

Archdiocesan officials approve plans; parishes will merge, twin

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downtown community during the week and provide a center for devotions.

Our Lady of Lourdes in west Baltimore is the only parish that will close. It will merge with All Saints parish, located about one mile away. After the last Mass is celebrated 10 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 19, Our Lady of Lourdes parishioners will become part of the worshiping community at All Saints.

Closing the doors

Parishioners at Our Lady of Lourdes and All Saints have known about the plan to merge since December and offered a Mass Dec. 11 at Our Lady of Lourdes to commemorate the occasion.

"There was a wealth of sadness," said Father Joseph Snoha, CM, pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes, "but there was the feeling that this was the best thing to do."

The merger of the parishes officially begins Feb. 26, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. "We thought it would be appropriate that

the people come together for the Easter season," Father Snoha said.

Bishop Ricard said, "The building is not the church. The people of God will continue, but in a new alignment."

The eight parishes scheduled to twin under the restructuring plan will share pastoral personnel and other resources. Administration of both parishes will be carried out from one location. Some parishes will downsize their physical plants and sell off buildings, but most property decisions have yet to be made. St. Ann's has announced that it will sell off some of its buildings.

Pastors hope that twinning will strengthen parishes by combining resources and outreach efforts.

St. Michael the Archangel and St. Patrick's, for instance, will be able to draw on outreach workers who have a combined knowledge of a wider geographical area, according to Father John Lavin, CSSR, pastor of St. Michael's. St. Michael's operates the Joseph

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House, which provides an array of emergency services to its mostly Hispanic community. St. Patrick runs Assisi House, an outreach which includes a food pantry.

"I think it will strengthen our outreach efforts," said Father Lavin.

A unified community

For parishes forming a single faith community, there will be a wider base for sharing and developing resources, according to archdiocesan officials.

Even though St. Jerome's parish wasn't part of the original 16 parishes targeted for restructuring, Monsignor Arthur Bastress, the pastor, decided to join the process anyway because St. Jerome's faced many of the same

problems as the other parishes. "We feel very much akin to the other restructuring parishes," Monsignor Bastress said.

Now St. Jerome will work over the next year with two neighboring parishes, St. Peter the Apostle and St. Martin, to create a unified plan for ministering to their southwest Baltimore neighborhoods.

"It is interesting that the oldest (St. Martin) and youngest (St. Jerome) daughter parishes of St. Peter will be coming together with their mother parish," said Father Michael Roach, pastor of St. Peter the Apostle explaining that both St. Martin and St. Jerome were originally offshoots of St. Peter.

What happens next

Now that the restructuring plans

have been announced, the affected parishes will establish transition teams to make the plans reality. Transition teams will consist of four parishioners, a team facilitator and the pastor. Parishes involved in twinning or merging will establish larger teams with representatives of both parishes.

"Transition teams are the key (to the success of the process)," said Joan Worthington Howington, a consultant for the archdiocese in the restructuring process. "The plans are great on paper, but implementing them and being specific is always tougher than anything else."

Transition teams will work within several boundaries, Ms. Howington said. Their plans must include evangelization, downsizing, personnel utilization, outreach and a balanced budget. Parishes must also be financially self-supporting. Teams must decide on how buildings will be used to their maximum efficiency, or if they will be sold. Bishop Ricard and Cardinal William H. Keeler will approve

the final plans.

Originally, 16 parishes were targeted in the restructuring process last May: St. Alphonsus, St. Ann, St. Cecilia, St. Gerard, Holy Cross, Holy Redeemer, Immaculate Conception, St. Martin, St. Mary Star of the Sea, St. Michael the Archangel, Most Precious Blood, Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Patrick, St. Peter the Apostle, St. Stanislaus Kostka, and St. Wenceslaus. Holy Cross and St. Mary Star of the Sea began twinning in 1993 and completed last fall.

Teams made up of parishioners and impartial facilitators studied the restructuring parishes and decided the best course for the future. The parishes' plans were then presented to archdiocesan officials for approval.

Because several parishes established twinning relationships with parishes that were not scheduled to restructure, the process has had a widespread effect and now directly involves four other parishes: All Saints, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Casimir, and Sacred Heart of Jesus.