

Real Presence/Real Future
Transition Team Update
June 2023

On May 25, 2023, Bishop Fernandes announced that St Mark will close as a parish. Plans call for the parish of St. Mark to be merged into the parish of the Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption at an undetermined point in the future. A Transition Team (“TT”) has been formed to facilitate the merger of the parishes.

The purpose of this communication is to update parishioners regarding things that are known for certain regarding the merger as of the date of this TT Update. The following items are known:

1. After 47 years of service as a Priest, Father Gideon will retire as Pastor of St. Mark on July 11, 2023.
2. Father Gideon and Monsignor Walter will move out of the St. Mark Rectory this year. Msgr. Walter will leave during July and Father Gideon will leave before the end of the year.
3. On July 11, 2023, Father Eilerman will become Administrator of St. Mark Parish in addition to remaining the Rector of St. Mary of the Assumption Parish.
4. St. Mark will remain a separate parish during this time with a separate offertory budget, and one weekend Mass will be held at St. Mark at 11:30 AM on Sunday mornings. In addition to the Sunday Mass, one daily Mass will be held at St. Mark on Wednesday evenings at 6:00 PM. Confession will be offered before this Mass from 5:15 to 5:45 PM and by appointment.
5. As a result of the retirement of Deborah Kaminski as Director of Religious Education at St. Mark, the PSR program at St. Mark will be merged into the PSR program at St. Mary beginning this autumn. However, PSR for both parishes will be held in the classrooms located at St. Mark from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM on Sunday mornings.
6. A communal Rosary will be held at St. Mark in the church on Sunday mornings at 11:00 AM, and at 4:00 PM at St. Mary before the Saturday evening Vigil Mass.
7. The TT has planned for several events to enable parishioners from both St. Mark and St. Mary to become better acquainted. Those events include:

- a.) July 16, 2023 – Meet and Greet with Fr. Eilerman in the St. Raymond Room following the Sunday Mass;
 - b.) August 14, 2023 – Feast of the Assumption of Mary (Mass at St. Mary at 7 PM with a Reception to follow);
 - c.) September 10, 2023 – Combined St. Mark/St. Mary Parish Picnic at the St. Mark Shelter House and Aranda Opportunity Center;
 - d.) October 7 through 12, 2023. Parish Mission hosted by the Oblates of the Virgin Mary. A Priest Oblate will preach at all the Lord's Day's Masses at both campuses on Saturday October 7 and Sunday October 8. An evening presentation will be given Mon. the 9th, Tues the 10th, Wed. the 11th, and Thur. the 12th alternating between the two campuses.
8. Father Eilerman indicated in the Town Hall meeting held on Palm Sunday that the outreach ministries of St. Mark need to continue. As a result, the TT is facilitating discussions between each of the outreach ministries of St. Mark and St. Mary. Where possible, common outreach ministries will be merged. On June 2nd, the St. Mark Food Pantry ministry and the local St. Vincent de Paul (“SVDP”) team met to determine how SVDP can collaborate with St. Mark and St. Mary parishioners to support the outreach. Members of the St. Mark and St. Mary Social Concerns Ministries met on June 12th to discuss the commonality of the multiple activities under the Social Concerns umbrella. Lastly, the maintenance teams of both parishes met to discuss repair priorities at the St. Mark.
 9. A subgroup of the TT has been formed to assess strategies to improve access to the Basilica for elderly and disabled parishioners and visitors.
 10. After the parish of St. Mark formally merges into the parish of St. Mary, there will only be one parish – the parish of St. Mary. However, this one parish will have two campuses – the campus of St. Mark and the campus of St. Mary. The locus of faith formation and outreach ministry will occur primarily at the campus of St. Mark, and the locus of sacramental and worship activity will occur primarily at the campus of St. Mary. In addition, the locus of education will also occur at the St. Mary campus with the St. Mary pre-school and grade school. The continued use of the St. Mark campus is dependent on available funds to operate and maintain the campus.

11. The TT is working on the mass schedule for both St. Mark and St. Mary for Holy Days of obligation. Details will be available in the near future.
12. The TT will provide regular updates regarding merger activities through bulletin announcements, website and social media postings, and other means.

The merger of the two parishes was necessitated by societal trends that led to a shortage of priests. Although Father Gideon was serving as Pastor of St. Mark, he was beyond the age of retirement and was free to leave his post for any or no reason as he was on “deferred retirement.” Given this status, the Bishop determined that he, along with 8 other priests serving on deferred retirement, should retire effective July 11th of this year. Although the Bishop greatly appreciated Father Gideon and the other similarly situated priests’ willingness to continue to serve, the Bishop felt compelled to make this difficult decision for several reasons.

One reason for the Bishop’s decision involved the need to effectively plan for the future. The Real Presence Real Future process recommended the closure of several parishes in order to effectively staff the Diocese with active priests. This was a major change in operations that no one wants to repeat. However, if the Bishop were to include the priests on deferred retirement in his calculations, he might have to revisit the organizational structure of the Diocese frequently given that priests on deferred retirement are not obligated to continue to serve as active priests for any given period of time. Because of the uncertainty regarding their continued service, the Bishop decided to ask them to retire as a group this July. However, given their experience and commitment to serve the people of God, the Bishop also asked them to consider serving in a capacity other than as the pastor of a parish.

Bishop Fernandes has a vision for supporting the presbyterate by utilizing retired priests as a “bench.” The retired priests are able to come into a parish and offer support by relieving a pastor for vacations, retreats, or something like a medical issue. Moreover, the retired priests are full of institutional knowledge that should be passed on to the next generation of the presbyterate in a mentor capacity. This knowledge is priceless and is more difficult to be passed down if a priest is working on the day-to-day tasks of a parish.

Lastly, a retired priest should be able to enjoy his retirement. In recent years we have had upwards of 12 priests that were beyond retirement age and were still pastors. While Bishop Fernandes and parishioners are grateful for this self-sacrifice, it is important that these men be present in the stage of life they are in and not be encumbered with administrative duties. Retired priests should be able to continue in active ministry, walking with parishioners and pastors, and enjoying this stage of life.