Catholics. We will pray for one another, and I remain,

Sincerely yours, in Christ



Very Rev. Philip Lee Erickson, JCL, KHS
Pastor, Our Mother of Sorrows Parish
Pastor, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Parish