

April 18, 2010

Dear Parishioners:

For over 40 years the Priests of the Sacred Heart have ministered to the people of Willacy County. It was through the efforts of Fr. Tom Sheehy, scj, who had traveled with the migrant farm workers from this area that the SCJs found their way to the Diocese of Brownsville and the good people of Willacy County. Over the years many SCJs have ministered here bringing the sacraments and proclaiming the Gospel to all.

As you and I know, many changes have taken place in our society and our Church in those forty-plus years. One of the most dramatic changes for the Church, and for our SCJ community, is the decline in the number of new men entering religious life, coupled with the aging of our members. This has forced us over the years to make painful decisions about where we work and what we are capable of doing.

The SCJs are at that point once again of having to decide what we can do with the personnel resources we now have and project to have into the future. Having consulted with my provincial council and others, we have come to the sad and painful decision that we can no longer continue to serve here in Willacy County. Believe me, that decision was not made lightly nor without a lot of anguish and lament. We simply do not have the men available to continue our ministry here.

Having made that decision, in writing we informed your new bishop, Daniel Flores, in early February of our need to return the pastoral care of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Raymondville, St. Patrick in Lasara, St. Anne in San Perlita and St. Francis Xavier Cabrini in Hargill to the diocese as of February 11, 2011. We did so since our contract with the diocese requires us to inform the bishop a year in advance of our planned withdrawal.

After writing the letter, Fr. MacDonald and I met personally with Bishop Flores to talk about how best to make this transition and how we can honor the work of the SCJs during these past forty years while assisting the new pastor to come to know and appreciate the good people of these three parishes.

Your assistance and participation in the transition that will take place between now and next February is very important. While there is certainly sadness in leaving a place in which SCJs have worked for so many years we also recognize there is an opportunity

here for you to strengthen the faith community and to take greater ownership of your parish.

In turning back to the diocese the pastoral duties of your parish I believe every SCJ who has served here has left his mark and while we may be leaving, the heart of our charism, that God loves you *with an everlasting love*, lives on in each one of you.

Yours in the Risen Lord,

Very Reverend Thomas P. Cassidy, scj  
Provincial Superior