

THE CATHOLIC PARISHES OF OAK PARK, IL  
*Ascension, St. Catherine/St. Lucy, St. Edmund, St. Giles*

January 29, 2022

Dear Parishioners of the Oak Park Parishes,

We, your priests, write to share with you the results of the Renew My Church parish configurations. The pages that follow contains the official document coming from the Archdiocese of Chicago. You will find that the information is detailed, but offers a clear direction for building the new parochial reality that we shall soon begin to implement.

We are gratified that Cardinal Cupich, the auxiliary bishops, the archdiocese's Presbyteral Council and the administrative leadership of Renew My Church, in coming to their decision, ultimately agreed with and chose to adopt much of what the Oak Park parish representatives had presented to them. To that end, we wish to thank so many of you who were involved in this lengthy but important process. The Grouping Members from the 4 parishes met regularly for months to pray about and discuss how to move forward in a manner that would honor our past, address current challenging realities and develop a blueprint for the future. We are immensely grateful to them.

In addition, we wish to thank our parish Pastoral Staffs with whom we have had many discussions and from whom we have gained important insight for moving forward. Our Parish Councils have also been involved in these arduous and challenging discussions and we thank them sincerely for all the ways that they have guided us, encouraged us and offered valuable input to us.

Finally, we offer our heartfelt gratitude to you, our beloved parishioners, who have prayed along with us for a noble outcome, who have shared your thoughts and opinions with us and who have stayed the course, trusting that we would always have your best interest in mind as we addressed both the practical and pastoral needs of our 4 communities of faith.

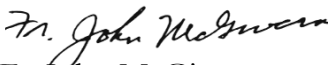
The decision:

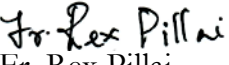
Ascension and St. Edmund Parishes will unite as one parish, effective July 1, 2022. Fr. Rex Pillai will become the pastor of this united parish.

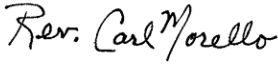
St. Catherine / St. Lucy and St. Giles Parishes will unite as one parish, effective July 1, 2022. Fr. Carl Morello will become pastor of this united parish.

Let us continue to pray for one another as we embark upon this new and exciting time. Challenges are sure to arise, but let us recall what St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians tells us: "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ." Let us, therefore, walk forward together in unity, embracing the new reality that we are asked to become and choosing to trust that the Holy Spirit shall walk along with us every step of this sacred journey.

May our Lord bless us all.

  
Fr. John McGivern  
Pastor, St. Edmund Parish  
Administrator, St. Catherine/St. Lucy Parish

  
Fr. Rex Pillai  
Associate Pastor, Ascension Parish

  
Fr. Carl Morello  
Pastor, St. Giles Parish  
Administrator, Ascension Parish





## Oak Park Renew My Church Update: January 2022

### Discernment Process

Ascension, St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy, St. Edmund and St. Giles Parishes engaged in the Renew My Church (RMC) review and discernment process over the past few months. The Grouping Feedback and Discernment team (GFDT), which was made up of members from each community, met to review and discern the future parish structure for the area. Our deepest appreciation goes to the GFDT who prayerfully discerned the parish structure during this challenging time of the pandemic.

Based on their meetings and feedback gathered from the larger parish community, they submitted feedback to the archdiocese, which included hope and commitment to work as a united Oak Park Catholic community regardless of the specific parish structure decided.

The Archdiocesan Standards and Recommendations Commission, which includes representatives from across the Archdiocese of Chicago, reviewed the feedback and other information, including financial summaries and parish trends.

Cardinal Cupich and Bishop Birmingham are grateful to Fr. Morello, Fr. McGivern, Fr. Pillai and the Grouping Team who gathered together, and all who offered feedback through the recent discernment process.

### Outcome

In the past few weeks, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, archbishop of Chicago, the archdiocese's auxiliary bishops, and the archdiocese's Presbyteral Council met to discuss the Commission's recommendation. Based upon those discussions and prayerful consideration, Cardinal Cupich made the following decisions regarding the parish structure in this grouping.

**The parishes will be structured as two parishes, with expectations that pastors and leadership teams will continue the collaboration that has already begun across Oak Park. This reflects the hope and commitment expressed by the grouping team to work in concert as an Oak Park Catholic community.**

- **Ascension and St. Edmund will unite as one parish effective July 1, 2022.**
  - Both churches will continue to host a regular schedule of Masses. The specific schedule will be determined by the pastor in consultation with parish leadership.
  - Ascension will formally be designated the parish church where the united parish's sacramental records will be kept.
  - Fr. Rex Pillai will serve as pastor of the united parish.
  - The local community will discern possibilities for the permanent name of the united parish, within guidelines provided by the archdiocese, and submit three to five options to Cardinal Cupich. Each church retains its name.
  - Ascension School will serve as the parish-governed school.
- **St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy and St. Giles will unite as one parish, effective July 1, 2022.**
  - St. Giles will formally be designated the parish church where the united parish's sacramental records will be kept.
  - St. Catherine St. Lucy Church will remain sacred space with the worship schedule to be determined by the pastor in consultation with parish leadership. This may or may not include a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass.
  - Fr. Carl Morello will serve as pastor of the united parish.
  - St. Giles School will serve as the parish-governed school.
  - St. Catherine St. Lucy School will continue in its current structure supported by Big Shoulders with pastoral support provided by the parish.
  - The local community will discern possibilities for the permanent name of the united parish, within guidelines provided by the archdiocese, and submit three to five options to Cardinal Cupich. Each church retains its name.
- Based on the hopes and commitment expressed by the grouping during the discernment process, **the archdiocese affirms the Oak Park grouping's vision to use St. Catherine St. Lucy campus as a base for powerful ministry outreach to the West Side of Chicago.** Ministry outreach efforts will be supported by the entire Oak Park Catholic community.



## **Rationale**

- The archdiocesan RMC Commission was grateful for the excitement from many in the grouping to work as one united Oak Park Catholic community, with the possibility of formally uniting in one parish.
- Considering long-term priest placement needs and not wanting to lock into a parish structure that may not be manageable for future pastors, the archdiocesan RMC Commission proposed structuring the parishes as two parishes would be the most prudent decision at this time.
- Retaining two parishes at four campuses provides flexibility for future priest placement and also avoids complexity that would result in Ascension and St. Giles Schools being under the same parish entity. The archdiocese remains grateful for the support of Big Shoulders and Fenwick's partnerships at St. Catherine St. Lucy School.
- Being structured as two parishes does not preclude efforts to work as a united Oak Park Catholic community. To best serve the areas of Oak Park, Austin and Galewood with two parishes, the archdiocese encourages parish leaders to continue to share ministries.
- The archdiocesan RMC Commission clearly heard the grouping's desire to retain all four churches and supports continuing all as church buildings retaining their sacred character.
  - The pastor and parish leadership team of the newly united St. Catherine-St. Lucy and St. Giles parishes will provide a recommendation regarding the frequency of worship at St. Catherine-St. Lucy Church, which may or may not include a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass.
- The archdiocesan RMC Commission encourages the Oak Park Catholic community to collaborate with the West Side Catholic community to envision how best to collectively address the spiritual and social needs of their shared ministry areas. This includes using the resources of both communities as well as their physical presence at St. Catherine St. Lucy, St. Martin de Porres, St. Agatha, and other Catholic institutions serving the community.

## **Next steps**

- The renewal process calls us to become a stronger, more sustainable presence for the future capable of reaching more people in their work of making disciples of Jesus Christ, building communities with one another and inspiring witness in the world around us.
- The newly united parish communities will embark upon the next phase of renewal, focusing on strong evangelization to the world around us. We know that this structural change is just the beginning of our journey of renewal.
- Renewal of our Church means that every Catholic, every searcher, and everyone who loves Jesus and his Church, will have to look anew at what it means to be Jesus' disciple and to live out that discipleship.
- Profound gratitude to all involved in the process to date, and prayers for all those who will take up the next phase of renewal, sharing faith and evangelizing those searching to know Jesus more deeply.