

Hamden Parish Merger Update August 2021

In an effort to keep the members of Christ the Bread of Life, Divine Mercy, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parishes informed with regard to the progress of our transition to one parish, we have put together these frequently asked questions. We ask you to please read them as we hope they will assist you. Most of all, we ask you please to pray for this process moving us toward an even more energized, unified and growing Catholic community in Hamden. That is very important as we seek the Spirit's guidance.

Why is this merger happening?

The primary shifts that have fueled parish mergers across the northern tier of the U.S. are a precipitous decline in the number of regularly worshipping Catholics, a migration of population away from our areas, and a related decline in the number of priests to serve the number of parishes we currently have. Unforeseen changes since 2017 also have affected our local situation. *The ultimate goal of coming together is to create a parish in Hamden that is sustainable with each of us actively working toward significant growth of the worshipping community through personal invitation.*

What is meant by a single parish?

In every way, we will be called to be one family of faith. That means that our mission, our ministries, office administration, and staff will be coordinated as one. It is important to remember that a merger calls us to work as *one*; that is different than operating in reality as three parishes with priests and staff serving essentially separate communities.

Will any churches close?

The total capacity of the four Hamden churches is approximately 3,250 across the four churches. Our total Hamden worshipping assembly in July 2021 averaged 1,842 per weekend, and averaged 2,646 in 2019, prior to COVID. *No decisions have been made regarding the possible closure of any church.* Any such discussions need to be in concert with the pastor of the new parish. The emotional response that these potential changes may create is not lost on anyone in parish leadership or on the Transition Team. At the same time, our faith in Christ nurtures us and sustains us in every circumstance; Jesus promised us, "I am with you always."

Who will be the pastor? What about deacons, parish staff?

Archbishop Blair will appoint a pastor and a parochial vicar (assistant) to coincide with the merger which is scheduled to take place January 1, 2022. As clergy, deacons also receive their assignments from the Archbishop. Staff decisions will be made in accordance with the human resources guidelines of the Archdiocese of Hartford.

Will our Mass schedule change?

Yes. It is anticipated that a pastor and a parochial vicar (assistant) will be assigned to Hamden. Following

Archdiocesan guidelines regarding the number of Masses that can be celebrated by priests, and considering the distances among the four churches, current parish schedules, and attendance patterns, our plan is to develop an interim schedule that will serve the needs of the community in the first months of this new configuration. We will solicit input and do our best to respond. We thank you in advance for your openness to the changes which must accompany this merger remembering that the Celebration of Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life." Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324-27.

What happens to the financial resources of our parishes?

The financial resources of the three parishes will be combined into one. The Transition Team Buildings and Finance Committee is working with Archdiocesan guidelines to develop a preliminary budget to serve the needs of the new parish. All financial resources and donations stay in Hamden; they become one to support the new parish of which we all will be a part.

What about Parish and Finance Councils?

There eventually will be one pastoral council and one finance council providing support and guidance to the pastor of the new parish.

How will the merger affect religious formation programs?

As with every other ministry of the new parish, there will be one unified religious formation program for youth as well as one Rite of Christian Initiation process for adults. The coordinators of the religious formation programs have been working together to begin the single new program this October with classes located at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish Center on South New Road.

Why is evangelization a key element of the merger?

Catholics know that a close and deepening relationship with Jesus Christ is key to remaining faithful. *It is critical that we are an invitational community, reaching out to those who have left the Sacraments and those who are seeking faith.* The Alpha Course, which currently has participants from each Hamden parish, is an important element toward drawing people to Christ. Relying on the Holy Spirit and our shared outreach, may we embrace the future with renewed faith.