

Church of Saint James the Apostle

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March 30, 2016

Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano, D.D.
Bishop's Office
1150 Buffalo Road
Rochester, NY 14624

Dear Bishop Matano

For your consideration, I write to request, the merging (amalgamation) of the clustered parishes: St. James the Apostle, Trumansburg; St. Francis Solanus, Interlaken and Holy Cross, Ovid for the following reasons. The three parishes exist between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes where the general population is decreasing. St. Francis Solanus and Holy Cross are located in Seneca County and are rural parishes. They were clustered in 1994. Both churches have small populations. In the recent parish census of June 2015, St. Francis Solanus has 45 families and Holy Cross has 81 families. Between the years 2000 and 2015 the weekly Mass attendance for St. Francis has declined from 92 – 53 and Holy Cross' has declined from 191 to 98. Historically, as with St. James the Apostle, Catholics have been a minority group in the area. St. Francis has a small church building with a seating capacity for 105. Holy Cross has a large church with a seating capacity for 240. St. James the Apostle is located in the northwest section of Tompkins County bordering Seneca County. Many look upon the parish as a suburban parish since the city of Ithaca is located ten miles south. St. James the Apostle parish has a listed parish census population of 252 families, although this is deemed not up to date and that the number of families is less than recorded. Between the years 2000 and 2015 weekly Mass attendance has declined from 334 to 178. Their church building has a seating capacity for 164.

The three parishes, (even though St. Francis Solanus and Holy Cross were clustered and have one parish office) have been for the most part functioning independently of one another. However for the past 15 years or more they have collaborated in a Pre-cana Program and periodically with a RCIA program. Within this past year they have collaborated in a Parents' Baptismal Instruction Program, Confirmation Preparation Program, Easter Triduum Liturgies and most recently collaborated with sponsoring a successful Dinner/Dance with 175 in attendance. Religious Education classes for children, grades 1 – 7, continue to be centered in the individual parish, based in part because the combined three parishes cover a 40-50 mile north-south distance. The total number of children for the three parishes attending religion education classes is 44.

Regarding Liturgical Worship: a Liturgy Committee with representatives from each parish has been recently created. In all three parishes there are well trained Ushers (and at Holy Cross this ministry includes Greeters), Altar Servers, Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. They have all received the same training so they can minister in all three churches. The three churches are blessed with volunteer musicians and cantors (song leaders) and choir.

Regarding social outreach: all three parishes work in their vicinities with other Christian churches in outreach programs to *feed the hungry and cloth the naked*. They are all involved in helping poor students in the local schools with food, winter clothing and school supplies. They gladly cooperate with Seneca and Tompkins Counties Catholic Charities in right to life endeavors and other programs.

Enclosed with this letter is a combined financial report for each parish (Balance Sheet & Statement of Revenues and Expenditures) for the fiscal period ending February 29, 2016.

Through the great assistance of Ms Karen Rinefiel, Coordinator of Leadership Formation for Parishes, monthly meetings were held throughout the year with a Planning Team made up of three representatives from each of the parishes to consider the meaning of parish clustering and possible ways to collaborate; to review parish finances and properties; to produce Guidelines for a new single Parish Pastoral Council, to create a single Parish Pastoral Council (which will begin this April); to have a unified parish office with one unified staff; to consider the location for one Parish Office; to bring together the Parish Finance Councils so each Finance Council member could be familiar with the financial situation of the other parishes and prepare for one finance council; to plan for the locations and times of weekend Masses, etc.

The planning team has held parishioner meetings at all three parishes to answer questions about the merger process and the meaning of merging the parishes. They solicited input from parishioners. I have consulted each pastoral council and finance council. As you will note when you read the attached documents, there was still widespread confusion about whether merging the parishes would result in any of the churches being closed. Some of that confusion has since been dissipated as the planning team has worked toward a new Mass schedule that can be handled by one priest with Masses at all three churches.

Attached to this request for your consideration are:

- The minutes from each of the meetings held at each parish (six meetings in all) giving the opportunity for the parishioners to ask questions and receive answers regarding the merging of the parishes into one faith community.
- The minutes from each of the Parish Pastoral Councils regarding the advantages and disadvantages of merging.
- The minutes from each of the Parish Financial Councils regarding the advantages and disadvantages of merging.
- Recent financial statements from each parish.
- Inventories of real property of each parish.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Rev. Bernard M. Maloney, OFM Cap

Pastor