



NEWS RELEASE

DIOCESE OF ERIE

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Diocese of Erie announces changes for parishes in Crown, Fryburg, Lucinda and Marienville

The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, has finalized the decision to partner St. Mary Parish, Crown, with the already partnered parishes of St. Joseph in Lucinda and St. Michael in Fryburg. He also announced that the status of St. Ann Church in Marienville, formerly a secondary mission church of St. Mary, will change to that of a secondary church. This means it will be available for occasional weekday Masses, funerals and weddings, but no longer have a weekly Sunday Mass. The changes are effective October 30.

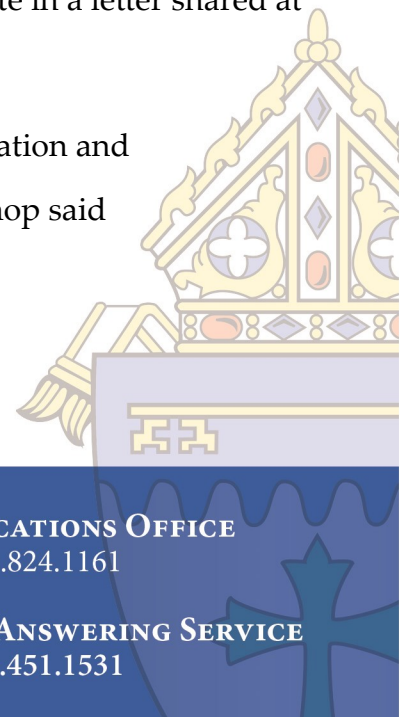
“With the declining number of priests in our diocese, as well as the decline in Mass attendance and active participation in parish life, I need to ensure that we are utilizing our ordained and lay ministers in the best way possible,” Bishop Persico wrote in a letter shared at the parishes beginning Saturday, Sept. 23.

Noting that the decision had been made after significant consultation and discernment with clergy and the Pastoral Planning Committee, the bishop said the parishes now will be under the leadership of a single pastor, Father Michael Polinek. But he also said that feedback from parishioners was

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helpful in prompting him to appoint a newly ordained priest, Father Cory Pius, as parochial vicar of all three parishes. Bishop Persico also has asked the pastor and parochial vicar to consult with parishioners going forward to create a revised Mass schedule that not only meets parishioners' needs, but also could be covered by one priest if necessary. He asked that the new Mass schedule go into effect the weekend of November 4-5.

Bishop Persico acknowledged people would be disappointed with the removal of Sunday Mass from St. Ann Church, but also indicated parishioners are aware of the significant challenges being faced throughout the diocese. In late August, a preliminary plan for parishes in Erie County was proposed — the most extensive changes in that area since the diocese was established in 1853. Finalized restructuring announcements also are planned for the Bradford, Clearfield and Oil City areas in October.

The Diocese of Erie currently has 93 parishes – 40 of which are partnered with at least one other parish. The arrangement allows for close collaboration of the parish communities with regard to Mass schedules, formation programs, evangelization efforts, staffing and pastoral administration. The finances of each parish will be kept separate, although the finance councils will meet together to maximize the impact of parish revenues and to streamline expenses.

The changes were first proposed at a meeting of pastors and parish leaders on March 22. Subsequent to that meeting, parishioners had the opportunity to dialogue with their pastors and provide feedback for consideration.

In an article that will appear in the October 2023 edition of the diocese's flagship publication, *Faith* magazine, archivist Father Justin Pino offers an interesting perspective on pastoral planning:

"...the ractice of reform/renewal has been ever-present in the life of Christ's church from the beginning," he writes. "During this time in the history of the Diocese of Erie, when pastoral planning has become essential to the life of our local church, when parish closures, partnering and merging are realities, it is essential to recognize these 'new ways of possibility' are far from new. In fact, the historical record shows the Diocese of Erie has been practicing pastoral planning for nearly

150 years.” Father Pino points out that the first closure of a church in the diocese occurred in 1866, just 13 years after the diocese was founded.

The exact circumstances of the closure and relocation of the faith community (from Maguire’s Settlement in Crawford County) are not known, according to Father Pino, “but demographic, geographic and personnel issues were as prevalent in the aftermath of the Civil War as they are today,” he says. “These factors in the vitality and life of a faith community are essential indicators today as we continue to embark on the paths of pastoral planning.”

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