



Bishop Ronald Hicks' Decision Concerning the Restructuring of the Sixteen (16) Parishes and Four (4) Schools in the Joliet Deanery

The Targeted Restructuring Committee began its work in the Joliet Deanery in February of 2023. Over the last twelve months, the Committee engaged in an intentional process to determine the future of the Joliet Deanery. On December 21st, I received the Committee's recommendations. After much prayer and discernment, I have decided to accept the Committee's recommendations. On January 24th, I consulted with our Presbyteral Council and College of Consultors, in accord with Canon Law, and both consultative bodies unanimously approved my acceptance of the recommendations. Today, I render my decision.

The Deanery currently has sixteen (16) parishes. Four parishes in the City of Joliet were previously closed: St. Stephen in 1982, St. Mary Carmelite in 1991, St. Thaddeus in 2003, and Ss. Cyril and Methodius in 2007. The decisions to close these four parishes were not part of any overarching plan to move the Diocese forward.

This moment is of great historical significance in that the Joliet Diocese has never undertaken a project of such magnitude. The restructuring of the Joliet Deanery is deliberate, proactive, and anticipatory of the future of the Deanery based on current facts. It will allow us to refocus on our mission as disciples of Jesus and spread His good news through service to the poor, the homeless, the unborn, the fallen away Catholics, the lost sheep, and so many others who are searching for answers and yearning for the love and peace that only Jesus can provide.

As we all are aware, many things have changed in the last 50 to 60 years. We have significantly less vocations to the priesthood, our active priests are aging, and our beautiful churches that were built with labors of love and much financial sacrifice are in need of significant repairs, largely due to prolonged deferred maintenance.

In addition, the Church today is not the same Church it was decades ago. The trend against organized religion is gaining momentum. Attendance at Sunday Masses is down significantly, and Sunday collections are down proportionately. Reducing the number of parishes will enable us to redirect our limited financial resources to ministry, instead of staffing expenses such as payroll and benefits, and putting temporary and costly band-aids on aging buildings.

Multiple factors were considered in this process, including but not limited to data points on priests, seminarians, parish finances, parish facilities' assessments, sacramental numbers, October mass counts, and average number of seats occupied at weekend Masses.

Considerations that were prioritized throughout the restructuring process include 1) the number of priests available to serve as pastors as well as the age and health of current pastors; 2) the availability of qualified professionals such as business managers, DRE's, musicians, etc. willing to work for the Church; 3) the highest and best use of existing parish facilities; and 4) the minimization of costs to parishes to staff and maintain their facilities.

Accordingly, I render the following decision and my decrees will be issued today consistent therewith:

Group 1- Our Lady of Mount Carmel, St. Joseph (Joliet), St. Bernard, St. Mary Magdalene, and St. Anthony.

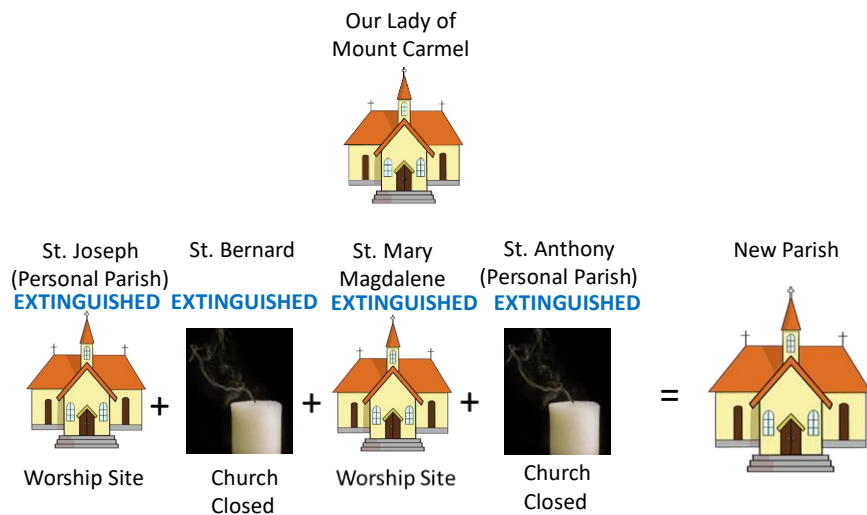
Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish will remain in its current structure.

The remaining four parishes will merge into a new parish with two worship sites – St. Joseph and St. Mary Magdalene. St. Mary Magdalene will be the parish church. St. Anthony Church and St. Bernard Church will close.

Group 1

Parish Configurations:

1. Our Lady of Mount Carmel remains in its current structure.
2. St. Joseph, St. Bernard, St. Mary Magdalene, and St. Anthony unite in a merger into a new parish with two worship sites, St. Joseph and St. Mary Magdalene churches. All former parishes are extinguished. St. Anthony and St. Bernard churches are closed.



Group 2 - St. Paul the Apostle, St. Jude, St. Patrick, Sacred Heart and St. Joseph (Rockdale).

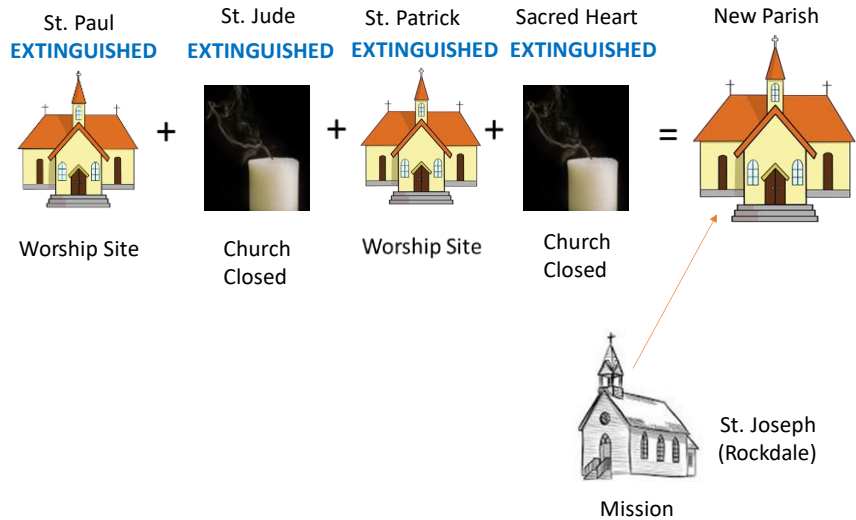
St. Paul the Apostle, St. Jude, St. Patrick and Sacred Heart will merge into a new parish with two worship sites – St. Paul and St. Patrick. St. Paul will be the parish church. St. Jude Church and Sacred Heart Church will close. St. Patrick’s existing Hispanic ministry and Sacred Heart’s African American ministry are assumed by the new parish.

St. Joseph will become a mission of the new parish.

Group 2

Parish Configurations:

1. St. Paul, St. Jude, St. Patrick, and Sacred Heart unite in a merger into a new parish with two worship sites, St. Paul and St. Patrick. All former parishes are extinguished. St. Jude and Sacred Heart churches are closed.
2. St. Joseph becomes a mission of the new parish.
3. Sacred Heart’s African-American liturgy and community outreach continue at the new parish.
4. The new parish expands its Hispanic ministry, including more Spanish masses, sacraments, etc.



Group 3 - Cathedral of St. Raymond, St. John the Baptist, St. Mary Nativity, Holy Cross, St. Ambrose (Crest Hill) and St. Anne (Crest Hill).

The Cathedral of St. Raymond will remain in its current structure.

St. John the Baptist will remain in its current structure. When the Franciscans can no longer staff St. John’s, the parish will be amalgamated into St. Raymond. At that time, a decision will be made as to whether St. John’s Church remains open as a worship site.

St. Mary Nativity will become a territorial parish, but otherwise will remain in its current structure. Holy Cross will be become a personal mission of St. Mary Nativity serving the Polish community.

St. Ambrose and St. Anne will unite in an amalgamation; St. Anne will be extinguished and the church will close.

Group 3

St. John the Baptist
(Personal Parish)



Cathedral of
St. Raymond



St. Mary Nativity
(Personal Parish)



Holy Cross
(Personal Parish)



Mission

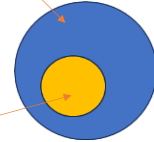
St. Ambrose



St. Anne
EXTINGUISHED



Church
Closed



Parish Configurations:

1. St. John the Baptist remains in its current structure as long as the Franciscans are able to staff the parish. When the Franciscans are no longer able to staff it, the parish will be amalgamated into the Cathedral of St. Raymond. At that time, a decision will be made as to whether St. John the Baptist church remains open as a worship site.
2. St. Raymond remains in its current structure and transitions toward providing Spanish masses and Hispanic ministry.
3. St. Mary Nativity becomes a territorial parish, but otherwise remains in its current structure. Holy Cross becomes a personal mission of St. Mary Nativity; Holy Cross continues to provide Polish masses, Polish school and other ministries.
4. St. Ambrose and St. Anne unite in an amalgamation; St. Anne is extinguished, and the church is closed.

Catholic Schools

The Diocesan Executive School Board, in conjunction with the Catholic Schools Office, made recommendations to the Targeted Restructuring Committee to ensure that Catholic education thrives in Joliet. I have accepted these recommendations.

The parish decisions inevitably affect St. Paul the Apostle School and St. Jude School. Therefore, both St. Paul the Apostle School and St. Jude School will close at the end of the 2023-2024 school year. The 2024-2025 school year will welcome students from both St. Paul and St. Jude Schools to a new school created as a ministry of the new parish and will function as a parish school model. The school will be located on the current St. Paul the Apostle campus which will best accommodate the anticipated growth of students and programs.

The new school will serve as a model for surrounding schools with added programming and outstanding academics steeped in Catholic teachings.

In the coming days you will learn of working sessions, informational meetings, and a timeline of transitional items for the school communities of St. Paul and St. Jude.

The Cathedral of St. Raymond of Nonnatus School, as well as St. Mary Nativity School will remain ministries of their respective parishes and are committed to incorporating programs to better attract and serve their surrounding communities.

In a matter separate from the Targeted Restructuring Process, I would like to make you aware that St. Matthew School in Glendale Heights will close this June. The decision was based upon several factors which included significant loss of enrollment over the past five years, a large annual deficit and substantial loss of funds due to the sunset of the Illinois Tax Credit Scholarship. Students are being welcomed at neighboring Diocesan Catholic elementary schools for the 2024-2025 school year.

Conclusion

Implementation of my decision will reduce the number of parishes in the Joliet Deanery from sixteen (16) parishes to seven (7) parishes. The seven parishes are:

1. Our Lady of Mount Carmel;
2. Cathedral of St. Raymond;
3. St. John the Baptist (until the Franciscans no longer staff the parish, at which time it will be amalgamated into the Cathedral of St. Raymond and a decision will be made as to whether St. John the Baptist Church remains open as a worship site);
4. St. Mary Nativity with Holy Cross as a mission/oratory serving the Polish community;
5. St. Ambrose (Crest Hill);
6. New parish (Merger of St. Anthony, St. Bernard, St. Joseph (Joliet), St. Mary Magdalene) with St. Joseph and St. Mary Magdalene as worship sites, St. Mary Magdalene being the parish church;
7. New parish (Merger of St. Paul the Apostle, St. Jude, St. Patrick and Sacred Heart) with St. Paul and St. Patrick as worship sites, St. Paul being the parish church, and St. Joseph (Rockdale) as a mission/oratory of the new parish.

Five churches will be closed: St. Bernard, St. Anthony, St. Jude, Sacred Heart and St. Anne.

As missionary disciples, we should all desire a Church that is thriving, growing and following the Gospel. In other words, everything we do as a Church needs to be about the salvation of souls. Most Catholics want to see a Church that is focused on the mission of Jesus Christ and not on the preservation of our buildings.

At the end of the day, I do not want us to be viewed as a diocese that buried its head in the sand or kicked the can down the road. Instead, with deep faith in God, we are pruning some of the structural branches, so that our Church can continue to produce great fruit.

I close with a quote from St. Francis DeSales, whose feast day was yesterday, January 24th:

“Do not look forward to the changes and chances in this life in fear; rather look to them with full hope that, as they arise, God, whose you are, will deliver you out of them. He is your keeper. He has kept you hitherto. Do you but hold fast to His dear hand, and He will lead you safely through all things; and, when you cannot stand, He will bear you in His arms. Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow. Our Father will either shield you from suffering, or He will give you strength to bear it.”

May God bless you always. As I remain --

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Ronald A. Hicks
Bishop of Joliet-in-Illinois
January 25, 2024