

What's Going On?

- What is **unification**?
 - Unification of Parishes is the term used for the merger of two or more parishes into one new one parish entity. In our case, we are proposing to Bishop da Cunha that St. Anthony's, St. Elizabeth's and St. Patrick's Parishes be merged together to form a new parish entity.
- Why are we undertaking this now?
 - The Pastoral Planning document that Bishop da Cunha approved in 2018 called for a 2 - 3 year timeline for evaluating the status of the Collaborative and the benefits of unification. That time has come and we have decided that we should now unify the three parishes into one.
- Who is the "we" in your previous answer?
 - The Pastoral Council consisting of 15 members, with individuals from each of the 3 current parishes, all of the Deacons, the Parochial Vicar (Father Ryan) and the Pastor (Father Steve), have all contributed to the discussion which has led to this decision.

Benefits

- What are the benefits (of Unification)?
 - The Administration of the separate facilities are labor intensive and demanding on our clergy and staff's time. This will streamline things and thereby free them for more pastoral needs.
 - Worshipping, working and serving together will make for a stronger Catholic community with a common mission.
- What is the Mission of the new Parish?
 - As it has always been, to Evangelize, (to share the life of faith rooted in the Gospel to others). The future of the Church depends on our willingness to embrace our mission of evangelization. This needs to be a top priority as we look towards the future.

What will happen to the churches and chapels?

- Will any of the churches or chapels close?
 - **At this time**, we expect to keep the churches and chapels open. The names of the **churches** will not change. Instead of St. Patrick/St. Elizabeth Seton/St. Anthony **Parish** you would hear “St. *NewName* **Parish** worshipping at St. Patrick/Elizabeth Seton/Anthony **Church**”. Both the Pastoral and Finance Councils of the new parish entity will continually review the appropriate use of our facilities and potential right-sizing for our parish needs in the future. As we have previously done, the extent to which our chapels are used will be determined annually.
- Are the Mass schedules changing?
 - There are many factors that are considered when deciding about Mass schedules. Of course we need to adjust to the number of people who make Falmouth their home during the summer months. The decline in the number of active priests available now and in the future, as well as the number of retired priests able to assist here in Falmouth will always be an important factor in determining how many Masses we can offer. We also need to evaluate the quality of our worship. The Mass schedule for the new parish entity must be viewed in its entirety (over all of the churches and chapels in Falmouth) rather than just one particular church. The Pastoral council and staff members will continue to monitor these and other issues in determining the Mass schedule and will adjust it as necessary according to our needs.
- Will my church lose its identity?
 - Each church brings its own unique and beautiful history to the new Parish and it is our intention to build on those legacies by celebrating that rich history which lies at the foundation of our new Parish.

Organizations and Ministries

- How will our church organizations and clubs be impacted?
 - We expect that all similar organizations and ministries (with the possible exception, at this time, of St. Vincent de Paul) will be combined into single, parish- wide organizations, and believe this will lead to wider membership from the entire Falmouth Catholic Community.

Leadership

- Who will be the Pastor/Parochial Vicar of the new Parish?
 - Pastoral assignments are at the sole discretion of the Bishop depending on the needs of the diocese, and are evaluated each year.
- Have you tried to find additional priests so that all the parishes could remain as they are?
 - As throughout the United States, the Fall River Diocese has an increasing shortage of priests, with many more retiring than are being ordained. There are few other sources of active priests since other countries and religious orders are experiencing the same decline in the number of priests. Unfortunately, over the past 30 years, many families have not encouraged their sons to become priests which has also contributed to the shortage we now face today.

While we have a good number of dedicated retired priests in the area presently assisting with Mass coverage, their availability is limited as they are not officially assigned to our parishes. We cannot build the future of the new parish on their availability. In short there are too few priests to go around.

- How many Diocesan Priests are there?
 - By 2025, the diocese will have 32 active priests at or above retirement age (70 years old). By 2025 we project 13 new priests being ordained, leaving us a gap of 20 priests assuming all 13 of those currently in seminary complete formation and are blessed with the gifts and talents to work in a parish.
 - Please keep in mind that a new priest should not be expected to fill the shoes of a retiring priest with 40+ years of experience. Ideally, new priests should have at least several years of development before being considered for a pastorate.

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Money

- Is it about money?
 - While a unification of the parishes into one parish entity will enable us to be better stewards of the resources that have been entrusted to us, the life of a parish is so much more. We need to strengthen our mission of evangelization to this generation and especially, the next.
- What will happen to the savings that have accumulated in the present parishes?
 - At this time, Father Steve and the Pastoral Council have agreed to keep current savings in segregated accounts by church so that any savings can be earmarked for the care of that building and chapel as applicable.
- Is this being done so the savings of one church can be used by another?
 - No. The reason for the unification is efficiencies for the Pastoral care of the community along with a better stewardship of both finances and human resources. Each parish currently has resources in savings or properties adequate to maintain itself for now.
- What will happen to the debt currently owed by St. Patrick's Parish?
 - The entire debt has been placed in abeyance as of September 2020 by the Diocese. The debt placed in abeyance will not accrue interest. What this means is the new Parish will not be responsible to pay on this debt until such time that any property associated with St. Patrick's Church is sold. At that time the Diocese will receive a percentage of the money generated from the sale to be placed against the debt and the new Parish will receive the remaining monies.
- What about the weekly collections?
 - Once the new Parish is established, all collections will be deposited in an account in the name of the new Parish for everyday operations of the Parish as well as for specific Diocesan and National Collections which we are required to take.
- Does this mean a reduction in staff positions?
 - Not at this time, and perhaps it may mean an increase in staff in the years ahead to address specific needs of our new Parish.
- I have made provisions in my will for a bequest to St. _____ Parish. Do I need to change my will?
 - It is not necessary to change your will though you are welcome to name the new Parish as a beneficiary in your will if that is your desire. Any donation made to a particular church will be included in the account for that church.

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- How does the merger affect my WeShare online giving?
 - There will be a new WeShare account in the name of the new Parish. We will discuss how to re-enroll if it is necessary.
- What will our donation envelope say on it?
 - It will bear the name of the new Parish.

Timing

- When is the unification going to happen?
 - Our current plan is to present the request to the Bishop in April. Once reviewed by the Bishop's Priest Advisory Council (Presbyteral Council) at its May meeting, the Bishop will ultimately make the decision. If approved, we are requesting a July 1, 2021 formation of the new Parish from the merger of the three.
- Why July 1?
 - It is the start of the fiscal year, so it is a good time to begin a new set of books of account for the new parish. In addition, it allows us to do the planning and preparation in the spring before the very busy summer season starts in Falmouth with more Masses, including many weddings as well as other events. It will also allow our summer visitors to celebrate the opening of our new parish with us.

Name of the New Parish

- What will be the name of the new Parish?
 - The name is chosen by the Bishop. We are asked to present him with three suggestions based on our knowledge of the history, location and other factors. But the decision is his. The name will most likely be a Saint's name although there could be other possibilities.

A subcommittee has reflected on over 21 possible names that have been suggested and, the Pastoral Council has chosen three to submit to the Bishop. They are, in order of preference:

1. St. Joseph, Guardian of the Holy Family
2. St. Teresa of Calcutta
3. St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina

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Communications

- Will there be an opportunity for a Collaborative wide meeting to hear more and ask questions?
 - That would have been our plan. But with the pandemic still with us, we think that such a large gathering would be inappropriate. There will be a meeting on Wed. April 7th which can be attended in person, via Livestream and ZOOM to address the unification process and status. We are also planning some mailed letters to the parishioners, frequent additions to the website, bulletin announcements, comments at Mass by the priest or deacon and media announcements to keep everyone informed.
- How often will the FAQs be updated?
 - Periodically as new questions are asked or old questions answered or clarified, we will continue to expand the FAQs document to continue to answer any questions you might have.
- Is there an opportunity for me to ask a question that isn't answered above?
 - Yes, of course. Please send your questions to either Steve Johnson at sjseapit@gmail.com or Jim Quinn at jttquinn76@gmail.com. We will get back to you with an answer and if appropriate add it to the Frequently Asked Questions list.