Dear Holy Family Parishioners, Aug. 25th, 2018

I want to mention some discussions I have engaged in regarding the future of Holy Family parish. As you probably know, there has been a petition sent to Rome asking that Holy Family be allowed to stay open. At our parish meeting on August 9th a question was raised by parishioners. The question boiled down to: “Can we continue proceeding with the steps towards closure while the petition remains unanswered? Or does the petition create a stay on further action until it is resolved?” At the meeting I responded that I didn’t believe that it did, but I would ask the diocese for clarity on this point. I was able to talk to the diocesan staff about this point and they said that we could continue proceeding as we have been, with the understanding that if the Vatican responds by asking that the parish stay open we would need to amend the present course. Therefore, we don’t need to wait until we receive a response from Rome. I was further able to revisit the topic with Bishop Sirba and he said we ought to proceed with the current course of action. There has been no formal decree of closure as of yet, but we are taking steps towards that eventuality.

I know this is not what many of you are hoping for, I can understand that you may feel like it should be your say and not the Bishop’s or the pastors when it comes to staying open. You have worked hard to maintain the parish financially and even make the parish a center for activity. However, when we reflect upon the role of a parish and the efforts that go into running and maintaining a facility, the priority must always be the work of bringing others to Christ and growing and strengthening the flock.

Many of you have mentioned to me that the retreat center and parish hall are used by many people in the community, and that it will be missed by the community. This, I am sure is true, but the church doesn’t exist to simply promote community events and centers of community. These can be, and have often been, the source of many Catholic apostolates… very often the work of the Church is connected to some kind of public service (education, medical care, feeding-clothing-providing housing for the poor). If, however, these activities and efforts don’t show clear and evident fruit and do not bring people into a lived Catholic faith, then we need to make the hard decision to turn our efforts in another direction or another location. That is the decision that was made back in 2012. In these past months since May we have been facing the reality that the decision made back in 2012 is now being carried out. It isn’t a matter of doing another study to see if things have changed, it isn’t a matter of holding on longer for a change in diocesan policy. The decision was made and has never been in question since that time. We may never have accepted that decision which makes the current situation harder to bear.

Sometimes we have a hard time letting go of how we want things to be, or how we hope they will be… this can lead us to turn a blind eye to signs or realities that are in plain sight. I don’t wish to be unkind, and I don’t fault you as parishioners for holding on to your hopes. However, I think we need to look at the broader situation. The Church has limited priests, the demographics of the area show that we haven’t grown, our sacramental numbers aren’t going up they are going down, and there are plenty of other parishes in the area that are close enough for us to attend. These realities are plain, they are facts, and when it comes down to it, we have to make decisions based on these realities, not simply on what our personal preferences are. It is always a hard decision to close a parish, nobody is glad that it is happening, but it has become necessary to make changes all across the diocese and our parish is one instance of a shift that has taken place or *is* in the process of taking place all over our diocese and our country.

I do not hold you at fault for the 2012 decision, I do not blame you, or think that you haven’t done enough on behalf of your parish. I think you have done what many of us do when we are passionate about something we deeply care about. Even so, I maintain that we need to turn our gaze to Christ… if you let go of your own desires, if you are truly open to what God is asking… what does he say? Are you motivated out of fear in your actions? Fear of the unknown, fear of what you will lose, fear of being disenfranchised? Or perhaps this has been about maintaining control of your life… staying with old friends and relatives… Maybe, there is some unresolved hurt from the past that needs to be brought to Christ.

Christ is with us in this struggle that we are undergoing, he carries the cross beside us, and he also allows us to feel it’s weight. This decision to let go and accept change is one that you will have to make for yourself. Even if the changes happen… you will not be able to find peace until you allow Christ to work something new in your heart. If nothing else, it can be an opportunity for the Lord to invite you into trust, and acceptance of a cross you can’t change.

Jesus Mary and Joseph, Pray for us who have recourse unto thee…

-Fr. Eli

p.s. This is a modified map of area parishes I learned of two others in Lastrup and Vineland that may be of interest.

Distances to other Catholic Churches in the area:

St. Rita (Hillman ) 14 mins. 12.3 Miles Mass Sat. 4 PM Sun. 10:30 AM

Holy Cross (Harding) 15 mins. 12.7 Miles Mass Sun. 8:45 AM

St. Therese (Vineland) 16 mins. 13 Miles Mass Sun. 11 AM

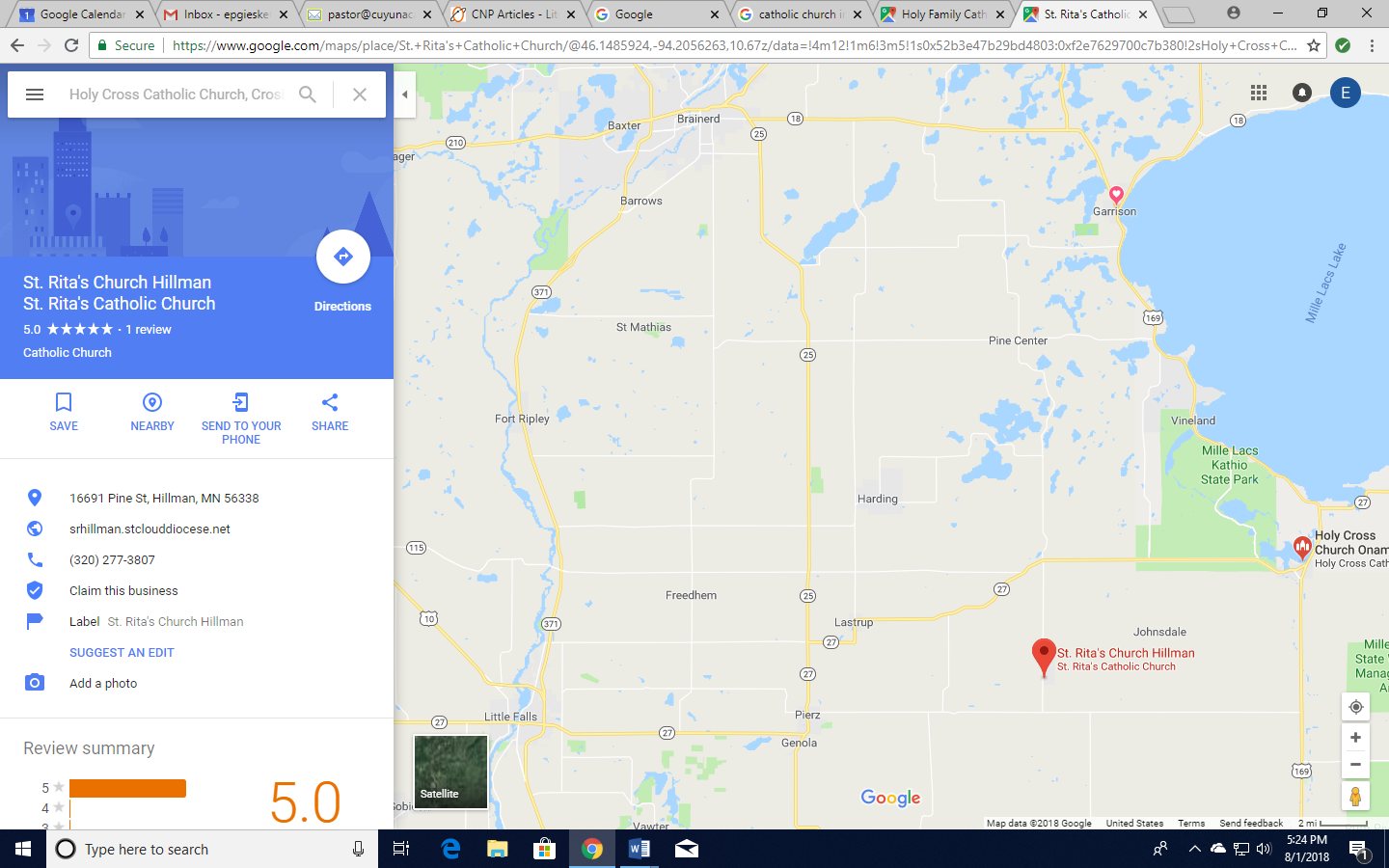
Our Lady of Fatima (Garrison) 18 mins. 13.8 Miles Mass Sun. 8 AM

St. John (Lastrup) 20 mins. 17.6 Miles Mass Sun. 10:45 AM

Holy Cross (Onamia) 22 mins. 18.4 Miles Mass Sun. 9 AM

St. Matthias (St. Matthias) 25 mins. 21.9 Miles Mass Sun. 8 AM

St. Joseph (Pierz) 27 mins 23.9 Miles Mass Sat. 4:30 PM Sun. 8 AM



Our Lady of Fatima (Garrison) 18 mins.

Holy Cross (Onamia) 22 mins.

St. Rita (Hillman) 14 mins.

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Holy Family

St. Therese (Vineland) 16 mins.

St. John (Lastrup) 20 mins.