

Responses to Questions from the March 15 Parish Meetings

On March 15, there were three parish information meetings regarding the Pastoral Council's recommendation that we become one canonical parish with three churches (worship sites). It was noted that in the Diocese of Portland there are 30 clusters. Of those 30 clusters, 16 clusters are now one canonical parish. For example, Cluster 3 in Aroostook County is one canonical parish (The Parish of the Precious Blood) with three priests and 10 worship sites. Six of these clusters have two canonical parishes, 7 have 3 canonical parishes and 1 cluster (the parishes of the Portland Peninsula) has 5 canonical parishes.

Following are questions that were raised in the information meetings:

How will the Pastoral Council be formed?

The Pastoral Council will consist of three parishioners from each worship site.

How many cost centers will we have?

Instead of having four sets of books, one for St. Bartholomew, one for St. John and Holy Cross, one for St. Maximilian Kolbe and one for Holy Cross School, we will have two sets of books. One set of books will be for Holy Cross School, the other for our merged parish.

Will Holy Cross School keep its name?

Holy Cross has over 75 years of history. Since the school is not merging with another school, there is no reason or plan to change the name of the school.

Will we go to one rectory?

We have no plan to go to one rectory. Bishop Deeley is cautious about selling any properties in our diocese as they will be difficult to regain if we need them in the future.

Will our Faith Formation and Worship and Spirituality programming be affected by becoming one parish?

Our Mass schedule will not change because of becoming one parish. We will still be holding Faith Formation classes, Small Faith Sharing Groups and Adult Faith Formation programming at all three churches. When it comes to larger gatherings, we will look at our facilities and hold events based on the assets of the building. For the most part, the average parishioner will not see any changes in the services or operation of the church.

How will the assets be merged? Will there be any separate accounts for each church?

At some parishes, they combined all savings under the new parish. This will be a decision that the pastor and the new Finance Council will decide under the guidance of Canon Law. All money going forward will be pooled. Donations designated for specific needs or worship sites would be used accordingly.

What are the finances in each of our parishes?

We recently presented financial details at each of the masses. Our three parishes are financially stable. We have no debt in any of our parishes at this time.

Will anyone lose their jobs?

No one will lose their jobs with this merger. As people have retired and resigned, duties have been reallocated. We currently have two job openings for staffing and we would love to see them filled.

Why didn't we do this before?

When clustering was first introduced to the diocese in 2005, St. Maximilian Kolbe had a mortgage and Holy Cross Church had debt from their renovations. It was decided that the other parishes couldn't take on that debt, so we remained four parishes (St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. John the Evangelist, St. Bartholomew and Holy Cross). It was mentioned at one of the information meetings that the original planning group favored the model of one canonical parish, but realized that would not be realistic until the debt issues were resolved.

In 2013, St. John the Evangelist and Holy Cross merged into one parish with the name St. John and Holy Cross.

In 2019, the finance councils started to ask the question of why we aren't one parish with a focus on simplifying the administrative costs. The pastor and parochial vicar are already shared between the three communities. Faith Formation and Sacramental Preparation had already merged the larger programming with programming still happening in each church. The only things that are not shared at this time are the financial accounts and a name.

Many parishioners have complained that we have taken on the name Cluster 22. In order to take a spiritual name for our cluster, we will have to merge into one parish. We, the parishioners will have input in that name.

How much time did it take for the pastoral council to decide what they would present to Msgr Stefanko?

The Pastoral Council originally engaged with the Finance Councils in October 2019 to understand their perspective on forming one canonical parish. In January the Finance Councils joined the Pastoral Council for a full discussion of the topic, with the Finance Councils requesting that the Pastoral Council move the discussion forward. On February 13, 2019, the Pastoral Council met with Fr. John Skehan to discuss the different models and learn about experiences in other clusters where Fr. Skehan had participated in the process. On February 16, 2019, the Pastoral Council met to discuss the Pro's/Con's of the different models. On March 1, 2019, the Pastoral Council met to discuss the different models and determine if we were going to make a recommendation to Msgr. Paul to move forward with a communication to the parishioners. This recommendation would include one canonical parish with three churches (worship sites). Thus there were 3 informational meetings, one discussion on the pros/cons and one meeting to form a recommendation. In addition to these meetings there were a number of email conversations with participation from the membership of Pastoral and Finance Councils.

What happens next?

The first step is to write this document to make sure the larger parishes are well informed of the direction we are taking.

By Easter, we will be asking parishioners for their suggestions for names of our new parish. Each church will maintain the name under which it has been dedicated, but our merged parish will have its own name. We will collect the names and then present them back to the parishioners for them to select their top five. These names will be submitted along with Msgr. Stefanko's request to the bishop's office to become one parish.

Msgr. Stefanko will present the recommendation to become one parish to the Council of Priests and College of Consultors who will then give their recommendation to Bishop Deeley.

Bishop Deeley will then make the decision of whether we become one parish and will choose the name the new parish.