

St. Lucy Croatian Catholic Church Listening Session Statement

May 2026

Good morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Andrew and I am a lifelong parishioner of St. Lucy Croatian Catholic Church in Troy, a parish that has been the epicenter of the Croatian-American Catholic community in Michigan for over a century. As we gather to discern the future of our parishes, I wish to share our community's perspective and hopes, not in opposition, but in a spirit of collaboration and unwavering faith.

A Century of Faith

St. Lucy is not simply a building or administrative unit; St. Lucy is a people, a mission, and a living testament to faith that has endured through generations. Our story began in 1924 when Croatian immigrants in Detroit, driven by an unshakeable fidelity to the Lord, decided to establish a church where they could worship in their native language and preserve their Croatian heritage. St. Jerome Parish was established. Through God's providence, that small community grew and flourished, eventually moving to 8 Mile Rd. in 1955, and finally to its current home in Troy in 1996.

Through every relocation and challenge, the essence of our parish has remained constant: we are a close-knit, prayerful community of Croatian Catholics, united not by geography, but by our shared faith and heritage. Indeed, we have preserved relics dating back generations, from statues and altars, to the Stations of the Cross hanging in the sanctuary today. The church's name and physical location may have changed over the years, but its identity and mission have remained steadfast.

Croatian Catholics

Our heritage runs deeper than most realize. In 1519, Pope Leo X bestowed upon the Croatian people the sacred title *Antemurale Christianitatis*: the "Bulwark of Christendom." This august title was assigned in recognition of our ancestors' heroic defense of Christian Europe's frontiers against overwhelming odds, enduring merciless onslaughts from their would-be converters. For centuries, Croatian Catholics have stood as sentinels of the faith, surviving Ottoman oppression, Communist persecution, and countless trials, yet never wavering in their devotion to Christ and His Church.

This spirit of fidelity did not end with our ancestors. It crossed oceans with our grandparents and great-grandparents who came to Michigan and it lives on today in our parish. As Archbishop Vigneron himself proclaimed at our centennial Mass just over a year ago, our community represents a "great gift of fidelity" to the Church in Detroit. We are not merely preserving the past; we are living witnesses to a tradition of faith that has weathered every storm and emerged stronger.

Our Canonical Rights and Church Law

St. Lucy is what Church law calls a “personal parish,” established under Canon 518 specifically to serve the Croatian-speaking faithful. This is an official recognition by the Church that the spiritual needs of particular cultural and linguistic communities truly matter and deserve dedicated pastoral care.

Once established, a personal parish enjoys the same canonical status and protections as any territorial parish, yet maintains a high standard for suppression, merger, and similar moves. The primary question in determining St. Lucy’s future should not be how our membership stacks up against neighboring churches, but whether the specific community for whom the church was erected, the Croatian Catholics of southeast Michigan, still exists and needs a dedicated ministry.

The answer is unequivocally yes. We continue to celebrate Mass in Croatian, provide confession in our native language, and maintain the devotions and cultural traditions that connect our people to their faith. Our immediately preceding priest even went so far as to learn Croatian to better serve our community, which is a beautiful testament to his recognition that our mission remains vital.

Church law requires that any decision to suppress or merge a parish must be based on “just cause.” This means a legitimate, specific, and proportionate reason that makes the change truly necessary for the good of souls. Closing a church building requires an even higher standard: “grave cause.” According to the Vatican, factors like declining numbers, priest shortages, or general diocesan reorganization plans do not, by themselves, constitute sufficient cause for closure.

Financial Strength

There are no reasonable concerns about St. Lucy’s financial viability. St. Lucy is not a burden on the Archdiocese; to the contrary, we are a blessing. We carry no debt. We operate with balanced budgets and some months with a surplus. Our building, built in 1996, is in excellent condition and needs only routine maintenance, which we can readily afford.

Most significantly, we have recently received a transformational bequest of over \$2 million specifically designated to ensure our parish’s future. This gift is a major vote of confidence in St. Lucy’s mission from someone who was a prime example of the necessity of St. Lucy’s presence.

Our Continuing Mission

The question is not whether St. Lucy can survive. Like our ancestors before us, we can and we will. The question is whether the Archdiocese of Detroit will continue to embrace the rich diversity that makes our local Church so vibrant. We serve Croatian Catholics from across the entire region: from Downriver to Ann Arbor, from Oakland County to the east side. We are the only Croatian Catholic parish in the state of Michigan.

If St. Lucy were to close (or exist as a building without masses), where would our elderly parishioners, who have confessed and worshipped in Croatian their entire lives, turn for spiritual

comfort? What would happen to the young families who find in our parish a tangible connection to their heritage and faith?

We do not compete with our territorial sister parishes. We complement them. We offer something unique that they cannot provide: a cultural and linguistic bridge that keeps people connected to the Church who might otherwise drift away.

The Need for Accurate Information in Order to Make Just Decisions

We understand that difficult decisions lie ahead. But difficult decisions still must be just decisions. They have to be based on accurate information. They have to respect the particular character of a parish. And they have to consider not only what might be closed, merged, or reduced, but what might be renewed.

On that point, I must raise a serious concern. The planning packet shows zero baptisms, marriages, and funerals for the year 2024, which we know to be false. It is simply not accurate. That gives a false impression of a parish with no sacramental activity and no living future. That matters because decisions built on incorrect data risk becoming incorrect decisions.

There is another concern that weighs heavily on many of us. St. Lucy's has a unique role as a Croatian personal and ethnic parish. A Croatian-speaking priest is not a luxury for such a parish. He is key to its mission. We have successfully identified a Croatian-speaking priest, who also speaks English, and who would be happy to come and serve here. Yet, as we understand it, that opportunity was not allowed to move forward.

I want to say this carefully and respectfully: when a parish's identity depends in part on language, culture, and pastoral continuity, denying such an opportunity feels deeply troubling. It gives the impression that the parish is being purposely relegated to decline while a realistic path toward renewal is being left unused. That is hard for the faithful to accept.

If the concern is that St. Lucy's lacks vitality, then let us use the tools to regain our vitality. If the concern is pastoral service, then let us welcome a priest who can provide it. If the concern is numbers, then let us begin with accurate numbers. If the concern is sustainability, then let us have a fair and transparent conversation about what sustainability to propose.

Our Humble Request

We do not ask for special treatment or exemption from the challenges facing our entire Archdiocese. We understand the need for creative solutions and collaborative ministry. We stand ready to work in partnership with our neighbors and the archdiocese as a whole, just as the Croatian people have stood for and protected Catholicism for centuries, even when doing so meant staring down the Ottomans at their cultural and military zenith.

What we ask for is what Church law itself demands: that any decision about our future be made with full knowledge and good faith consideration of our unique circumstances, our canonical

protections, and our continuing pastoral mission. We ask that the process be transparent, that we be heard, and that alternatives to closure, or any other maneuver that even resembles closure, be genuinely explored.

Thank you for your time. May the Holy Spirit guide this process with wisdom and charity so that God's will may be done for the sustenance and protection of souls.

Respectfully submitted,

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