



Diocese unveils final parish reconfiguration plan for parishes in McKean, Potter and Warren counties

BRADFORD — At a meeting for pastors and parish leaders held in Bradford Oct. 17, the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, unveiled a new configuration of parishes for McKean, Potter and Warren counties.

The most significant changes affect St. Elizabeth Parish in Smethport, St. Gabriel Parish in Port Allegany, St. Eulalia Parish in Coudersport and St. Bibiana Parish in Galeton. Several of these parishes already have secondary churches, some of which have a weekend Mass; some of which do not.

Please note several key distinctions:

A **parish** refers to a community of people while a **church** refers to a building.

A parish can have secondary churches, with or without mission status.

A **secondary mission church** is permitted to have Mass on either Saturday evening or Sunday morning.

A **secondary church** (without mission status) does not have a weekend Mass, but is still available for weddings, funerals and in some cases, a weekday Mass. - more -

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The changes, effective December 1, 2023, are as follows:

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, Smethport, will remain a parish church.

St. Gabriel Parish, Port Allegany, will merge into **St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, Smethport,** becoming a secondary mission church of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish. A Saturday evening or Sunday Mass will still be offered at St. Gabriel Church.

St. Joseph Church in Mount Jewett, remains a secondary church of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, but now without mission status. St. Joseph Church will not have a weekend Mass.

St. Eulalia Parish, Coudersport, will remain a parish church.

St. Bibiana Parish, Galeton, will merge into **St. Eulalia Parish, Coudersport,** becoming a secondary church of St. Eulalia Parish. St. Bibiana Church will not have a weekend Mass.

St. Augustine Church, Austin, remains a secondary church of St. Eulalia Parish, but now without mission status, meaning it will not have a weekend Mass.

Sacred Heart Church, Genesee, remains a secondary mission church, but now of St. Eulalia Parish, rather than of the former St. Bibiana Parish. A Saturday evening or Sunday Mass will still be offered at Sacred Heart Church.

Included with this release is a two-page listing of the final configurations, including the parishes that will not be directly affected. It also is available at <https://www.eriecd.org/planning.html>.

A preliminary plan for Bradford, Potter and Warren counties was first put forth on March 16, 2023, at which time parishioners were invited to offer feedback through surveys made available online and as hard copies. In addition to the official responses submitted by each parish, 160 people offered feedback.

“The feedback is an essential component to the process,” said Bishop Persico. “The insights provided by parishioners helped us formulate a much stronger plan than what was originally proposed.”

During the presentation, Bishop Persico reminded pastors and parish leaders that the driving force underpinning the parish reconfiguration remains the “best possible spiritual care of souls in the diocese.”

“We’ve worked hard, together, to determine the best use of our resources, including our clergy, to allow us to maintain and form communities where we can grow in our faith and in our relationship with Jesus Christ,” he said. But he also emphasized the realities facing the diocese, noting that parish configurations may change again in the not-too-distant future.

“We currently have 92 active priests in the diocese, but we expect that number to be closer to 60 within about seven years,” he said. “Even as we emphasize welcome, evangelization and renewed parish life, we have to pay attention to the realities found in demographic and population trends, as well as church attendance, as we move into the future.”

A series of implementation guides and other resources are being prepared not only to help parishes manage the logistics of the changes, but also to help with the spiritual aspects of the reconfiguration.

“My primary concern is that you, as pastors and parish leaders, accompany the people in your parishes spiritually during this interim period,” Bishop Persico said.

Next week, Bishop Persico will make a similar presentation to parishes in Clearfield County. Parishes in Erie County, which represent slightly more than 40 percent of the Catholic population in the 13-county diocese, received a preliminary plan in August; the period for feedback on that plan ended October 9. The pastoral planning committee will soon begin work on the final plan for Erie County, which is expected to be announced next spring and implemented during the summer of 2024.

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