

The Elmira Catholic Parishes Blessed Sacrament, Christ the Redeemer, St. Mary's

Questions and Answers regarding the Process of Merging Parishes May 2017

The planning team presented some basic information about the process of merging parishes at the 3/27/17 parishioner meetings. What follows is more complete information and responses to questions asked orally or through the response forms.

Why did the planning team recommend to Bishop Matano that he appoint a Pastor and Parochial Vicar to serve the Elmira Catholic Community and that Blessed Sacrament, Christ the Redeemer and St. Mary's cluster this coming June when Fr. John DeSocio moves to Senior Priest status?

After considering various options and receiving input from the parish pastoral and finance councils, the planning team made this recommendation based on the following: 1) Moving in this direction seemed natural since it builds on the significant current sharing of ministries and staff positions; 2) One pastor would mean one leader making decisions regarding staffing, buildings and finances; 3) With only one pastor rather than two, there would be more efficiency in tending to administrative functions with more of the priests' time devoted to ministry; 4) Because a merger process can take up to 18 months, there would be time for people to adjust to changes; 5) The current financial burden is too great to stay as separate corporations or to merge just two parishes.

What does it mean to merge our parishes into one? What changes? How is being a single parish different from being three parishes joined in a cluster?

A parish is a community of the Christian faithful under church law; each parish is a separate corporation under civil law. Under both church and civil law three distinct entities are merged to create a new one. There is a new parish rather than the previous three; the three corporations are merged into one. Probably the only visible change for most parishioners is that the new parish will have a new name. In addition, there will be one set of sacramental records rather than the current three and one set of financial records and accounts. The new civil corporation will have two lay trustees selected by the Pastor.

What are the main benefits of becoming a single parish?

The Bishop looks for pastoral advantages in deciding whether to merge clustered parishes into a new parish. That is, has the relationship between the parishes grown in commitment, love and respect for the unique gifts of each so that the mission entrusted to us by Jesus is enhanced by unity? There is strength in numbers and in uniting the unique characteristics of each of the communities.

What are the drawbacks?

The drawbacks are generally more related to perception than to actuality, since the same Pastor is making decisions whether the parishes are clustered or merged. There can be a feeling of loss of local control since three corporations—each with its own financial records and its own two lay trustees—are reduced to one.

If we become a single parish, does that mean I'm no longer a member of Blessed Sacrament, Christ the Redeemer or St. Mary's?

Yes, you would then be a member of the new parish. The three previous parishes would cease to exist. The churches of Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Casimir, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Mary's, St. Patrick and Ss. Peter and Paul will keep their names.

What process will be followed and what is the timeline?

Church (Canonical) Process	Proposed Timeline
Education of parishioners and opportunity for parishioners to give input	Parishioner meetings – March 27, 2017 This bulletin insert – May Opportunity for giving additional input – May
Pastor(s) consult with pastoral councils and finance councils	Current pastoral councils – June meetings Finance councils – June/July/August New transitional pastoral council – Aug./Sept.
Pastor may petition Bishop Matano to merge the 3 parishes	August/September
Bishop considers the petition and seeks the opinion of the Presbyteral Council	November
If it is advantageous to the mission of the Church in Elmira, the Bishop issues a decree calling for the merger	November
Civil Process	Proposed Timeline
Legal counsel drafts documents and the diocesan Chancellor forwards them to the Pastor with instructions; the Pastor and the Trustees of each parish meet and pass resolutions; a petition is submitted to the appropriate court; the court issues an order which is filed with the County Clerk; a variety of notifications to federal, state and local authorities are made	Usually takes about 6 months

Who will name the new parish? Will we parishioners have any input?

The pastor with parish leadership and parishioners at large will generate a list of desirable names which meet the criteria set forth in canon law. The list will be whittled down to five and submitted to the Bishop, along with a statement describing why each name is included on the list. Bishop Matano will choose a name from among the five submitted and notify the Pastor.

What will happen to the financial assets of each individual parish?

These will be combined into a single set of savings accounts, investments, etc. belonging to the merged parish.

When money comes into the new parish from each worship site, will it be used only for that worship site?

No, there will be a single budget and system of accounts. Perhaps our situation can best be compared to what happens typically when two individuals marry and combine their financial resources as they begin one shared life together.

If a particular site needs a major repair or project undertaken, where does the money to fund that project come from?

That money comes from the assets of the new, single parish. When the budget is created each year, decisions will be made about which capital projects will be undertaken and priorities will be determined. If there are unanticipated emergencies, decisions will be made by the Pastor in conversation with staff members, the financial council, and any appropriate others.

What happens to bequests (past and future) left to one of the previous parishes?

Donors' wishes are always honored. Unrestricted bequests will continue to benefit the parish.

Why is St. Mary Our Mother not part of this configuration?

Our own three parishes are already quite large and complex with over 4000 households including more than 9000 baptized Catholics. We have already combined many ministries and have a large number of shared staff positions. The Elmira Catholic parishes do occasionally collaborate with St. Mary Our Mother and share a finance director, but it makes sense right now to make the changes we think will help the Elmira Catholic community to thrive and continue Jesus’ mission into the future under some challenging circumstances.

Any questions to which we can respond in future bulletins? Any comments to address to the pastors, pastoral councils, and finance councils as they consider the question of becoming a single parish? Please give your input below—drop this form off at the Faith Formation Center or place it in the collection basket by Friday, May 26. Thank you.
