

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM FR. BEN CONCERNING PREPARING FOR FAMILY OF PARISHES

I am sure that as we move forward into our future as a family of parishes that people have questions. A good source of answers to some of these questions can be found on the Archdiocese Beacon of Light information page: <https://catholicaoc.org/beacons-of-light/learn-more>. Here I would like to address some overall questions that impact our own particular family of parishes. This is not an exhaustive list of questions and answers, but I hope, it may help give some broad general information.

1. Vision

Where are we going and how do we get there? The process to bring our family of parishes together into one parish will not be achieved instantly but will take some time. Obviously, due to a number of factors, which includes declining number of priests, changing demographics, the wisdom of consolidating resources, and shifting parish membership, we are in a time of change. We, however, have the opportunity to guide and plan that change. We have been given an opportunity to create something new, something vibrant and energetic. We have an opportunity to form our future rather than allowing circumstances dictate who we are, what we do, and how we do it. This time, my friends, allows us to form our future.

All of the parishes here on 'the Westside' have a storied history, staunchly loyal followings, and family pride. Each Parish has served, for many generations, the people of our communities, the Catholics of Cincinnati, through many years of struggle, bigotry, anti-Catholic opposition, poverty, hardship, war, and depression, as well as happy times and times of expansion, building, growth, and prosperity. Communities of faith and life, churches, convents, schools, the development of a whole unique and respected Catholic culture are part of the history of the westside of Cincinnati. Why would anyone want to give that up or see it fade into oblivion? It's hard to embrace change especially when we see our values, heritage, pride, home, and communities challenged and threatened.

Let me tell you that I'm not here to take that away. I don't want to see us fail, disappear, vanish, decline, or surrender. If anything, I'm here to make us grow! I'm not interested in slowly fading away. I'm interested in faith and life. I'm interested in making what we have sown in the past, grow in the present, and flower in the future. I want growth, energy, and vitality. I want to work for a Catholic revival on this side of town, a renewal of our faith and culture, an expansion of our parishes and schools, a new generation of leaders, movers, changers, determined, passionate, creative, and faithful people who will explode onto the local, national, and world stage. I want to be part of a people that embraces the challenge of the present and creates the way of tomorrow. Our people did it in the past, and we will do it now. We cannot allow our respect for the past prevent us from looking forward to the needs of the future. If the past has given us anything, surely, it's given us a future. We will have a future if we make that future, now, today. The future may not look exactly like the past, or the present, but it will be built upon the past and the present. It could even be better. All of that is up to us.

Keep in mind that the primary purpose of all that we do, all that we build, all that we are about, is proclaiming the Gospel and building the Kingdom of God. All our resources, all our energy, all our work and time should go into that mission. If what we have builds that Kingdom, then we hold onto it. At the same time, we build anew, we build more, we build better, we build for now and tomorrow.

As the Gospel continuously encourages: "Don't be afraid." So, let's not be afraid. We either become the victims of time and circumstance or we become the creators of our destiny. I don't know about you, but I'll be damned if I'm not going to make the most of the opportunities God gives me.

A year for building our vision: We are very fortunate that because we have a pastor, two parochial vicars, two retired pastors who are remaining to assist in parish ministry, as well as a significant number of retired priests to help and because we have stable parish communities that have cooperated with each other for many years, we have not been placed in a situation where we must make immediate changes. At the same time, we are all aware that change is necessary and inevitable so we will plan our change rather than simply allow circumstances determine our future.

As well as meeting with priests, staff, council members and parishioners, which has already begun, I will develop an Executive Development Council called "The Vision Team," to guide us to the development of a Vision, plan, and strategy, to position our family of parishes for a successful future. Over the next year we, as a community, will formulate that vision. Defending or maintaining the status quo is not viable, sustainable, reasonable, nor helpful. We need imagination, vision, and guts. Simply maintaining what we already have is too small of a vision and maintaining what we have is not tenable anyway. We must be willing to innovate and think creatively. At the same time, what we have makes us resource rich, that includes people and places. We have all the tools, gifts, and resources we need to build – how we build and what we build is up to us.

What we want to achieve and how we achieve it will be key vision questions as we move forward as a parish.

2. E Pluribus Unum (From the many one) -

What will happen to my parish? The Family of Parishes has no canonical status. Each parish in the family remains an independent juridic person. If the family is given a name, that doesn't change either the canonical or the civil status of the parishes of the family. Several of the current pastoral regions have names (e.g. Clermont County Catholic Community, Marion Catholic Community, Petersburg Parishes, Winton Wyoming Pastoral Region, etc.), but these names primarily serve to foster unity internal to the region. The same would be true of a name given to a family of parishes.

However, the ultimate plan for the family of parishes is that from a number of parishes one parish will be formed. Our family of parishes includes St. Dominic, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Simon, St. Aloysius, and Our Lady of Victory. These parishes will remain as distinct parishes until such time as the parish council of each parish votes for suppression. That we will come together as one is already determined. How we bring that about, the time frame, and the structure, we will have to make happen. Eventually, each parish will form a chapel or campus in a common parish which will receive its name, hopefully, on 3rd July, 2022. Eventually, each individual parish will be dissolved into the one parish and this parish will retain a number of parish sites, or chapels, if they are considered necessary for the success of our mission. A general rule as we move forward will not be the maintenance of the status quo, or what is best for this or that parish, but what is best for the future of our parish and the building of God's Kingdom. When a single parish is formed there will be one central administration, although, a number of sites may be used and utilized to focus on different ministries.

Baptism, First Communion, Funerals, will continue to be celebrated in each parish and records of these sacraments will be maintained in each individual parish record. The Sacrament of Confirmation will be held in common for all five parishes of the family and will rotate between St. Dominic and Our Lady of Victory simply due to church capacity. Couples who are getting married may choose from any one of the chapels for their wedding but, normally, the priest/deacon "assigned" to their own chapel will be the celebrant of the wedding.

3. Personnel –

Will people lose their jobs?

On 1st July 2022 Fr. Benedict O'Cinnsealaigh will become the canonical pastor, and Fr. Chris Lack and Fr. Michael Cordier will become the parochial vicars, of the five parishes belonging to the family of parishes, Our Lady of Victory, St. Dominic, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Simon, and St. Aloysius. Fr. Jim Walsh and Fr. Don Rettig will retire but remain active in this family of parishes and each will be given the honorary designation of "pastor emeritus."

There are no plans for a reduction of parish or school personnel in any of the five parishes of the family of parishes. The form of administrative offices, duties and locations, will be determined over time as part of an overall logistical and administrative plan. Staff and Parish Councils will be consulted in such transitions.

4. Operational –

How are we going to manage all this change?

Different Sites: There are no immediate plans to close any of the five sites bequeath to our new parish. As we move forward, building a single parish with multiple sites, we may decide to consolidate positions, ministries, and functions, and utilizing all sites for the advantage of the entire parish. All sites should be valued as a resource for the entire family of parishes. However, at least until a complete merger of all the parishes, no other parish is responsible for the maintenance of another's property, site/campus, or operating expenses. If a site is not financially viable, its future will be questioned and analyzed. In time it might be prudent to close non-viable sites. Properties may be utilized and reconstituted for new or special uses such as a youth and evangelization center, focused education, sports or recreation center, ministerial meeting spaces. It is essential that the communities continue to support their particular parish in order to maintain ministry, liturgy and physical plant.

During the summer of 2022, an inventory, valuation, and assessment of the condition of all the properties will be carried out. The condition of the structure and equipment (boilers, heating, air conditioning, roofs, windows etc) will be made leading to an analysis of future needs and projected spending/costs to maintain or replace.

Mass Schedule: The Mass schedule of each chapel (parish) will remain as is for the coming year. With three priests assigned to our family of parishes it is clear that over time the present schedule of Masses will not be sustainable. There is no doubt that we will need to change, but such changes will be determined on the basis of availability of priests, the numbers attending Mass, or the possible closing of chapel sites. Over the first three months, our three assigned priests will move around the parishes to celebrate the Masses so that people have an opportunity to meet them. We also plan to arrange social gatherings and small group meetings, as well as after Mass coffee meet and greet opportunities, so people have an opportunity to meet and support our priests.

What about Parish Council and Finance Commissions: Each parish council and finance committee will remain in existence to guide each parish community until such time as a parish is suppressed and subsumed into the new parish entity. At this time there is no plan to create an overall parish council or finance council for the "new parish" or "Family of Parishes." It may prove useful to form such a council, but the parish councils and finance committees will still remain in existence until the "new parish" receives a canonical/legal recognition as a parish and juridical person.

Parish ministries and groups: All parish groups and ministries will continue as they are for the present but invitations to belong will be opened to parishioners from all five parish sites. Some groups may decide to consolidate under the new parish name while others may remain associated with a particular chapel/campus. For example, it might be best to have one parish mission for all five parishes, one retreat for women/men Christ Renews, or one Scout/Cub Den, one PSR program, one athletics program. Each group and ministry will be consulted and will have a say in any decisions or plan.

5. Finances –

What happens to my donation and the monies we have frugally put aside? Does it go where I intend? It is the law of the Church (Canon Law) that a parish's finances are maintained and belong to that parish until a parish is formally suppressed. All five parish finances remain independent and go to that particular parish. However, this also means that each parish is responsible for its own maintenance, expenses, and financial health. If they remain independent each parish will be responsible for its own financial support and its future will depend on the ability of each parish community to maintain its own commitments. If in the future a particular chapel/site is considered by the pastor and community no longer necessary or tenable, it may be closed. It may also be decided that a site is useful for the family of parishes and so it may be maintained by the family of parishes. Again, there are no plans to close any sites.

The Sunday collection, all parish funding, and all particular parish and parish group fundraising (PTO, Athletics, Festival, Raffles etc.) remains with each parish. That's simply following Church law.

Even in the eventuality of merger of all parishes into one parish, all special designated, or restricted accounts (Fr. Grimmelman Society, Victory Fund, etc.), will remain for use at the particular parish as they are restricted benefices and must be used for the purpose they were designed to support.

There may be ministry or personnel expenses that are shared by the families of parishes even while the parishes remain independent (a fulltime youth minister, athletics director, clergy etc.).

6. Schools –

What are the plans for our schools? Both St. Dominic and Our Lady of Victory Schools will remain open and independent. Both schools are functioning well and have enough parish support to maintain their present ministry. Both schools have between 400-500 children and which is a great number for a parochial school as it is big enough to be sustainable and not so large as the children become invisible or simply numbers. We are committed to Catholic education and will remain committed to Catholic education for our children. Already in some areas of school and parish sports, there exists extensive cooperation. It may prove more advantageous for us as we move forward to have the teams become one team body enabling our teams to have a deeper roster, wider support, and allowing our sports programs to become the powerhouse in the region. Again, any decision on this matter will only happen with consultation and planning.

For the present, school tuition assistance and the “scholarship” or “in parish” school rate will still be determined on the basis of particular parish membership and registration as assistance and “in parish” rates are supported by the revenue of the individual parishes and are dependent on planned giving and tuition assistance collections which are parish based. Rules concerning eligibility for tuition assistance and “in parish” rate will be maintained as they are at present.

Parishes in our family of parishes that do not have a school may choose one of the schools and receive the “in parish” or “scholarship” rate.

7. Evangelization –

The proclamation of the Gospel is the essential mission of every Catholic and the purpose of the Church. The Church is also the means by which God gathers us together as a body, cares for us through the sacraments, provides for our formation, and also provides for our own evangelization. Every baptized Catholic shares in the mission of Christ and His Church. How we are going to carry out this evangelization, what evangelization means, and what it will look like for us here in our family of parishes will be a central focus of our vision for the future. We will establish a task force to formulate a mission plan for this local evangelization, reaching out to the local community, reaching out to the fallen away, engagement of families, youth, and supporting our parish members. We intend to grow the parish.

8. Getting started – One Mass – One Family

The new family of parishes comes into existence on the 1st of July 2022 with the appointment of the pastor. On Sunday 3rd July we will celebrate one Mass for all the parishes at 11:00 a.m. at the Field House at Elder High School. Each parish will have its regular scheduled Saturday Evening Mass on the 2nd of July but no scheduled Masses on Sunday morning 3rd July will be celebrated at Victory, St. Dominic, St’ Al’s, St. Simon or St. Vincent. All are invited to join in the one Mass to launch our new family of parishes. At this Mass we will formally introduce the name of our new family of parishes.

Thank you all for your commitment to your parishes and the Church. Let’s pray for our future success and that the Grace of God fill us all for the adventure ahead.

Fr. Ben