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Dear Parishioners,

Over the past several years, we have walked together through a time of real challenge and real grace.

When I first began serving our parishes, it was already clear that we were living in a moment of transition—not just for our own communities, but for the Church as a whole. What has stood out to me, again and again, is the way you have responded: with generosity, with honesty, and with a willingness to engage difficult questions for the sake of the mission. It has been a privilege to serve among you.

I am writing now to share something more personal, because I believe it is important to be honest about the reality I am living in—and because I know many others quietly carry similar burdens.

Over the past eighteen months, I have been navigating several struggles with my health, including symptoms of burnout and depression. This has not been easy to acknowledge, and even less easy to accept. Like many people, I would much prefer to keep going, to push through, and to continue carrying the responsibilities entrusted to me.

But to be candid, there are days when even simple responsibilities feel beyond my reach. At times, I find myself unable to even open my email—not because there is too much to do, but because I know I do not have the capacity in that moment to respond in a way that would truly help the person reaching out. Whether there are two messages or twenty, it can feel the same. Much of my energy is spent simply trying to remain steady.

Earlier this Lent, I shared with you a sense that the Lord was inviting me to be less “nice,” but more truly kind—to act not simply in ways that preserve comfort or avoid difficulty, but in ways that genuinely serve the good of others, even when that is harder.

In that light, I have had to face a difficult truth: remaining in my current role, and simply pushing through, might appear “nice” on the surface. But it would not be kind—not to our staff, who deserve a pastor who is fully present and able to lead; not to our parishioners, who deserve the same; not to the priests who will be coming to serve among you, whom we are called to welcome and support well; and not to the witness that a priest’s life is meant to offer to the abiding presence of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is not to continue as we are, but to step aside so that others can serve more fully.

For that reason, and after much prayer and reflection, I have asked Bishop Mark to allow me to step back from the responsibilities of a pastor in order to focus on my health and healing, and he has granted my request. This means that I will conclude my service as pastor of our parishes on June 30. My final weekend celebrating Mass in our communities will be June 13/14, after which I will be preparing for the transition to my next assignment.

Beginning July 1, the diocese will be implementing a new pastoral structure for our communities. At a recent meeting between Bishop Mark, diocesan officials, and the trustees of all our parishes, it was decided that our parishes will again be served by multiple pastors: one for Sacred Heart–Immaculate Conception and St. Theresa’s, one for Sacred Heart–Our Lady of Knock and St. John the Baptist, and a pastor together with a parochial vicar for St. Mary’s and the three St. Patrick’s parishes. These priests will be coming soon, and I ask you to welcome them generously and support them in their ministry.

While this represents a change in structure, it should not be understood as a step backward. From the beginning, our efforts were shaped by the reality that very few priests might be available to serve a large number of communities. Much of what we have built together was meant to strengthen our parishes so they could endure and remain faithful even under those constraints.

What is now unfolding is different. With more priests able to be present among you, and with a renewed emphasis on the role of parishioners in shaping the future of their communities, new possibilities are opening up. I believe this moment holds real promise—not because it replaces what we have done, but because it builds upon it.

Although this will be a new configuration, there is also a strong desire among our parish trustees to continue sharing resources where possible—especially our staff—so that the progress we have made together is not lost, and so that our parishes can continue to move forward without having to start over. The work we have begun together has helped prepare our communities not just to endure, but to grow and flourish.

For my part, I am at peace knowing that these communities will be well served by what comes next.

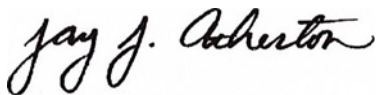
I want to be very clear about something, because it matters to me that this is understood rightly. My struggles are not the result of any one group of people, any decision, or any particular aspect of our life together. It is not because of you. It is not because of the diocese. And it is not because of the work we have been doing. In fact, much of that work—our collaboration, our shared sense of mission, the faith and generosity I have witnessed among you—has been a source of real strength and consolation for me. If anything, it has made this decision more difficult, not less.

I know that some may wonder whether it would be possible for me to remain, especially as more priests arrive and responsibilities are shared. I have considered that carefully. But the truth is that in order to focus on my healing, I need to step back from the responsibilities that come with being a pastor—even of a smaller assignment. Continuing in that role, in any form, would not allow for the kind of renewal that is needed.

I do not wish any of you to worry for me. I am safe. What I am facing is real, and it requires attention, but it is something I believe I can move through with time, care, and God's grace. I fully expect to enter a season of healing that prepares me for many more years of priestly ministry. God continues to guide all of us—even when the path forward is not the one we would have chosen.

I also hope that by telling you about these inner struggles, I may encourage anyone else who is also struggling to recognize that it is acceptable to seek help, to speak honestly, or to acknowledge their own limits. If this message helps even just one person summon the courage to say, "I need help," then it will have been worth saying.

Thank you all—for your faith, your patience, your honesty, and your willingness to walk this road together. Be assured of my prayers for you, and I ask for yours as well.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jay J. Acheator". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name below it.

~Fr. J