

P E T I T I O N

to

**The Most Reverend Richard G. Lennon
Bishop of Cleveland, Ohio
Catholic Diocese of Cleveland
1027 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114-2560**

on behalf of

**ST. EMERIC PARISH
Diocese of Cleveland, Ohio**

submitted by

**Miklos B. Peller
Procurator for St. Emeric Parish**

March 24, 2009

P E T I T I O N

to

The Most Reverend Richard G. Lennon
Bishop of Cleveland, Ohio
Catholic Diocese of Cleveland
1027 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114-2560

I, the undersigned, a baptized parishioner of good standing, on behalf of myself and serving as procurator for the parishioners (please refer to Attachment A.) of St. Emeric Church and parish located at 1860 West 22nd Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44113, pursuant to canon 1734 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, do hereby seek revocation of the decree or administrative decision ordering the suppression of St. Emeric parish. I further request, in accordance with canon 1737, paragraph 3, that the decree/decision ordering the suppression of the parish be suspended pending hierarchical recourse, to prevent irreparable harm from occurring as a result of the loss of our parish and the possible sale of parish property.

I had the honor of serving as a member of the Cluster Planning and Coordination (CPC) Committee studying the future of the three Hungarian parishes. As procurator for St. Emeric Parish, I submit this Petition for revoking or amending your March 12, 2009 decree, delivered by UPS on March 14, 2009, ordering suspension of St. Emeric Parish. In support of this petition, I refer you to the previously submitted package of materials and facts demonstrating the viability and rationale for remaining a stable and separate parish (copy of package enclosed in the Appendix of this Petition). In accordance with the points listed therein, we found that our parish meets all the criteria for spiritual and financial vibrancy, which were outlined in the directives. In support of the above finding are some key issues that may have been overlooked or missed and expressed in detail in Attachment B.:

1. Parishioners are still in need of services / Sacraments administered in Hungarian because they are spiritually conversant in only the Hungarian language and we do have a priest to serve this need.
2. We serve the youth of the Hungarian-American community by providing the facilities and spiritual guidance to the two Hungarian Scout troops. This scout movement endeavors to instill Christian moral values in its members. **From this community, three young ladies have recently entered religious orders and one young man is a third-year seminarian in this Diocese.** The suppression of St. Emeric Parish by the Diocese will also eliminate the facilities, terminate the spiritual guidance and expel the youth of the Hungarian-American community from the Catholic faith-based environment which St. Emeric Parish provided them.
3. Financially, we have never been a burden to the Diocese, only contributors.
4. St. Emeric is easily accessible by four major highways, public transportation, and has unlimited parking space on weekends and evenings with the permission of the City of Cleveland at the West Side Market parking area. These essential attributes make St. Emeric church an effective parish activity center.
5. St. Emeric is centrally located with respect to the Hungarian community of Greater Cleveland.
6. Following Vibrant Life initiatives, St. Emeric Parish has been blessed with new parishioners.

This request is prompted by Your Excellency's decision, which you conveyed to the Rev. Sandor Siklodi, pastor of St. Emeric Parish, in your letter of 12 March 2009, delivered on March 14, 2009, ordering the suppression of St. Emeric parish. You have given a suspense of **ten useful days** with a deadline of 27 March 2009 to initiate recourse against your decision.

Provided there is a "certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted" in a parish (Canon. 515, § 1), there is a need for that parish. St. Emeric Parish, currently a personal parish, although smaller than many others in the Diocese, serves the needs of its entire parish community and that of the local community as evidenced by the number of parishioners, its financial strength, and its youth and community programs.

If Your Excellency will not grant the favor of a positive response to the portion of this recourse dealing with the planned suppression of the parish, I ask that you view with favor a request in accord with Canon 1733.1 that you permit St. Emeric church to remain open until, at least, safer and freer access to St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church occurs when, as you noted, the "Opportunity Corridor" is completed. As is commonly known, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church is not readily accessible by freeways or public transportation, the area surrounding that church is crime-ridden and dangerous. Many St. Emeric parishioners, especially among the elderly and those with young families are expressing strong concerns and misgivings regarding their safety if they wish to continue worshiping within the greater Hungarian Catholic Community by attending liturgies at St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church. We foresee that in time, and with the completion of the "Opportunity Corridor" connecting Interstate 490 and University Circle that these safety issues may be resolved.

Alternatively, we ask Your Excellency's suggestions for a compromise solution which would permit St. Emeric Parish to remain active in the service of God. If, in your eyes, we have erred somewhere along this process, please do not allow the community to suffer for a technicality. The St. Emeric community would like to continue its ministry to the Faithful and is requesting to remain an asset to the Diocese, working in full cooperation with the Diocese.

Wherefore I, and on behalf of those appointing me to serve as their procurator, respectfully submit this Petition and ask that Your Excellency revoke or amend your decree or administrative decision of suppression.

Given at Cleveland, Ohio, this 24th day of March 2009.

I have the honor to be, Your Excellency,
Devotedly yours in Christ,

Miklos B. Peller
Procurator for St. Emeric Parish

STATE OF OHIO)
)
COUNTY OF Cuyahoga)

BEFORE ME, the undersigned authority, personally appeared, Miklos B. Peller, who, after being first duly sworn, acknowledged that he is the person duly authorized to execute the foregoing Petition, and that he executed same in my presence, this _____ day of March, 2009.

Notary Public - State of Ohio

Personally Known _____ Or Produced Identification _____ Type _____

ATTACHMENT A.
MANDATA PROCURATIONIS
ST. EMERIC PARISH
PETITION
March 24, 2009

Over two hundred properly executed individual Mandata Procurationis, appointing **Miklos B. Peller** as the individual St. Emeric baptized and registered parishioner's **procurator**, have been signed and notarized. All of the original documents are on file in the possession of the procurator.

The Mandatum documents are not attached as a means of saving on resources, paper and space volume, but will be submitted by the Procurator immediately upon demand.

Miklos B. Peller
Procurator for St. Emeric Parish
March 24, 2009

ATTACHMENT B.
DETAILED ARGUMENTS
ST. EMERIC PARISH
PETITION
March 24, 2009

ATTACHMENT B.

March 24, 2009

Re: **Appeal of St. Emeric Parish
Diocese of Cleveland**

Argument in favor of request to revoke or amend the March 12, 2009 administrative decree to suppress St. Emeric Parish:

1. Historic Cleveland, like many cities east of the Mississippi, is a city built by immigrants. Immigrants built most of the churches in the core city that His Excellency Bishop Richard G. Lennon decreed to close. These churches were intricately interwoven with the life of the parishioners. These parishioners treated their churches as social and cultural centers in addition to the churches' primary religious function. St. Emeric church and parish are no exception, it still continues to be the center for worship, social, cultural, and youth events, continuing its role established by those who built it and those that cherished it and maintained it.
2. St. Emeric Parish has been a faithful parish of the Diocese of Cleveland for the past 105 years. The parish is among the smaller ones in the Diocese.
3. The Diocese of Cleveland up to this date deemed it expedient to declare St. Emeric Parish a "personal," non-territorial parish in accord with Canon 518. As such, it has served the Hungarian-speaking Roman Catholic community of Greater Cleveland, **and it has the vitality, will, and resources to continue this role into the future.**
4. The main reasons for the clustering process and the realignment of parishes, as stated by the Diocese of Cleveland, are as follows to the best of our understanding:
 - A. Demographics and number of parishioners
 - B. Negative finances
 - C. Priest shortage
5. Bishop Lennon issued to us a letter dated May 28, 2007 with the following instructions to the Hungarian Cluster Planning and Coordinating (CPC) teams: "develop a plan to submit to Bishop Lennon for no more than one parish to meet language and religious needs within the next three years." His Excellency had assigned the Rev. Mr. Daniel Galla to act as coordinator and Rev. Gary M. Chmura as district delegate for our CPC team.
 - A. At our first meeting on July 24, 2007 the St. Elizabeth CPC committee declared that St. Elizabeth will remain open and will not decide on the fate of the other two parishes for the reason that they have a priest, they have solid finances and they have parishioners. The representatives of the other two cluster member parishes also declared the same. St. Emeric further added that there is an active youth program at St. Emeric, namely the scouts and the Hungarian school. The general feeling was that all three parishes meet the criteria for being a vibrant parish.
 - B. This initial response to the plan permeated the subsequent meetings as well and developed into a deadlocked situation.

C. The Hungarian Cluster CPC team held their second meeting on September 5, 2007 at St. Elizabeth of Hungary. Rev. Chmura was also present. The CPC team explained to Rev. Chmura that the CPC team is deadlocked on the issue of merger and suppression because::

- (1) all three parishes have parishioners
- (2) all three parishes have solid finances
- (3) all three parishes have a priest
- (4) the reality of the large distances that parishioners would have to travel to reach any of the churches was one of them selected to remain open

The CPC team then felt that the closing criteria would not apply in the case of our Cluster.

D. Further meetings were held by the CPC team under Rev. Mr. Galla's guidance. Various ideas were shared on how to make the life of the parishes more vibrant and what steps should be taken to spread the Gospel. All three parishes felt that each would be able to continue in existence without being a burden on the Diocese. Rev. Mr. Galla summarized the result of the previous meetings during the second to the last meeting in October 2008 which summary was included in our Cluster Response dated November 15, 2008. We realize that this response from our Cluster was not the one His Excellency may have expected, but that was what the three member parishes of the Cluster accepted unanimously.

6. When "no religion" in the Diocese, currently at 15%, is on the rise from 8.2% in 1990, and when all Christians declined to 70% from 86% in 1990, the act of closing our parish along with others, temporarily easing the symptoms and not curing the cause, appears to imply that the parishes suppressed or merged are the primary reason for the decline mentioned above and that their elimination will be the cure.
7. Bishop Lennon's perception and conclusion that St. Elizabeth Parish is the center of the Greater Cleveland Hungarian community are not correct. While it is true that along an imaginary straight line connecting St. Emeric and St. Margaret, St. Elizabeth is the closest to the line's midpoint. It is, however, by no means "centrally located" in the realistic and practical sense. At this time, only St. Emeric **in the center of the city** is easily accessible by four highways and by public transportation.
8. We understand that His Excellency is not asking Hungarian-Americans to do something different from parishes of similar size. Yet Bishop Lennon decreed that five out of six parishes with American-Hungarian heritage be suppressed in the Cleveland Diocese. St. Emeric Parish was declared a "personal" parish by the Diocese decades ago in accord with the norm of Canon 518. Since it is not territorial, the outreach and evangelization by St. Emeric Parish have been, by the reason of the rite, language and nationality of the American-Hungarian community of the Diocese of Cleveland in full accord with the norm of the Canon cited above. This resulted in a vibrant parish life as described in our Cluster Response of November 15, 2008. This life is evident not only on Saturdays and Sundays but throughout the week on Monday and Tuesday nights, some Wednesday evenings, as well as Friday nights. The suppression of St. Emeric Parish will put an end to this vibrant life and will effectively terminate these Hungarian-American outreach, evangelization efforts and along with that our youth and cultural activities.
9. The suppressing of St. Emeric Parish will cause irreparable collateral damage to several vital youth activities centered around the church. It will inflict irreparable harm on the Hungarian Scouts in the Greater Cleveland area. There are about 250 registered Hungarian Scouts in the greater Cleveland

area that over the years has clustered around St. Emeric Parish. About half are under the age of 25. The boys moved to and have met at St. Emeric since the 1960's, the girls since the 1990's. All East side scouts moved to St. Emeric in the early 1990's.

- A. In 1990, the American Hungarian Friends of Scouting (AHFS), the sponsoring organization for the scout troops leased from the Diocese an abandoned building situated on the St. Emeric site and spent about 5,000 donated man hours and about \$100,000 to turn an old 4,200 sq./ft. milk warehouse on the St. Emeric/Diocese property into the Hungarian Scout Center.
 - B. The American Hungarian Friends of Scouting completely maintains this 4,200 sq. ft. **Hungarian Scout Center.** The Center is not large enough to house the Friday night scout meetings and the Monday night Hungarian School (about 100 students). For these events the old St. Emeric School classrooms and Church hall are also used at the same time. The Folk Ensemble makes use of the Center every Tuesday night. The AHFS meets on Wednesday nights.
 - C. Often all these groups take part with the parish pastor for various religious activities with discussions, prayer and Mass. Sunday Masses are attended by these youth groups, and its members partake in the liturgy as altar servers, readers and choir members. All these programs and activities take place in the Hungarian language. A large majority of the youth groups are Catholic, and non-Catholics willingly and happily participate.
 - D. Nearly 100% of these young members and their families will not move to the once abandoned Buckeye Road area to continue their affiliation with a Hungarian Catholic Church. The area is not safe and the facilities are nonexistent for what is needed.
 - E. We are in danger of losing the Hungarian youth and their ties to the Catholic Church, practicing their faith in their mother tongue, by closing St. Emeric Parish. If St. Emeric remains open, the future and vibrancy of the Church are very bright for the long term, many decades, with the continued participation of the youth. The other Hungarian parishes just do not have these facilities.
- 10. We all agree with His Excellency that St. Elizabeth Parish would welcome with open hearts the members of St. Emeric and St. Margaret Parishes thanks to the close traditional, physical and spiritual cooperation between St. Emeric Parish and St. Elizabeth of Hungary in the past. Demographics which emerged over the past four decades, however, resulted in the loss of Hungarian-Americans in the wide area in which St. Elizabeth is located. Furthermore, the crime rate around St. Elizabeth Church is significantly greater than around St. Emeric Church according to county records, causing concern among those who travel to St. Elizabeth Church.
 - 11. The loss of the two parishes Bishop Lennon decreed to be closed in the Cuyahoga County area of the Diocese is expected to smother the full potential of the spiritual life of many parishioners, young and elderly alike. We determined that this expectation will indeed be the case after talking heart-to-heart among our parishioners upon their hearing His Excellency's decision of March 12, 2009.
 - 12. Bishop Lennon declared that the criteria for his action were shortage of priests, negative finances and lack of parishioners. We relayed this to him many times through our Cluster coordinator and the District Delegate that in the Cluster's opinion the three parishes do not fit this prototype. This point

was made abundantly clear in our Cluster Response as well as it relates to St. Emeric Parish, yet His Excellency decreed to suppress St. Emeric Parish believed to have the higher number of parishioners and kept open the one in a high-crime area of the City.

13. His excellency also stated recently that 42% of the 224 parishes, namely 94 individual parishes in the Diocese lose money. He chose to close 29, including St. Emeric, and chose to merge 41 parishes. This merely adds up to 31 percent. St. Emeric Parish has never been a burden on the Diocese yet His Excellency suppressed this parish.
14. The evaluations and decisions leading to the decree ordering St. Emeric Parish to close were only minimally sensitive to the needs of the parishioners. Our parishioners come from places 10 to 40 miles away to attend Mass and other religious events. Many of the elderly of our parish are physically unable to take on the extra miles to St. Elizabeth. As St. Emeric Parish has vibrant youth programs on a weekly basis, and young parents with young children in our parish will refuse to go to that church which is difficult and potentially dangerous to reach in the well-known high crime area.
15. Our parishioners feel forsaken and bitter about the perception that the Diocese completely paid little attention to the recommendations presented to the Bishop through the prescribed process by the CPC committees upon the conclusion of the many cluster meetings. Through our CPC meetings, we consistently conveyed through Rev. Mr. Galla and Rev. Chmura that all three parishes have the, financial strength and stability, spiritual vitality and pastors/administrators dedicated to the parishioners to serve the Hungarian-American faithful who are separated by significant distances in the Diocese. That is why the CPC committee members of all three parishes decided to unanimously recommend to His Excellency that all three parishes remain open throughout our proceedings. The decision to close two out of three parishes in Greater Cleveland, five out of six in the Diocese, primarily attended by Hungarian-Americans has a horribly destructive consequence on the life and the soul of the community of Catholics of Hungarian origin even in the region beyond the limits of the Cleveland Diocese.
16. We ask that His Excellency evaluate the following compromise solutions in the spirit of Canon 1733.1:
 - A. We are aware of the Opportunity Corridor. The idea of such thoroughfare has been alive for the past 40 years, at one time it was named East-West Corridor. It took nearly 30 years to build I-490 which terminates at East 55 street. Whether the county will be able to pay \$500 million to continue this road, remains to be seen, as it would not occur before mid-2017 at best. Therefore, there will not be such a road for many years to improve access to the church Bishop Lennon decreed to remain open. The maps of the proposed routes of the Corridor indicate that St. Elizabeth of Hungary is in the road's direct path. We cannot therefore even be certain that St. Elizabeth will remain or will be subjected to an eminent domain, or would be saved because of its National Registry. Further investigation on this plan is required. The prospect of this thoroughfare, however, definitely promises a bypass around the high-crime areas surrounding St. Elizabeth of Hungary. We respectfully propose that the suppression of St. Emeric Parish be postponed until the Opportunity Corridor is opened and its access to St. Elizabeth of Hungary is accomplished. When that happens, we will realize His Excellency's vision of turning St. Elizabeth of Hungary into a vibrant parish serving not only the Hungarian-American community of the Diocese, but a wider group of the faithful who would indeed be proud to call St. Elizabeth their parish.

- B. While we await the completion of the Opportunity Corridor, St. Emeric Parish would like to open its church and facilities to be shared by members of our neighboring parish of St. Wendelin which Bishop Lennon decreed to be closed and which is currently merely one block away from St. Emeric. Through the graciousness of the City of Cleveland and the West Side Market, ample parking is available at St. Emeric Church at the time of the Sunday Masses and all evenings of the week. We will encourage the faithful of the former St. Wendelin Parish to feel at home and glorify God with us in the best way they can. We at St. Emeric are truly enthusiastic about this prospect. The St. Emeric Parish Cluster Committee had considered this possibility throughout the months of discussions leading up to our Cluster Plan, but we received information just before November of 2008 which indicated that St. Wendelin Parish will remain open. However, His Excellency's decree closed St. Wendelin Parish and we would like to reach out to the parishioners who lost their beloved parish and church.

- C. As an alternate to the suppression of St. Emeric parish, we are open to receiving His Excellency's suggestions for a compromise solution in the spirit of Canon 1733.1 which would permit us to remain active in the service for the glory of God.

The arguments presented herein are in support of our Petition to The Most Reverend Richard G. Lennon, Bishop of Cleveland, Ohio in which Petition we request His Excellency to review the presented arguments and to revoke or amend the decree to suppress St. Emeric parish of Cleveland, Ohio, or if possible, respectfully request His Excellency to suggest other alternatives to suppression. St. Emeric Parish prays that an alternative to its suppression be found under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

APPENDIX
CLUSTER RESPONSE - November 15, 2008
ST. EMERIC PARISH
PETITION
March 24, 2009