

Dear St. Joseph Parishioners:

Since Bishop Hicks' decision on the restructuring of the Joliet Deanery was released last week, some of you have called and sent emails to the Diocese with questions. As the Director of Implementation for the restructuring, Bishop Hicks asked me to respond to these inquiries. Frequently asked questions were published along with the decision, but I realize that you have parish-specific questions that were not addressed in the FAQs. So, I will attempt to answer those questions now.

While St. Joseph Parish is closing and merging with three other parishes, St. Joseph Church will remain open and will operate very similarly to how it currently operates. The name of the church will not change, and the average parishioner will experience very little change. Mass times may be different. A pastor and parochial vicar will be appointed by the bishop to serve the new parish. Fr. Tim Andres has the opportunity now to prayerfully discern whether he will seek to fill either of these positions.

A "parish" is defined as the community of the faithful, i.e. the people. A "church" is a building where sacred rites, including masses, take place. The merging of the parishes means that all parishioners of the four parishes will become parishioners of the new parish when it is erected on July 1st. St. Joseph Church and St. Mary Magdalene Church will be the two worship sites, and neither will be superior to the other.

The only significance of the "parish church" or the "parish seat" is that it is the designated location for canonical requirements to be fulfilled, such as the establishment of parish and finance councils, as well as the storage of sacramental records. The parish church is not in any way greater, more important, or more exclusive than the other churches designated as worship sites within the parish.

Canon Law (the law that governs the Church) requires that a parish church must be a territorial parish. St. Mary Magdalene is a territorial parish, which means it has territorial boundaries. St. Joseph is a national parish that was established to serve the immigrant Slovenian population. St. Joseph has no territorial boundaries; it is physically located within the boundaries of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish. Therefore, St. Mary Magdalene is designated as the parish church because of its existing boundaries. While St. Joseph Church may have a longer history than St. Mary Magdalene Church, this has no bearing on the designation of the parish church.

In the second parish session that took place in October, four scenarios were presented. Scenario 4 depicted the merging of the four parishes with St. Joseph as the parish seat. The Targeted Restructuring Committee was not aware of the technicality regarding territorial boundaries and as the director, I accept responsibility and apologize for this oversight and the confusion it has caused. There was no intent to deceive.

In terms of St. Joseph's Slovenian heritage and traditions, as well as the traditions of the other three parishes, the new parish will strive to keep as many alive as is feasible. Sacred objects such as statues or vessels from St. Anthony and St. Bernard, the two churches that will be closing, may be placed in St. Joseph Church and St. Mary Magdalene Church as well. These decisions will be up to the new pastor and his parish leadership team.

St. Joseph Park, St. Joseph Cemetery and the museum will become ministries of the new parish. The names will not change. Activities will continue as scheduled at the park and burials will continue at the cemetery. Other ministries at St. Joseph will remain in place, and some new ministries may begin. Again, these decisions will be up to the new pastor and his leadership team.

The Religious Education program will be merged with the Religious Education program at St. Mary Magdalene. It will be a larger program. The new Director of Religious Education along with the new pastor will determine how the program will be administered and where classes will take place. If there are enough catechists, classes could continue at both campuses. Neither St. Anthony nor St. Bernard currently have Religious Education programs.

The savings and operating accounts of the merging parishes will be combined in the new parish. This includes donations and money raised by fundraisers. These funds will be used to operate the new parish and maintain the buildings on both campuses.

Finally, the term "extinguished" is the canonical term used when a parish is suppressed by a diocesan bishop. It may not sound very nice, but it is the actual term used in the bishop's decree. It can't be sugarcoated.

Try to look beyond St. Joseph Parish and see the bigger picture. God is leading the Diocese in a new direction, and He is challenging us to work together with our brothers and sisters in Christ to build up His Kingdom here in Joliet. This is not something to lament; it is something to embrace.

This parish has energy and vibrancy. I encourage you to use your strengths to build your new parish. Welcome your fellow new parishioners into St. Joseph Church. Teach them about your Slovenian heritage and the rich history of this church building.

In closing, I ask you to pray for Bishop Hicks as he continues to shepherd the faithful in our Diocese. Pray for all the faithful in the Joliet Deanery, especially the parishioners whose churches are closing. I promise to pray that the peace of Christ will wash over you, and that you will open your hearts and minds to the opportunities ahead.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Maureen Harton
Director of Implementation