



DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

November 2, 2018

Dear Saint Matthias Parishioners and School Families,

It is with a heavy heart that I write to tell you that Rev. Douglas J. Haefner, this week resigned as pastor of Saint Matthias Parish, Somerset – a position he has held for the past 27 years. As I heard and witnessed during my several visits to your beautiful parish over the past two years, so many of you are grateful for Father Haefner's many contributions over the past decades. Although surprising, Father's decision to step down at this time is for the benefit of the parish and school community.

It is with sadness that I must inform you that Father's resignation coincides with serious questions and concerns that recently have been raised regarding the handling of parish finances. While I cannot go into details at this time for legal reasons, please know I am fully committed to getting to the bottom of things and will share additional information, as I am able. Father came to me about his own health problems and these financial issues in recent weeks and has expressed his sorrow for his actions and for letting us all down. As per our established practice, I have withdrawn Father Haefner's priestly faculties while the matter is being looked into. Father Haefner will seek treatment in a committed effort to regain his health, which many of you are aware has been in decline recently. I ask you to join me in prayer for Father's wellbeing.

To care for the parish and school community in the coming months, I am appointing Fr. Abraham Orapankal as your temporary administrator. Father Abraham is currently the pastor of St. John Neumann Church in Califon. I consider him to be a holy priest, a devoted pastor, and a talented man, loved by his parishioners. At my request, Father Abraham has graciously agreed to leave his own beloved parish community and come to journey with you as you grow closer to the Lord even through the troubles you now experience. For this, I am most grateful. Father will be on pilgrimage to the Holy Land over the next couple weeks, so Msgr. John Fell, Director of Priest Personnel for the Diocese and Episcopal Vicar for Health Care, will fill in until Father Abraham's return. As an expression of my closeness to you during this time, I will come to the parish hall on Monday, November 5 at 6:30 p.m. for a pastoral visit with those of you who would like to attend.

Father Abraham will be with you until the summertime; the months that Father will spend with you will also allow me to carefully reflect upon and pray about the person who is best suited to serve as the next pastor of St. Matthias Parish. Be assured that I will seek out your advice as

well as that of my diocesan advisors in making this important selection, and will entrust this all to much prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

I understand the suddenness of this announcement is unsettling for many, and that Father Haefner has been so well respected by you over many years. You are not alone in these feelings; this is heartbreaking to me too. Be assured you remain in my prayers during this challenging time of transition. I ask you to pray for me, too, as you pray for Father Doug and welcome Fr. Abraham to your wonderful parish.

With renewed best wishes, I remain

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James F. Checchio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend James F. Checchio, JCD, MBA
Bishop of Metuchen