

Real Presence/Real Future
Transition Team Update
January 2024

The September 2023 Transition Team Update reported that on May 25, 2023, Bishop Fernandes completed his review of the Real Presence Real Future. This study took over a year to complete and was accomplished by seeking the input of every person in the Diocese of Columbus. Twice, after a model for a grouping of parishes was presented, anyone who saw a defect in that model was invited to provide an alternative model for the restructuring of that grouping of parishes. The final model which was approved for St. Mark and St. Mary was, ***One Parish, One Church, One Pastor, One School.***

On September 28, 2023, Bishop Fernandes issued a Decree of Suppression for St. Mark Parish effective April 30, 2024. The decree set April 30, 2024, as the date St. Mark would no longer be a parish and the merger with the St. Mary of the Assumption parish would occur.

The purpose of this communication is to update parishioners on the decisions made and actions taken related to the merger and to discuss certain spiritual concerns.

Decisions Regarding the Merger

The following are decisions made and actions taken regarding the merger of St. Mark and St. Mary:

1. On July 11, 2023, Fr. Eilerman became Administrator of St. Mark in addition to remaining Rector of St. Mary. Upon assuming his new role, Fr. Eilerman was impressed with the St. Mark buildings, grounds, and activities and made the decision not to sell the property. This is dependent upon ongoing support from parishioners.
2. As reported in the September Update and consistent with the Real Presence Real Future (“RPRF”) recommendations for St. Mark, Fr. Eilerman determined the merged parish of St. Mark and St. Mary would have two campuses. The locus of faith formation and outreach ministry would occur at the campus of St. Mark, and the locus of sacramental and worship activity would occur at the campus of St. Mary. In addition, the locus of education would continue at St. Mary pre-school and grade school.

3. Fr. Eilerman is in the process of retaining an architect to redesign the St. Mark worship space returning it to its original intended use as a multipurpose space. Making the room useful for evangelization and faith formation activities, as well as social events. Fr. Eilerman has been in contact with Shawn Kenney of the Catholic Museum to remove the large pipe organ in the rear of St. Mark Church. Shawn Kenney has an expertise in organs and although the organ is beyond repair, many parts are salvageable. Mr. Kenney will soon be disassembling the organ, taking the parts that can be repurposed and discarding those which are beyond repair. A dumpster would most likely be brought in for the purpose of removing the discarded parts of the organ.
4. The final Mass at St. Mark is on Sunday April 28, 2024, with Bishop Fernandes as the celebrant. Priests who served at St. Mark, including Fr. Gideon, will be invited to concelebrate. Everyone attending is invited to a luncheon on the St. Mark campus following the Mass.
5. Once the two parishes are merged, the weekday and weekend Mass schedule will be reviewed. The new Mass schedule will be published by the end of April 2024.
6. During the Town Hall meeting held on Palm Sunday 2023, Fr. Eilerman complimented the depth of St. Mark's outreach ministries, their significance in the Lancaster community and his desire to have them continue as long as there is both the financial and volunteer support to keep them running. As a result, the St. Mark Food Pantry ministry, the Bridges of St. Mark overseas ministry and the work of the St. Mark Social Concerns ministry will continue. The campus of St. Mark will remain available for use by existing groups such as AA, Alanon, Kairos Prison Ministry and other outreach organizations such as St. Vincent de Paul. Fr. Eilerman also hopes to expand the outreach ministries that make use of the campus of St. Mark.
7. The Aranda Opportunity Center on the campus of St. Mark will continue to be available to parishioners who desire to reserve it for family functions.
8. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will continue at St. Mark until April 30, 2024. At this time there are no plans to change or remove anything from the Adoration Chapel. Adoration times at St. Mary will become available by the end of April 2024.

Spiritual Considerations

The Basilica of St. Mary will become the place where this merged community of St. Mark and St. Mary will worship and adore God. The celebration of the Eucharist is the central act of the Christian Community. As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stated it is the source and summit of our faith. It is critical that this newly merged community worship together in the same space. Otherwise, the Mass becomes something that divides, instead of unifying and becomes a counter sign to the oneness we share in Christ. Remember Christ's words at the Last Supper "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their words, so that they may all be one, as you Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me."

As discussed in the September Update, the merger of St. Mark and St. Mary involves difficult change. The merger was necessitated by societal trends that led to a reduction of practicing Catholics, which in turn has led to a decline in vocations to the priesthood. Key to the effort of reversing this trend is the Bishop's RPRF priority of evangelization. Following the merger, the campus of St. Mark will play a pivotal role in efforts aimed at evangelization. Future activity possibilities include enhanced outreach efforts, Bible studies and other catechetical programs, music events and concerts, social events and festivals, youth activities, recreational events, retreats, and other activities. St. Mark will be the epicenter of efforts to renew the Catholic community in Lancaster as well as reach out to those who do not know the Lord. Although St. Mark ceases to be a center of worship, it will have a vital role in the renewal and growth of the Church.