



DIOCESE OF PEMBROKE

284 TRAFALGAR ROAD
PEMBROKE, ONTARIO K8A 5A8

Pembroke, August 6, 2026
Feast of the Transfiguration

Brothers and Sisters,

Peace be with you on this Feast of the Transfiguration! With Peter, James and John on the holy mountain, we hear the Voice of God proclaim of Jesus: "This is my Beloved Son. Listen to him!"

I write this letter to you today, and especially to the people of the Pontiac Deanery, to respond to an unexpected and urgent crisis which presents us with a challenging situation. As you are already aware, two of our priests serving in the Central and Lower Pontiac are no longer available for ministry in the parishes in which they have been serving. Fr. Michael Goring is on health leave, and Fr. Kakule Christian has left the Diocese as of August 5, 2026.

With the assistance of several retired priests and priests from other deaneries with full time responsibilities, we have managed to maintain the schedule of Sunday Masses and other essential services for the present and until the end of August. This has only been possible because of the incredible generosity of these priests and the faithful service of parish secretaries and administrative assistants in the parishes of the Pontiac. We are very grateful to both the priests and lay collaborators who have made this possible. However, with the beginning of September and the full schedule which will engage all the active priests, it will no longer be possible to count on their generous assistance.

Together with the Priests Personnel Committee, I have tried to find other possible solutions, even in the short term. Unfortunately, we have not succeeded in doing so. We realize that beginning in September, there will only be two resident active priests to serve the 14 parishes and missions of the Pontiac Deanery. This is an unexpected and urgent critical situation. The present Mass schedule cannot continue.

You are also aware that we are in the process of Pastoral Planning for the whole diocese. We are in the midst of a process of consultation and strategic planning, so that we can embrace the future with hope. After the 7 Regional Meetings, and the Parish Meetings, conducted from January to June 2026, everyone is aware of the growing need to move forward. At every Regional Meeting, I shared with you that in urgent cases, and especially if unexpected circumstances arose, we would need to take some decisions, either definitive or temporary according to the situation, but we would continue the process for a long-term plan. This is one of those unexpected and urgent situations which require immediate temporary decisions. And we will continue the process of consultation.

After those Regional and Parish Meetings, in June every parish received a brief report about the state of their parish and community. The Steering Committee, together with the Deans of the five Deaneries, has carefully studied those reports as well. Beginning this fall, we will continue the process of consultation in each deanery, beginning as soon as possible with the Pontiac.

After prayer and listening to the guidance of the Spirit, the Priests Personnel Committee, with the Deans of the five Deaneries, proposed to me the following interim plan for Sunday Masses in the Pontiac Deanery. Listening to the Spirit, and with much prayer and reflection, I accepted this proposal and decided that beginning on the weekend of September 5-6, Sunday Mass will be celebrated only in the following Churches:

St. Alphonsus Church – Chapeau;
Église St-Pierre – Fort Coulonge;
St. John the Evangelist Church – Campbell's Bay;
Holy Name of Mary Church – Quyon.

The detailed Sunday Mass schedule will be published shortly. In each Church, care will be taken to provide Mass in French and English, or at least, bilingual. There will be six Sunday Masses celebrated each week in the Pontiac. This schedule is based on two active priests each celebrating three Sunday Masses, which is the ordinary limit envisioned in Canon Law.

Even temporarily, we cannot depend on the assistance of the retired priests to the extent that we could count on them this summer. We know that they will continue to assist in particular situations of more urgent need, such as holidays, illness, funerals, and as requested by the pastors or the Bishop. We are very grateful for this assistance.

Sunday Mass will be temporarily suspended in the other Churches:

St. Paul the Hermit Church – Sheenboro;
St. Joseph Church -- Saint Joseph's;
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church – Waltham;
Église St-Charles-Borromée – Otter Lake;
St. Elizabeth Church – Vinton;
Église Ste-Anne – Île du Grand Calumet;
St. James the Greater Church – Portage;
Église de l'Immaculée Conception – Bryson;
St. Edward Church – Bristol;
Église St-Francois d'Assise – Lac des Loups.

It is important to remember that we are NOT closing these parishes. This is an interim schedule while we continue the consultation necessary. We urge parishioners to continue to attend and participate in the Sunday Mass in their 'cluster', to use their parish envelopes to support their parish, and to participate in the consultation process as we prepare a long-term proposal to be presented to the Diocese and to the Bishop.

The priests who will be appointed to provide the pastoral care of all 14 parish communities will be announced as soon as possible.

I realise that this is a very serious step. It will be difficult, and painful, for the priests and for the people of these communities. We understand this. It is important that we face this critical situation together over the coming months, and that priests and people support one another as you prepare together a long-term proposal for the future. We know that change is necessary and we will not be able to return to the previous schedule. This is true for the whole Diocese, and not just for the Pontiac Deanery. For this reason, the priests and people in the other four Deaneries will also be working together with the Steering Committee to prepare a long-term proposal for the future for each Deanery, and for the whole Diocese.

May the God of all consolation strengthen all of us with the gift and power of the Holy Spirit! Even as we experience the pain of 'letting go', together we listen to Jesus who calls us to follow him and witness to the gospel in all we do!

May our Blessed Mother, Mary, our Perpetual Help, help us to trust as she did at the foot of the Cross, so that with her, we might welcome the new life which only the Risen Christ can bring!

St. Columbkille, pray for us!

In Christ our Redeemer,

+ Michael Brehl, C.S.R.

✠Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.
Bishop of Pembroke