



Pastoral Letter

September 8, 2024
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

To The Faithful of Holy Spirit Mission, Washoe Valley Nevada

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with urgent and heart-felt pastoral solicitude that I write to you offering my encouragement and support at this time. The tragic fire in Washoe Valley on Saturday, September 7, 2024 affected so many people's lives, including all of you as members of Holy Spirit Mission. Please pray for the first responders who acted quickly and effectively to minimize the damage and loss of human life.

The situation developed so quickly that none of us could have anticipated the magnitude of the devastation which would result. It was with sadness that I received word on Saturday evening that Holy Spirit Mission had burned and was completely destroyed. I immediately left St. John the Baptist Parish in Lovelock on Saturday night and drove straight to the Mission in the hopes of recovering the Blessed Sacrament. I am aware that many parishioners of Holy Spirit Mission attempted the same thing. The first responders were understandably concerned about anyone entering that area due to the ongoing danger of the fire and so none of us were permitted any access into Washoe Valley.

Thanks to the assistance and accompaniment of the Washoe County Sheriff and his deputy, I was able to make a site visit to Holy Spirit Mission on Sunday, September 8 along with Father Arlon Vergara, and some hastily-recruited members of your community past and present including Vincent Toomey, Michael Imus, Chris Imus, Ron Lunt, Zac Lunt, and Matthew Combs. The Sheriff and members of the Lyon County Fire Department facilitated our efforts to recover anything we could from the Mission.

Nothing could have prepared us for what we saw when we arrived at the mission. We were saddened beyond words at the smoldering debris that was once the House of God. As an immediate sign of hope, we saw the undamaged statue of the Blessed Mother standing in watchful attention over the site of the former Mission chapel. The Blessed Mother is particularly close to her adopted children in Christ when they suffer affliction and distress.

Our first and primary effort was to locate and recover the Tabernacle in the hopes that the

Blessed Sacrament might have been miraculously spared. Unfortunately, the intensity and duration of the fire had completely destroyed the Tabernacle and all its contents. The heat was so intense that it actually fused metallic pieces together. As such, nothing remained of the Blessed Sacrament.

Our next effort was to recover important documents and sacred vessels from the office safe and the sacristy safe. We did retrieve some intact documents from the office safe but, unfortunately, the sacristy safe was unable to endure the fire. Most of the contents were severely damaged or destroyed. This includes the historical Sacramental records of the Mission. We did recover parts of the Monstrance, a Chalice and the Holy Oil stocks - but even these were badly damaged.

Because of this, I especially ask your help in reconstructing these lost Sacramental records. Please supply copies of any Baptism, Confirmation, or Marriage certificates you might have so that Father Arlon can reconstruct these records. If you do not have original certificates, then please submit any other documentation you may have so we can substantiate the important sacramental history, which will be necessary as people seek further Sacraments.

Additionally, I want to thank and recognize Brother Hall, our new Superintendent of Catholic Schools, whom I have appointed as supervisor of Bishop Manogue High School, for generously offering the Bishop Manogue Chapel for the congregation of Holy Spirit Mission to use each Sunday. I believe that this location will give you a stable place for Sunday worship and will help your community to preserve its unity as you plan your future.

I hope you know of my personal support of you. I trust in the words of scripture when Saint Paul tells us, "we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28).

I trust that God, who has been accomplishing good work in you and for you, will bring it to fulfillment. I hope that you share that trust and confidence as well, and that the experience of this tragedy may become a source of deepened faith, greater commitment, and blessing for your community.

With every best wish, and an assurance of prayer, I remain

Yours in Christ

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Most Rev. Daniel H Mueggenborg
Bishop of Reno