

HOLY CROSS, ST. FRANCIS SOLANUS AND ST. JAMES THE APOSTLE

Questions and Answers Regarding the Process of Merging Parishes

January 2016

The planning team has created this Q and A to help parishioners learn more about what a merger of our parishes would mean and about the merger process.

What does it mean to merge our parishes into one? What changes? How is being a single parish different from being three parishes joined under the same pastor?

Under both church and civil law three distinct entities are merged to create a new one. There is a new parish rather than the previous three. The three corporations are merged into one.

Probably the only visible change for most parishioners is that the parish has a new name. In addition, there is one set of sacramental records rather than the current three and one set of financial records and accounts.

What process is followed in merging parishes?

There are two parts to the process: 1) merging the three parishes into a single parish under church or canon law, 2) merging the three corporations into a single corporation under civil law.

The canonical process is as follows (with tentative timeline as developed by the planning team):

- Consideration by the parishes – Information is shared through bulletins and parish meetings inviting comments, questions, and concerns. (January/February 2016)
- The pastor's consultation of the pastoral councils and finance councils – After reviewing input from parishioners, each council meets to consider the question and discuss the pastoral advantages and disadvantages of the proposed merger. (February 2016)
- The pastor petitions the diocesan bishop requesting consideration of merger and sends a summary of the reasons for this request. Other requested materials include: a summary of the history of the relationship of the parishes, minutes of parish finance councils and parish pastoral councils, recent financial statements from each parish, and inventories of real property of each parish involved. (March 2016)
- Bishop's consultation of the Presbyteral Council – Priest councilors receive a summary of materials, consider the question of merging, and offer their individual opinions to the Bishop. (May 2016)
- The Bishop considers the opinion of the councilors and other interested people and issues a decree which is communicated to the pastor. The decree is then communicated to parishioners through the bulletin or posting in the vestibules of the churches. (May 2016)

If it is determined that a merger is to go forward, a civil process is undertaken with the Diocese providing the legal support needed. Fr. Bernard and the trustees of each of the three parishes meet and pass resolutions provided by legal counsel. A petition is then submitted to the appropriate courts for consideration and the courts issue an order to be filed with the county clerks.

What are the main benefits of becoming a single parish?

There is strength in numbers and in uniting the unique characteristics of each of the communities. Clustered parishes within our Diocese which have merged have found that they have become more fully one faith community where the word of God is proclaimed, people are educated in the faith, the spirit of the gospel is promoted through social justice, and the faithful are nourished through the celebration of the sacraments. Ministries are often strengthened and new ones begun.

What are the drawbacks?

The drawbacks are generally more related to perception than to actuality, since the same pastor is making decisions whether the parishes are clustered or merged. The pastor needs to weigh the desires and needs of each of the communities in both cases. A single pastoral council and finance council (common in both clustered and merged parishes) may be attentive to the needs of each community or not. There can be a

sense of loss of local control since three corporations—each with its own financial records and its own two lay trustees—are reduced to one.

Will the name of my church change?

No, the churches of Holy Cross, St. Francis Solanus, and St. James the Apostle will keep their names. However, the new parish will have its own, new name.

If we become a single parish, does that mean I'm no longer a member of Holy Cross, St. Francis Solanus, or St. James the Apostle?

Yes, you would then be a member of the new parish. The three previous parishes would cease to exist. The buildings would remain the same, the churches would retain their names, but the newly formed parish would have a new name. See above.

How long would it take to become a single parish?

Once a petition goes from a Pastor to the Bishop, the process generally takes about six months. However, because the courts need to approve the merger, there is no hard and fast rule about how long the process takes.

Will our weekend or weekday Mass schedules change?

Maybe. The weekend and weekday Mass schedules may change whether the parishes are clustered or merged. The number and time of Masses is dependent on the number of priests available and the pastor's ongoing judgment after consultation with the newly forming pastoral council.

If our parishes merge, what will happen to the financial assets of each parish?

These will be combined into a single set of savings accounts, investments, etc. belonging to the single parish.

When money comes into the new parish from Holy Cross, St. Francis Solanus, or St. James the Apostle, is it associated with and used only for that church?

No, we would have a single budget and system of accounts. It might be helpful to liken what would happen to what is typical when two individuals marry and combine their financial resources as they begin one shared life together.

If one of the campuses needs a major repair or project undertaken, where does the money to fund that project come from?

That money comes from the assets of the new, single parish. When the budget is created each year, decisions would be made about which capital projects will be undertaken and priorities will be determined. If there are unanticipated emergencies, decisions would be made by Fr. Bernard in conversation with staff members, the finance council, and any appropriate others.

What happens to bequests (past and future) left to Holy Cross, St. Francis Solanus, or St. James the Apostle?

Donors' wishes are always honored. Unrestricted bequests will benefit the parish at large.

If our parishes merge, will each church maintain its trustees or will new trustees be selected for the new parish?

Because our three separate corporations under NYS law would be consolidated into one corporation, that new entity would have two trustees who would be selected by the pastor annually.

What about fundraisers? Could we still have fundraisers that benefit one of the churches?

Fundraisers could be designated either to serve the overall needs of the parish or for a specific purpose—e.g., to benefit a specific ministry or a project at one of the churches. A combined effort could help draw the new parish together, build community outreach, and help financially. There would also be more parishioners to carry out fundraising activities.