



NEWS RELEASE

DIOCESE OF ERIE

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12.1.2020

**The Diocese of Erie announces the Carmelite Order  
has closed the Holy Family Monastery in Erie**

The Carmelite Order has closed the Carmel of the Holy Family Monastery, located on East Gore Road in Erie, as of today. It was the only cloistered, contemplative community of women religious in the Diocese of Erie.

“This is not the outcome we had hoped for,” said the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie. “This truly is a great loss. We have been richly blessed by the prayers and presence of the Carmelites in our diocese.”

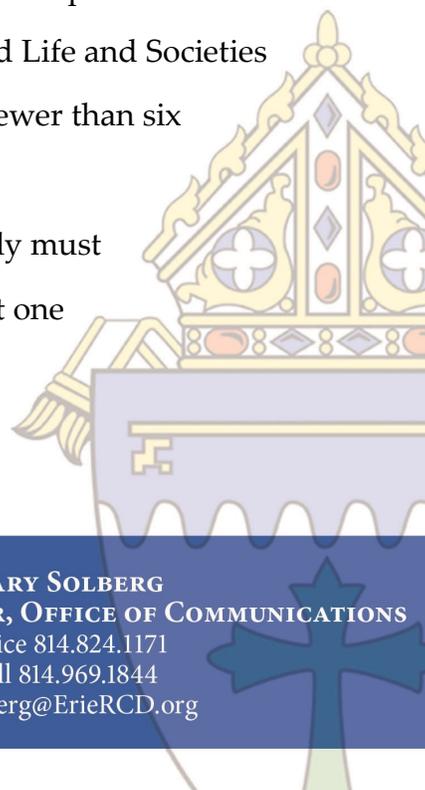
The closing comes in response to *Cor Orans*, new norms for contemplative communities published by the Vatican’s Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in 2018. The norms require that communities with fewer than six members either close or affiliate with a larger, viable community.

According to the norms, a healthy self-governing body not only must have at least six members to vote for leadership positions, but at least one

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sister must be devoted to vocation formation. Only three sisters were living at the Carmel of the Holy Family Monastery in recent months.

“We worked with the sisters to explore every possible avenue to keep the community here,” Bishop Persico said. “Over the last three years, on their behalf, I have contacted monasteries around the country to see if they might be willing to send sisters to strengthen the community in Erie.” Few monasteries are in a position to do so.

“It would not be fair to put other communities at risk in the name of bolstering our own,” the bishop said. He also noted that in the 63 years the Carmelites have been in the diocese, none of the sisters who entered the community came from the Diocese of Erie.

“It just underscores how important it is for all of us to pray for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life for the diocese,” he said. In recent years, the monastery — which still used a fax machine as a primary form of communication with the outside world — even launched a website in the hopes of raising awareness about vocations to the cloistered religious life and about their particular community.

News of the challenges faced by the nuns of the Holy Family Monastery was first reported in the April 2020 edition of *Faith* magazine, published by the Diocese of Erie. At that time, Bishop Persico announced he had pursued the option of having the community affiliate with another monastery.

“I want the Carmelite monastery to stay here,” Bishop Persico said at the time. “I think it is important to have the sisters praying for our diocese and the people here. Their ministry of prayer is very important to the life of our church in northwest Pennsylvania.” After consultation with the St. Joseph’s Association, to which the Erie monastery belongs, the Holy Family Monastery did affiliate with the Carmelite Monastery of Rochester, New York, in September 2019.

Since that time, one of the sisters chose to permanently relocate to the Rochester monastery, leaving just three nuns in the Diocese of Erie.

“Working with the community, it became clear that in order to live out the fullness of their unique vocations, the remaining sisters would need to make alternate decisions about their future,”

Bishop Persico said. As of today, each sister has arranged to move to a new community.

The Carmel of the Holy Family Monastery was established in 1957 at the invitation of Archbishop John Mark Gannon, who sought prayerful support for priests, seminarians and vocations to the priesthood as he prepared to build St. Mark Seminary. Led by Mother Mary of Jesus Crucified as the first prioress, six Carmelites arrived in Erie in February of that year, founding the monastery on the southeast corner of the future seminary property. The last member of the original six nuns, Mother Emmanuel of the Mother of God, passed away on April 9, 2016.

“I trust that each sister will continue to grow in her love of the Lord who has called her, even on this unexpected path,” said Bishop Persico. In addition, he noted that people may not be aware that Carmelite nuns depend completely on the generosity of people to support their contemplative lifestyle.

“The Monastery of the Holy Family was never in financial need, and I am deeply grateful to all who helped support them. It has been a grace-filled relationship based on faith, and we move forward in trust and gratitude for all that has been,” the bishop said. Any remaining resources of the monastery will be used to support the sisters in their new communities. The leadership of the St. Joseph’s Association and the community in Rochester will determine what to do with the property itself.

The final canonical action in the process of closing will occur when the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome issues the decree to suppress the monastery.

The monastery’s website will remain active until the end of the year. Read more about its history and the daily experiences of the community members at <https://www.eriecd.org/carmelites/> .

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