



Franciscan Friars

PROVINCE OF SAINT BARBARA ♦ Office of the Provincial Minister

An Open Letter to the Parishioners of St. Mary's Basilica

September 9, 2022

Dear Parishioners,

May the Lord give you peace.

It is with sadness that I need to inform you that after many years of service to St. Mary's Parish we Franciscan Friars will need to leave and return the parish to the complete care of the Diocese of Phoenix. We Franciscans have been entrusted with the care of St. Mary's since 1895 and so it was with great sadness that I and my council had to make this decision. We will officially turn back the parish to the Diocese in the summer of 2023. I have talked to Bishop Dolan and informed him and he will work closely with all of us in this change.

This has been a very difficult decision. The simple truth is that we do not have the Franciscans we once had and need to reduce our ministerial commitments. In the 1960s, we friars on the West Coast numbered about 500 while today we are down to just 110 men. And the reality is that more than half of the men we do have are 70 years of age or older and are at retirement age. We have a great shortage of priests able to celebrate sacramental ministry.

We friars will work closely with the Bishop Dolan and all of you to develop a transition plan before we hand St. Mary's over to the care of the Diocese. This transition period will include a team from the parish, the friars and the Diocese. The parish is not closing and will continue to serve all the faithful. Our hope is that this transition period will facilitate an orderly handover to the Diocese and give us all time to grieve these changes, plan for the future, and move forward with confidence that we have as disciples of Jesus. But let us be honest, change is never easy.

But we also believe, as the Gospel tells us, that Jesus will not leave us orphans. And that He is with his Church until the end of time. So while this current situation might be a great sadness for us, we simply have to trust that in some way or some manner the Holy Spirit will lead us to where we are supposed to be, but still with a heavy heart we must leave.

I would like to thank you each individually and as a community for your great love and support of the friars over the years. Your kindness to all of us Franciscans has been greatly appreciated. I will remember all of you in my prayers and I kindly ask you to pray for us Franciscans also in this period of change.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. David Gaa, OFM
Provincial Minister