



## **TARGETED RESTRUCTURING OF PARISHES IN PHASE 3** **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)**

### **1. Now that Bishop Hicks has rendered his decision, what are the next steps? How will the Diocese assist parishes in making the transition to new parishes?**

Initially, all pastors in the restructured parishes will be asked to create Parish Transition Teams consisting of 3-6 people who will assist the pastors and represent their respective parishes in the transition process. Pastors may nominate deacons, staff members, parish council/finance members, former Key Parish Leaders from Targeted Restructuring discussions, and/or other parishioners. After the transition teams are in place, the Diocese will assist restructured parishes in several ways. First, the Diocesan Finance Office will work with current business managers to make all the necessary financial and business-related transitions from their current parishes to the new parishes. Second, the Human Resources Department will assist in determining staff needs for the new parishes. Third, the Department of Catechesis and Evangelization will be available to work with the new pastors and Parish Transition Teams in combining all areas of ministry, Religious Education, and the merging of parish traditions, sacred objects, etc.. Fourth, the Legal Department will assist in the transition or impact on contracts for goods and services and leases. The Diocese has established the following timeline:

#### **February**

- a. Current pastors nominate 3-6 parishioners for Parish Transition Teams.
- b. Initial meeting of Diocesan leaders with pastors and business managers from merging parishes to begin planning business and practical matters for transition.

#### **March**

- a. Parish Transition Teams begin planning the merger of existing parish ministries, mass times, RE, sacred objects, etc. and healing/unity events with the assistance of the Department of Catechesis and Evangelization
- b. Diocesan Finance Office continues to meet with business managers to discuss business-related matters and budgeting for FY 2026.
- c. Diocesan leadership and support functions continue to meet with pastors, business managers and Parish Transition Teams for purposes of planning, support and communication efforts.

#### **April – June**

- a. Parish Transition Teams, with new pastors once assigned, continue planning the merger of existing parish ministries, mass times, RE, sacred objects, etc. and healing/unity events with the assistance of the Department of Catechesis and Evangelization

- b. Diocesan Finance Office continues to meet with business managers to finalize all business-related matters, budgets and staffing for new parishes.
- c. Diocesan leadership and support functions continue to communicate with pastors, business managers, and Parish Transition Teams for planning, support and communication efforts.

July-December

- a. Ongoing diocesan support as needed.

2. **What is the Code of Canon Law and why is it important?**

The Code of Canon Law is the body of law that governs the Church. It is important because Canon Law sets forth the procedural guidelines that must be followed by the Bishop and the Diocese in making a decision to merge, amalgamate, or close parishes and church buildings. The terms “canonical” and “canonically” refer to proper adherence to the Code of Canon Law.

3. **What is a parish?**

A parish is a certain community of Catholic faithful established within a particular church.

4. **What is a church?**

A church is a building consecrated for the purpose of worship.

5. **What is an extinguished parish?**

An extinguished parish is one that is suppressed by decree of the diocesan bishop.

6. **What is an amalgamated parish?**

An amalgamation is when one parish is extinguished and then subsumed by an existing parish. In this case, the parishioners of the extinguished parish will join the existing parish. In many amalgamations, the church buildings of the extinguished parish will continue to be used as a worship site where the sacraments will continue to be provided.

7. **What is a merged parish?**

A merger is when two parishes are extinguished, and they are established as a new parish. In this case, parishioners of the two extinguished parishes will become parishioners of the newly established parish. One church building will become the designated parish church and the other church building will be a worship site where the sacraments will continue to be provided.

8. **What is a designated parish?**

A designated parish is the remaining parish in an amalgamation and the appointed parish church in a merger (aka “new parish”).

9. **What is a territorial parish?**

A territorial parish is the parish where some Catholic faithful are canonically assigned because they live in its geographic territory.

**10. What is a worship site?**

A worship site is a church building of an extinguished parish which is used by a parish for Masses and other sacraments.

**11. What is the Presbyteral Council?**

The Presbyteral Council is the canonical consultative body comprised of priests serving in the Diocese. The Bishop is required to consult with the Presbyteral Council and obtain their consent when making decisions involving the modification of parishes.

**12. How will the pastors of the new parishes be selected and when will the pastors of the new parishes be announced?**

Priest assignments are handled by the Episcopal Vicar for Priests and the Priest Personnel Board. All open pastorates in the Diocese will be posted for the discernment of any priest interested. The Priest Personnel Board meets and discusses the candidates. This process typically begins in February and concludes in April. Bishop Hicks has final approval on all pastor appointments.

**13. What will happen to the current pastors and parochial vicars assigned to the restructured parishes?**

Current pastors whose parishes are closing will be assigned to other parishes on or about July 1, 2025. The same process described in Answer No. 6 will take place.

**14. When will changes start to take place at the restructured parishes?**

No changes will occur until the pastors of the new parishes are announced. At that time, the new pastors will be asked to work with the current pastors to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. In addition, the Parish Transition Teams described in Answer No. 1 will work with both pastors on such matters as mass times, sacraments, Religious Education, sacred objects, parish ministries, parish administrative issues, business matters, etc. However, no changes will be implemented until the effective date of new pastor's assignment on or about July 1, 2025.

**15. What will happen to the deacons at the restructured parishes? Will they be assigned to the new parishes?**

Current deacons may be assigned to the new parishes. The Diocesan Office of the Diaconate is responsible for the assignment of deacons to parishes.

**16. What will happen to the staff members at the restructured parishes?**

All staff positions at the new parishes will be posted as open positions by the diocesan Director of Human Resources. Due to the size of the new parishes, it is hoped most staff members will become part of the staff of the new parish should they choose to

apply. Staffing decisions will be made by the new pastor with the assistance of the diocesan Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources will assist current staff members who are not hired at the new parishes in finding positions at other parishes in the Diocese.

**17. What will be the names of the new parishes?**

For an ‘amalgamated’ parish, meaning one parish has been subsumed by another parish, the receiving parish name will be the name of the parish, but worship sites may retain the name of their church building. For a ‘merged’ parish, the temporary name of the new parish will be the combination of the existing parishes’ names. After the new parish is in existence, the pastors and parishioners will choose a new name for the parish, as required by canon law.

**18. Will the names of the church buildings be changed?**

The new pastors will be responsible for making these decisions. However, since most, if not all, of the names on the church buildings are etched or carved, it is unlikely these will be removed or changed.

**19. How will parishioners be affected by restructuring decisions?**

Sunday and daily mass times at the new parishes may be different than current schedules. Parishioners’ registrations and records will be transferred to the designated parish. Additionally, the restructuring may impact the location where parishioners worship and ministries they are involved in, but restructured communities will bring an array of opportunities for new relationships, outreaches, and opportunities to serve.

**20. What happens to the savings on deposit at the Diocese and in the operating accounts of the parishes?**

The savings and operating accounts of the merged or amalgamated parishes will become the property of the designated parish. These accounts will be combined on or about July 1, 2025. The pastors may choose to continue to designate the funds of the extinguished parish for the care of the facilities and ministries of that worship site.

**21. What happens to the debt owed by the restructured parishes?**

A parish may have diocesan debt and/or third-party debt. Third-party debt includes long-term equipment leases and other contractual debt. Third-party debts will be assumed by the new parishes as they are contractual and must be paid. The terms of debt repayment to the Diocese will be discussed by the new pastor with the Diocesan Finance Office.

**22. How will Mass times of the new parishes be determined?**

The new pastor will consult with the Parish Transition Teams to create the daily and Sunday mass schedules for the new parishes, as well as times for Reconciliation. Masses will be celebrated at both worship sites of the new parishes.

**23. How will the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation at the churches that are closing be handled?**

Baptisms may continue to take place at current parishes until June 30, 2025. Parishes that will be closed should not schedule any baptisms to be held after June 30, 2025. Reconciliation should continue as normally scheduled until June 30, 2025. First Communion and Confirmations will take place as scheduled at churches that are closing until June 30, 2025.

**24. How will scheduled weddings at the churches that are closing be handled?**

Weddings may continue to be celebrated as scheduled through June 30, 2025. Parishes should immediately contact engaged couples whose weddings are scheduled after June 30, 2025 and advise them of the church closures and provide alternative sites for the wedding ceremony. Weddings may continue to be held and may be scheduled at sites which are designated to become worship sites as of July 1. The new pastors and Parish Transition Teams will coordinate and accommodate weddings at the new parishes.

**25. Will the Religious Education programs at the amalgamated and merged parishes be combined into one program at the new parishes? What will happen with current DREs and catechists?**

This decision will be the responsibility of the new pastors and DRE with the assistance of the Diocesan Department of Catechesis and Evangelization. Current DREs may apply for the DRE position(s) at the new parishes. Since the new programs will be larger than the current Religious Education programs, additional volunteer catechists will be needed to staff the new programs. The new DRE will be responsible for staffing the new programs.

**26. Will the ministries of the merging parishes be combined at the new parishes?**

These decisions may vary by location and type of ministry. The new pastors and Parish Transition Teams will oversee this process with the assistance of the Diocesan Department of Catechesis and Evangelization.

**27. Will current volunteer ministers such as Eucharistic Ministers, lectors, cantors, musicians, ushers, greeters, counters, etc. be able to serve in these ministries at the new parishes?**

Current volunteer ministers will be needed at the new parishes. The new pastors and Parish Transition Teams will oversee this process with the assistance of the Diocesan Department of Catechesis and Evangelization.

**28. Who is responsible for the maintenance needs of the restructured parishes?**

The new parish will be responsible for maintaining all former parish campuses unless and until they are sold.

**29. Each parish has its own traditions. How will these traditions be preserved at the new parishes?**

The new pastors and Parish Transition Teams will consider the traditions and make thoughtful decisions about the traditions with the assistance of the Diocesan Department of Catechesis and Evangelization.

**30. What will happen to the sacramental records of the restructured parishes?**

Sacramental records from amalgamated or merged parishes will be transferred to the designated church building of the new parish (or to the Diocesan Archives, depending on the available space). Sacramental records from closed church buildings parishes will be transferred to the Diocesan Archives.

**31. What will happen to the statues, Stations of the Cross, and other sacred objects in the church buildings of the restructured parishes?**

The new parishes are encouraged to incorporate statues and other sacred objects from the closed churches into the new parish churches and worship sites. These decisions are ultimately the responsibility of the new pastors. Any sacred objects not absorbed by the new parish will be inventoried, recorded and stored in the Diocesan Archives.

**32. What will happen to the territories of the amalgamated and merged restructured parishes?**

The existing territories of affected restructured territorial parishes will be assigned to the new parishes.

**33. What will happen to other personal property (non-sacred objects) located in the restructured parishes?**

All non-sacred personal property in amalgamated and merged parishes will become the property of the new parishes. Any excess property will be inventoried and offered to other parishes and schools and, if not needed or claimed, the property will either be sold or discarded.

**34. When a parish is extinguished what happens to its church building?**

The church building may be used as a secondary worship site under the new parish name.

**35. When a parish is extinguished, can its other buildings be used by the new parish?**

The new pastors are responsible for determining which, if any, buildings will be utilized and how they will be utilized.

**36. When a parish is extinguished and the church will eventually close, what happens to the church building?**

It will be reduced to profane but not sordid use (removal of the sacred nature of the church building) and no more sacred rites can take place thereafter.

**37. Will the closed churches be insured?**

All diocesan owned real estate has comprehensive insurance coverage through Catholic Mutual Group.

**38. When will the final masses be celebrated at the closing churches?**

The new pastors will be responsible for planning the final masses at the parishes whose church building will be closed.

**39. Does the Diocese have plans to sell any of the real property of the closed churches?**

Plans for closed sites have not yet been determined by the Diocese. Pastors of the new parishes, along with their business managers, should discuss plans for closed sites with the Diocese.