



NEWS RELEASE

DIOCESE OF ERIE

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**Five parishes in DuBois region to become one;
new parish, Holy Spirit, to be established**

St. Catherine Church, DuBois, will become the parish church

Monsignor Richard Siefer, pastor of five parishes including Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish, Sykesville; St. Bernard Parish, Falls Creek; St. Catherine of Siena Parish, DuBois; St. Mary Parish, Reynoldsville; and St. Michael the Archangel Parish, DuBois, announced on October 7 that the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, after consultation with the diocesan priest council, has accepted the parishes' proposed plan to merge the five parishes into one.

The mergers, effective December 2, 2023, will be an "extinctive union," by which a new parish, Holy Spirit Parish, will be formed from the five merged parishes.

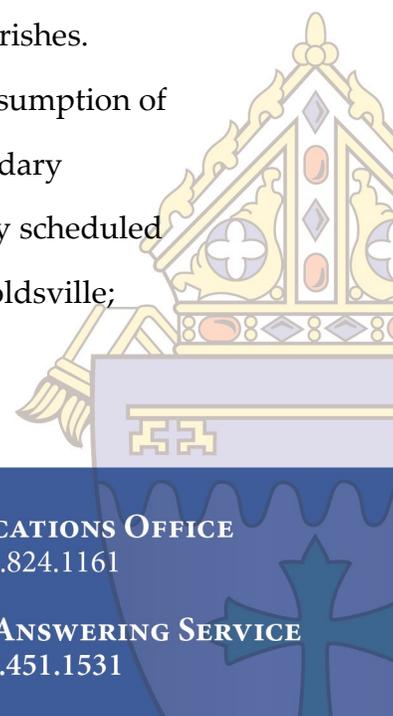
St. Catherine Church* in DuBois will become the parish church and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Sykesville, will be designated a secondary church with mission status, meaning it will continue to have a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass. St. Bernard Church, Falls Creek; St. Mary Church, Reynoldsville;

**Please note the distinction between parish, which refers to a community of people, and church, which refers to a building. - more -*

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and St. Michael the Archangel Church, DuBois, will be designated as secondary churches of Holy Spirit Parish, but without mission status. While this means that the latter three churches will no longer be able to offer Sunday Mass, the churches will still be available for occasional weekday Masses, funerals and weddings.

Monsignor Siefer, who is also vicar for the Eastern Vicariate of the Diocese of Erie which comprises Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean and Potter counties, has served in the DuBois region since he was appointed as pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in 1991. In 2017, St. Catherine partnered with St. Michael the Archangel under his leadership, and in 2022, he also was appointed pastor of St. Bernard, St. Mary and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary parishes.

“I am grateful for the leadership of Monsignor Siefer during this process,” Bishop Persico wrote in a letter to parishioners read at Masses the weekend of Oct. 7, “and am pleased to appoint him pastor of Holy Spirit Parish.” Bishop Persico also has appointed Father Edward Walk as senior associate of Holy Spirit Parish and Father Benjamin Dagher as its parochial vicar. Father Dagher also will continue as part-time faculty at DuBois Central Catholic School.

“Developing this plan has not been without challenges,” Msgr. Siefer said, “but the people have worked very hard to balance the realities we face with the desire to strengthen our community. We honor those who came before us and want to ensure a Catholic presence in our region well into the future.”

The Diocese of Erie is in the midst of another phase of pastoral planning focused on parish restructuring with efforts in process for the Bradford, Clearfield, Erie and Oil City regions. Bishop Persico has emphasized that changes are being made out of necessity. Accelerated by the pandemic, Mass attendance in the diocese has dropped by 51 percent across the diocese since 2012. At the same time, vocations to the priesthood are on the decline while more and more priests in the diocese are approaching retirement age. Currently there are 92 active priests serving across the 10,000 square miles of the Diocese of Erie; that number is expected to drop to approximately 60 by 2030.

Bishop Persico also has indicated he understands it will require effort to accept and adapt to the changes.

“Our churches are beautiful and we have strong attachments to them,” he wrote in his pastoral letter, “Building the future: A call to embrace renewal and restructuring in the Diocese of Erie,” published April 10, 2023. But he also said he “cannot emphasize strongly enough that although our structures may change, the mission Christ gave us to go forth and make disciples remains. As inspiring as that sounds,” he wrote, “we all know it requires a great deal of sacrifice, generosity and willingness to walk through challenges with the faith that Christ accompanies us.”

Bishop Persico plans to celebrate the first Mass with parishioners of Holy Spirit Parish on Saturday, Dec. 2.

For a more detailed history of the parishes involved, the decree effecting the change can be found at www.eriescd.org/bishop/decrees.html.

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