

Recommendation for the Roman Catholic Community of the Tonawandas



Brothers & Sisters in Christ-

There is no denying that the last several weeks and couple of months have been filled with anxiety and stress for many in our Family of Parishes. As mentioned in previous communications, the Catholic Church is a vital part of the history and life of Western New York. Our churches make up the very fabric of many of our cities, towns and villages. Communities where the Catholic Church is present, is very obvious, and it is something we should be proud about as Catholics.

It has been taken to prayer and there have been many communications with parishioners, community leaders and clergy. After great discernment, we will be accepting the recommendation by the diocese to merge St. Francis of Assisi Church and St. Jude the Apostle Parish with other churches in our Family. This decision was not easy to come to, but I believe, strategically, is the direction for us as the Catholic Church in our parts of Tonawanda, North Tonawanda, and Western New York as a whole. The leadership team had many spirited conversations, and it was not unanimous that we go this direction, but was the one with the most agreement.

We **will be** suggesting an adjustment to the initial recommendation. While St. Francis of Assisi will merge with Our Lady of Czestochowa, we will be recommending that St. Jude the Apostle merge with St. Christopher instead of Our Lady of Czestochowa because of geographical logistics.

At this time, **nothing** has been made official and **NOTHING** is for sale. A meeting with Bishop Fisher is scheduled for August 16 where we will review various aspects of our recommendation, which will be in next week's bulletin and posted online.

St. Francis and St. Jude will continue to function as they have since the formation of our Family. Our Faith Formation program for the Family will continue to be based at St. Jude's until the Summer of 2025 when we relocate it to Our Lady of Czestochowa's campus.

St. Francis' Early Childhood Center, will be in operation until the end of the upcoming school year, June 2025.

St. Francis' Chapel and Columbarium, will be recommended to remain open. The chapel would be available for funerals for those with purchased niches and an annual Mass on All Souls day (November 2), beginning in 2025. Weddings and baptisms will not be permitted in the chapel/columbarium.

Outreach Ministry, from the Family of Parishes will relocate and centralize to the St. Francis campus. Location on campus of outreach operations is still TBD. This means St. Amelia and St. Christopher outreach will be relocated, DATE: TBD.

St. Jude the Apostle's residence on Kingston Ave. will be the only property put on sale at this time, when it is ready to do so.

Final Masses & Celebrations for both St. Francis and St. Jude will be coordinated with respective committees from each parish. Even when final Masses are scheduled, it will not mean that the property will be immediately put on sale following the celebrations.

Parishioners will be communicated with for registering at St. Christopher, St. Amelia or Our Our Lady of Czestochowa, when the time is appropriate. Everyone will be free to join any parish of their choosing.

Any donations received for St. Francis for St. Jude between now and the closing of the community will be used for upkeep and care of the facilities until their sale.

A new Mass schedule will be worked on with a future start date to be communicated, likely **Lent 2025**.

Parishioners of St. Francis and St. Jude are encouraged to still participate in the sacramental life of both parishes.

Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, and Altar Servers will have trainings scheduled in December/January for St. Amelia, St. Christopher and Our Lady of Czestochowa for their specific locations. Anyone interested in serving in those roles at those sites, current or new, will be asked to attend.

Music Ministry will be coordinated once the new Mass schedule is determined. We hope that our current choirs will be open, willing, and able to continue to serve us in new locations based on location and Mass times.

Mass Intentions will be allowed to be booked for January 2025 forward, once the new Mass schedule and its start date is determined.

Statuary, icons, windows, altars, tabernacles and other religious articles will remain in place at St. Francis and St. Jude until a later date and procedures are received with how to proceed for their use. It is hoped that many of these important items will be able to be reused in the churches within the Family of Parishes.

Employees of St. Francis and St. Jude will be worked with on hopefully remaining within the Family of Parishes in new capacities and opportunities.

Proceeds from sold properties go to the the parish corporation for which they belong for upkeep of facilities. It is still unclear how the child abuse cases will be settled. There is still a possibility that individual cases will be brought to parishes directly, or that there will be one large settlement amount that parishes will pay into. We do not know at the writing of this announcement how things will unfold.

There will be constant communication throughout the entire process, answering questions as we approach different stages. Unless something is read in the bulletin, it should not be considered official.

It should again be reiterated that a meeting for our Family is not scheduled until August 16 to meet with the bishop to go over the recommendation. Since our recommendation closely mirrors that which was first put forth from the diocese and the Road to Renewal Office, we do not anticipate much to change following our meeting.

During this time, we need to remember that we are all brothers and sisters and Christ, and Christ will continue to be the center of everything we say and do as a Family of Parishes. The priests, deacons, religious and lay leaders of our Family are committed to serving to the best of their ability everyone who comes to use seeking Christ. This is a challenging time, and we need to be there for one another, offering support where and when it is needed.

The communities of Our Lady of Czestochowa, St. Amelia and St. Christopher are called upon to welcome those from other communities, inside and outside of our Family of Parishes. From introducing yourself with a smile, to giving up “your seat” in church, the smallest of gestures can make the world of difference, positive and negative.

I am humbled to serve as your pastor and this is without question the most difficult thing I will likely ever face in my priesthood. I want to ensure everyone, the priests of our Family put all of our energy into our vocation and service as priests and feel the same emotions as all of you right now. I hope and pray that together as we go through this process we will become stronger in who we are and how we identify as Catholics.

In Good Faith,
Fr. Michael