



*Diocese of Fall River*  
*Office of the Bishop*  
*Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.*

October 13, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you with an announcement of great hope and vision for the parishes of Central Fall River.

As many of you are aware, our Church is facing many critical challenges, and a number of factors have greatly affected our parishes, particularly those in our cities where so many of our churches are concentrated; among these factors are changing demographics and linguistic needs, a decline in parish membership and participation, fewer priests and aging facilities.

In January I initiated a process of strategic planning to consider these challenges, and I am most grateful for the hundreds of parishioners who came forward in listening sessions to voice their concerns. I am especially thankful for the more than 125 parish leaders from St. Anne, St. Anthony, St. Bernadette, Good Shepherd, and St. Stanislaus, who convened last June to begin the discussion about the future of our parishes in Fall River.

From that June assembly, many committed volunteers stepped forward to chair committees and lead discussions about our parish life and ministries, and I greatly value their leadership, counsel, and wisdom. I am also appreciative of the efforts of Fathers Albino, Deston, Fitzpatrick, Johnson, Maddock, and Wilson, to support this important planning process.

In August I paused the strategic planning among these parishes because of pending personnel changes, and the critical financial challenges posed by a few of the parishes. Your patience has given me the time needed to make a difficult but necessary decision about the future of St. Anne. It is with a heavy heart that I share with you, that this weekend we are announcing that St. Anne will close. The final Mass will be celebrated on November 25th on the Feast of Christ the King.

While these decisions are difficult, I have also given great consideration to the nature of the parish collaboration in Central Fall River, and the leadership required to guide us through this important transition.

This I know: we are better positioned as a community of faith to confront our challenges collaboratively, not separately, as individual parishes. Parish leaders have given me this advice: by focusing on strong lay and priestly leadership, consolidating our ministries, building on our combined human and financial resources, and reimagining the efficient use of our churches and facilities, we can plan with renewed vigor and inspiration!

And it is also evident to me that the Fall River parishes currently engaged in the planning process could benefit from the support and affirmation of other neighboring parishes. I am pleased to announce that St. Mary's – our Cathedral – will join in this coordinated strategic planning, adding their voice to this evolving partnership.

Now, the Cathedral, together with St. Anthony, Good Shepherd, and St. Stanislaus parishes will jointly plan for the future. This will require great leadership – successful planning depends not on process, but on leaders who come forward dedicating and committing themselves to change. The planning has already yielded great lay leadership, and I believe that we will have a great team of clergy to assist these leaders and shepherd the process.

I am pleased to announce that Father Tom Washburn, a New Bedford native and member of the Franciscan community, who has considerable expertise in leading urban parishes and working with youth and young adults, has agreed to serve as the new Rector of the Cathedral. In addition, Fr. Tom will be taking on the role of Administrator for both St. Stanislaus and Good Shepherd parishes. In this new role, Fr. Washburn will lead the clergy team that includes Father Albino, pastor of St. Anthony of Padua and Father Juan Carlos Muñoz Montoya, who will be serving as parochial vicar.

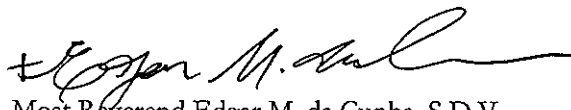
As of October 31st, these parishes will now be served by this team of priests; such is the challenge, but also the great opportunity for this new faith community. Father Washburn is uniquely qualified and most enthusiastic about accepting this challenge. The great opportunity is for our lay leadership to participate as full partners in transforming this community.

As these parishes plan, they will do so with the understanding that they need to consider the maintenance and support of four parish campuses – St. Anthony, Good Shepherd, St. Mary and St. Stanislaus. This is considerable maintenance and a financial challenge in and of itself. Therefore, for that reason, we are closing the chapels of Holy Rosary and Holy Cross. The last Mass will be celebrated on November 25th on the Feast of Christ the King. Even without the use of these two chapels, we will have more than enough capacity at the existing churches to appropriately serve the current parish population.

There are many details to be worked out, many questions and concerns to be considered; this is indeed the work of strategic planning. I am confident that with the considerable and newly combined talents of our lay leaders and Fathers Washburn, Albino, Muñoz Montoya – shepherded by Father Washburn – that we will establish a renewed and refreshed Catholic Community of Central Fall River, and continue rebuilding in *Faith and Hope!*

Thanking you for your patience and collaborative spirit, I am

Yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V.  
Bishop of Fall River