

Saint Stephen the Martyr Chapel

of the Cathedral of Saint Paul Parish
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July 23, 2021
Saint Bridget of Sweden

Dear Members of the Saint Stephen Community:

It was a great surprise to me, to be asked by Bishop Raica to become Chaplain of the Birmingham-area Catholic university students approximately two months ago, effective with Father Altonji's transfer to Huntsville. The decision had to be made quickly due to several urgent factors, including, most drastically, the lack of available priests to take Father's place. I wish we could have approached it in a different way, including with community meetings beforehand and the like. Unfortunately, we were constrained in many respects by things beyond our control.

Since the time of the announcement, I have met with the FOCUS missionaries, the Catholic student organizations, the Knights of Columbus, Deacon Danny, Father Altonji, Frederick Pollman, Mary Beth Yaeger, Gigi Pickard, many students and young adults, and other community and campus ministry stakeholders. I have been so grateful for the understanding that all have shown regarding these changes, and I most certainly sympathize with the sadness and concern that many of you have expressed as well.

With this letter, then, I wish first of all to thank all of you, who have been a part of this community – some for many years. The final Sunday Mass will be celebrated by Fr. Justin Ward on Sunday, August 15, and Deacon Danny is arranging a community breakfast beforehand. (He will announce more details at Mass soon.) Due to a long-scheduled trip that week, I will not be able to attend, but I will offer my Mass for all of you that day.

You have generously supported St. Stephen's financially so that we could provide for campus ministry over all these years, to say nothing of so many other important activities, including for other groups in the Birmingham community. You have invested sweat equity by volunteering in many ways, whether through service days to clean up our campus or in caring for the sanctuary. You have shown hospitality to students and visitors alike and made all feel welcome. You have come – even recently – to pray for the dead and weep with those who weep. I am most grateful for the manifold ways you have supported Saint Stephen's, and I wish to assure you that your support has not been in vain.

Particular thanks are due to those who have participated in student ministry; those who have prepared meals for and served our students; all the student leaders; various FOCUS missionaries; various priests and religious sisters; Deacon Danny and Sally; musicians and choir members; lectors; altar servers; altar sodality members; sacristans; collection counters; so many other volunteers; Finance Council members; Knights of Columbus past and present; generous donors; the Simbang Gabi community; our group of young adults; those who have participated in the pro-life Mass; employees past and present; those who served at the Firehouse Shelter or at First Light... and, in a special way, more recently, all those who helped livestream Masses, provided the equipment, and otherwise supported us during the Covid-19 pandemic!

No, your support has not been in vain, for as I already announced, we will continue to serve the needs of our university students and discern a path forward otherwise for this new chapter of the chapel's history. In this regard, my initial meetings with so many have borne very good fruit and we have a fine initial sense of where a starting point may be for a committee process

now. And although we will not be able to maintain Sunday Mass beyond August 15, 2021, we will continue holding Tuesday evening Adoration & Confessions during the school year (6:30pm), Thursday evening Confessions (4:30pm) & Holy Mass (5:30pm) year-round, and other activities, including having the student lounge open for students from all three of our local campuses. *You are always welcome to join us for any of our scheduled liturgies!*

I know that the Sunday cancellation leaves you having to decide where you will fulfill your religious obligations after the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and that it's never easy to change parishes. Please know that you are most welcome at the Cathedral of Saint Paul, a wonderful parish with faithful people of all ages and backgrounds. We are especially inviting our students and young adults to the more solemn 11:00am Sunday Mass (choir/incense), but know that there are a variety of liturgies to meet different preferences, including the 5:00pm Saturday (hymns), 7:15am Sunday (recited/quiet), and 8:30am Sunday (solemn/incense/often celebrated by Bishop). We would love to have you join us at the Cathedral!

My hope and prayer is that our forthcoming committee process will build upon the good fruit already attained and help us determine a solid path forward for keeping our physical and spiritual presence, as a beacon on the Southside and for the Birmingham student population.

In this regard, although you will no doubt move your tithing to your new parish home, I humbly ask that you also remember us at St. Stephen's from time to time in your other charitable giving. All donations that we receive will continue to be used to maintain our facility and support our campus ministry programs. Online giving options will remain in place for those who may wish to keep donating that way, and of course, we will continue to accept cash or check gifts, transfers of stock, or other in-kind donations as well. We continue to employ Mary Beth as our campus minister, Joseph as our custodian, and Frederick as our music minister. (My priest salary is shared between the Cathedral and the Chancery – not paid from St. Stephens' funds.) For the purposes of transparency and good stewardship, we will soon publish a fiscal year-end report for St. Stephen's Chapel in the Cathedral bulletin and on the St. Stephen's web site.

Thank you for your patience – not only in reading this long letter, but also with what has been a difficult, and, in some ways, awkward transition process. Our Lord is so good and his mercies never fail: he will guide us all on the path that lies before us. If anyone would like to share ideas, suggestions, or concerns, please know that my door is open. I am generally in the St. Stephen's office on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, and can also be reached by email at fatherjerabek@stpaulsbhm.org. May God bless us, Mary keep us, and St. Stephen the Martyr intercede for us, so that we may commend our spirits ever more fully to the Lord each day.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Very Reverend Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Chaplain, Saint Stephen the Martyr Chapel
Pastor & Rector, Cathedral of Saint Paul
Judicial Vicar & Chancellor, Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

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