

Merger FAQ—February 23, 2020

Why does my parish have to merge?

Who hasn't asked the question, "Do I have to?" Sometimes we truly don't. Sometimes it is a genuine necessity. Sometimes it is just in our best interests. On the one hand, since we are a sacramental Church whose whole existence is centered on the Eucharist, it is necessary that we merge to maintain this core of our faith and worship. There are fewer priests and the numbers will continue to diminish. It is necessary to merge to ensure that the Eucharist is available in all areas of the six counties that make up the Diocese of Pittsburgh. But beyond this necessity, it truly is in our best interests to merge if we want to thrive as communities of faith, worship and service and not merely survive. By combining our resources we are "Better Together." This is more than a tag line; it is a reality when music ministry, liturgical ministers, faith formation opportunities, and service projects are united. Further, we are better stewards of the resources entrusted to us by God for the mission of Christ when we choose to come together as one parish.

Will any of the churches close when we merge?

At present, there are no plans to close any church building. As long as the number of people coming for Mass continues (or even grows!) and as long as parishioners respond generously in supporting the annual operating budget and the capital needs of the four church buildings, there is no need, nor is there any clear benefit, to close a church at this time. One cautionary note regarding adequate funds—our parishes recently had to use savings to meet annual operating expenses. This is an unsustainable practice.

What happens to each individual parish's funds?

All of the assets and liabilities of the four parishes will belong to the new parish. By church law, none of the assets, whether in the checking account or in savings, can be taken by the Diocese or anyone else.

What about the monies collected as part of the Campaign for the Church Alive?

All of the monies collected for the *Campaign for the Church Alive!* were restricted for use in accord with the case statements of each parish. Some projects have been completed and the funds expended. However, all four parishes have remaining funds and unfinished case statement projects and programs. Father Rushofsky has pledged that, *to the extent possible*, he will honor the existing case statements. However, he faces constraints. Some of the cost estimates submitted with the case statements were too low. There are not adequate funds for everything. Further, the needs of the new parish must be considered. Any changes would have to be approved by the Finance Council and the Diocese.

Merger FAQ—March 1, 2020

I understand that the merged parish will have a new name. What happens to the names of the church buildings?

Every church must have a *title*, which is typically given when the church building is consecrated/dedicated or blessed. There may be only one title for a church. Ordinarily, the title of a church that has been formally dedicated by the bishop (as distinct from being blessed) cannot change. So our four churches will retain their titles when the parishes merge and the parish receives a new name. Further, in liturgical calendar, the celebration of the title of a church is considered to be a solemnity. The Church permits a parish to observe the solemnity of the title of its church on the Sundays in Ordinary Time when those observances fall during the week.

“ Saint Athanasius—May 2

“ Incarnation—March 25 (*The Incarnation is when the Word became flesh at the time of the Annunciation as opposed to December 25th which observes the Nativity of the Lord.*)

“ Saint Sebastian—January 20

“ Saint Teresa of Avila—October 15

What will happen to the parish offices?

Parish administration will merge into a single operation. Father Rushofsky’s desire is to have all parish offices in a single location by July 1st. Plans are underway to retrofit the school building at Saint Teresa into a pastoral center. This is where parishioners will come to request a sponsor certificate, to request a Mass intention, to schedule a baptism, etc. Ultimately, there will be a single phone number for the parish. Until parishioners get used to dialing the new number, calls to the former parish numbers will be forwarded to the new office.

What will happen to the various ministries and organizations?

Many ministries and organizations have already merged such as the music ministries. Still others are in the process of coming together. Ultimately, all parish ministries and organizations will unite under the new parish, though for practical reasons there may continue to be multiple opportunities for some activities. For instance, Saint Paul of the Cross could not accommodate all the men from the merged parish on a single weekend. Regardless, all activity will be sponsored by the new parish.

What will happen to the Pastoral and Finance Councils?

The Pastoral Council has already merged and operates as one council for all four parishes in the grouping. This is an interim Council and will continue as such for a while until the new parish has settled in. For reasons of Church law, there are still four separate Finance Councils. After the merger, there will be a single Finance Council to advise the pastor on the temporal affairs of the parish.

Merge FAQ—March 8, 2020

Will parishioners receive new offertory envelopes for July 2020?

The four parishes are working with assistance from diocesan staff to merge as many administrative and financial functions as possible by July 1st. This includes creating a single checking account, merging parishioner databases and having envelopes provided with the new parish's name.

What will happen to excess funds collected through the Parish Share campaign?

Parish Share is a 10-month campaign designed by the Diocese of Pittsburgh and implemented by parishes to support our diocesan bishop and his distinctive ministry. The campaign allows parishes to keep all funds that are raised in excess of the campaign goal set by the Diocese. 2020 will be an unusual situation. Because the kickoff of the campaign occurs on February 23rd, there will be four goals, one for each parish. When the parishes merge in July, those goals will be combined. Funds collected in excess of the combined goal will still belong to the new parish. The new parish finance council will work with Father Rushofsky to determine the best use of those excess funds, such as meeting shortfalls in operating income, funding capital improvements projects and/or strengthening the long-term savings of the parish for future needs.

How many festivals and flea markets will the new parish sponsor?

Planning for the festivals and flea markets must begin up to ten months in advance of the events. Father Rushofsky has approved the traditional practice of two festivals and two flea markets. The first will be in June before the merger and will be sponsored by and located at Saint Athanasius. The second will be in August and will be sponsored by the new parish and will occur on the grounds at Saint Teresa. Even though the June festival and flea market will occur before the merger, for all practical purposes, the net proceeds of these events will be managed by the new parish in accord with the counsel provided by the new parish Finance Council.

How will priorities be established for using capital maintenance and improvement funds?

It is important to note that we are **not** establishing a “mother” church with three “chapels” of lesser importance. All four churches have the same standing and so each physical plant will receive the needed care. Priorities will be established based on the urgency of the need and the availability of resources. There may be times when there are competing priorities with insufficient funds to meet all of the needs. The new parish Finance Council will be charged with advising Father Rushofsky on how best to respond to such a situation.