

Pastoral Letter on the Merger of Holy Cross, St. Catherine and St. Mark

As announced on several occasions (bulletin articles, letters, and announcements at Church) throughout the past year, our three parishes (Holy Cross, St. Catherine and St. Mark) will be moving from a cluster model to a merged parish. How did we get here? I will give a brief timeline of events, with the understanding that many discussions, consultations and the completion of many plans will not be included in this timeline:

- 1993 - Cardinal Maida initiates the process of *Vicariate Pastoral Planning*. By this, he asks all parishes within a vicariate, to plan for the future. Every vicariate establishes cluster models. It was determined over the course of this process (which took several years), that when/if needed, Holy Cross, St. Catherine and St. Mark would form a cluster.
- 2004 - The Archdiocese of Detroit requests that Holy Cross, St. Catherine, and St. Mark cluster. This was enacted as a result of the aforementioned *Vicariate Pastoral Plan* which each parish developed on their own to prepare for the future (limited resources, clergy shortage, parish size, etc.).
- 2004-2006 - Our three parishes have existed as a Cluster. During that time we have merged RCIA, Parish Council, Worship Commission, Pastoral Minister, Parish Bulletin, Christian Service Commission, Religious Education Program, Baptism Classes, Weekend and Weekday Mass Schedule, Confession Schedule, Pastor. Although the merging of these has been very positive, this model is not efficient, as it is extremely taxing on the Pastor, some parish programs and staff. When clustered, we exist as three separate institutions only linked by a common Pastor, which is not a proper model of parish community or the bond we all share through Baptism and the Eucharist.
- 2005 - The Archdiocese begins the self-study process entitled: *Together in Faith*. All 300 parishes and 180 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese were asked to complete a Self-Study to evaluate themselves through the lens of three principles: sacramental, sustainable, strategic. A committee of parishioners attended a Vicariate-wide meeting with our Regional Bishop, Earl Boyea, and representatives from the Archdiocese to explain this process. Every parish then viewed an Archdiocesan produced video about the *Together in Faith* process at all weekend Masses. The Parish Council from each parish completed the Self-Study. The Self-Study was reviewed and affirmed by the Vicariate Pastoral Council, then sent forward to the *Together in Faith Committee* for the Archdiocese. Recommendations which came from our parish as a result of the Study were accepted and affirmed by Cardinal Adam Maida, Archbishop of Detroit. The conclusions were that Holy Cross, St. Catherine and St. Mark should move from a cluster to a merger. Holy Cross and St. Catherine would be designated a Church and St. Mark a Chapel. We were asked to have this completed by December, 2006.

How will this look? Holy Cross & St. Catherine will retain the status of 'Church' and St. Mark will become a 'Chapel'. With a merger, we will bring together all remaining aspects of the three sites (administration, budgets, programs, etc) into one functioning parish, made up of three sites. Each site, as is the case presently, will offer certain

services, Masses, and parish functions. We will no longer exist as three sites connected by a Pastor, but rather one worshipping community of faith. This also entails us 're-naming' our new (parish), **WHILE STILL RETAINING OUR INDIVIDUAL CHURCH NAMES**. Our three locations will be part of one parish – but again, **KEEP OUR RESPECTIVE CHURCH NAME**. A parish does not always have the same name as it's Church. It has been the common custom of the Archdiocese to have both the parish and it's Church keep the same name, but according to canon law, this is not the only way to function. The new name will identify our parish (made up of the three sites), **while each Church/Chapel will retain their former names**.

What would that look like? In the coming year, once this is all established, if we were to have a parish function, it would be advertised as: "Parish Name" is offering an Adult Formation Evening at St. Catherine Church, or Holy Cross Church, or St. Mark Chapel. Our bulletin and offertory envelopes would also have the new name of the parish. Our listing within the Archdiocese would have our new parish name. The new parish entity would describe our sites in their totality, but when referring to an individual location, you would **STILL USE THE PRESENT CHURCH NAME**. For the past two months, the parish has been engaged in the process of choosing the new parish name. The results of this will be completed by December. All registered parishioners were given the chance to suggest names, and then eventually vote, for the new parish name through their envelopes. This was published in the parish bulletin for three straight weeks, which also included inserts about canon law guidelines for naming a parish and commonly asked questions about a merger. Once the final parish name is decided through the vote of the people in December, we will follow the formal process of petitioning to the Archbishop of Detroit, Cardinal Adam Maida, for the parish to be promulgated with the new name and boundaries.

What about the money? Merging as one parish **WILL NOT MEAN THAT PARISHES WILL BE LOSING ALL THEIR SAVINGS, OR ASSUMING OTHER PARISH DEBTS**. Each parish will retain their individual savings accounts in separate line items within the budget. For the immediate future, money in the savings accounts will be used for the respective church. If we decide to change that policy, it will be a parish-wide decision. The parish debt, which is only an issue for Holy Cross, is being addressed by the *Preserving Our Landmark of Faith Capital Campaign* which you have seen published every week in the bulletin for the past four months. None of our parishes have surplus in their operating budgets. As long as people continue to give at the same level, each parish will basically be taking care of their respective site. Since many of our ministries and programs are presently shared/merged, we are already sharing the costs between the three sites (Pastor salary, Pastoral Minister salary, Religious Education, RCIA, supplies, programs, ministries, etc). This should be seen as a very good thing for all of us. We are sharing expenses, so that quality ministry can be conducted for as many people as possible. Again, please remember that this **WILL NOT MEAN THAT PARISHES WILL BE LOSING ALL SAVINGS, OR ASSUMING OTHER PARISH DEBTS**. Also, please know that this entire process is being directed through the Stewardship/Administration Commission (who see where every penny from the parish is spent or saved) and Parish Council (who also consult upon parish policies and where and how the money collected is spent/saved.)

In the coming months, as ‘talk’ about all this will be a focus for many, please wait to hear the facts before you formulate your opinion. I have done my very best to compose this lengthy letter so that you have all the information in regards to these changes, all of which has already been shared with you over the course of the past year. Please also do not listen to the rumors, speculation, or to people who speak as if they know, but really don’t. Whenever one speaks with authority, your first question should always be “what is your source for this information?” If it is not first-hand knowledge, from the actual source, then 99.9% of the time it is not accurate, and filled with misinformation. To rumor and spread this amongst people is very detrimental to our moving forward in a positive manner. Words can be very dangerous, especially when they seek to blame, hurt, or destroy others, without the truth. Please know that everything is being done to include the parishioners every step of the way in this process, with the leadership of the Parish Council.

I ask that you continue to pray to the Holy Spirit for the inspiration to find peace in this difficult process. Change is never easy for any of us, but I do believe and have experienced that many ‘good things’ can and do happen with change. If we read the history of all our parishes, and many of you have lived through these memories, there have been many building changes - some demolished, others built, new pastors, administrators, staff, parishioners, programs, ministries, liturgical reforms, even new names for some of our present churches - yet we are still here! Pray that we make this transition with open hearts, and with an understanding that even though some aspects of our church are changing, there is still one thing that remains the same - praise and worship of God, through the reception of the sacraments and service through ministry to God’s people.

May God bless each and everyone in this coming New Year,

Rev. Tim Birney, Pastor

Preserving our Landmark of Faith Update

Goal:	\$1,015,000.00
Amount Pledged:	\$ 945,429.29

1st Project: Replacement of the Church and Rectory roofs and gutters. This project will begin in mid-December. cost: \$145,000.00 company: Zimmer Roofing

2nd Project: Reduction of debt- a \$100,000.00 payment was sent to the Archdiocese for the reduction of our present debt. Debt balance: \$545,000.00

Thank you to all of those who so generously donated to this Campaign. We are still in need of pledges to reach our goal. Please call the parish office to see how you can help. All donations may be placed in the Capital Campaign envelopes found in your offertory envelope packets. Statements will be sent once a year at Christmas. God bless you for your stewardship.