



The Discernment Process

Admiral Jim Stockdale was the highest-ranking United States military officer held as a prisoner-of-war during the conflict in Vietnam. He was given no release date and lived not knowing if he would survive to see his family again. Years following his release, he was asked how he dealt with not knowing how the story would end. He answered, “I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end.” He never lost faith in the end of the story. “This is a very important lesson”, he said, “You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end – which you can never afford to lose – with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

What are the facts of *our* current reality? Our parishes face a number of challenges: the parishioner base of some parishes is small; we have fewer priests; and many parishes have had to defer maintenance for years resulting in unaffordable capital needs. Simply put, we have more campuses than we need, we have more campuses than we can afford, and we have more campuses than we can staff. In July 2021 we began a process for parish renewal in the lower Blackstone Valley region. Since then, representatives from each of the five parishes in Blackstone, Linwood, Millville, and Uxbridge have reviewed each parish’s financial reports and analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. They heard and discussed oral presentations from each of the teams, toured each parish’s facilities, conversed about these data and experiences, and prayed all the while. In February, the representatives presented recommendations to Bishop McManus, and now, based upon those recommendations, the following is announced that will become effective on July 1, 2022:

The Decisions

Regarding the parishes in Linwood and Uxbridge:

- Good Shepherd Parish will be fully united to Saint Mary Parish.
- Saint Mary Parish will continue in its current structure and serve the entire community of Uxbridge.
- Saint Mary Church will be the sole location for all Masses.
- Father Nicholas Desimone will remain as pastor of Saint Mary Parish.
- Opportunities to lease or sell the Good Shepherd properties will be explored. Proceeds from the sale of these properties will be used to create an endowment that will secure and enhance the Church’s ministry to the people of Uxbridge.

Parish Renewal in the Blackstone Valley

Regarding the parishes in Blackstone and Millville:

- Saint Augustine, Saint Paul, and Saint Theresa Parishes will all unite as one new parish with a new name and one worship site.
- Saint Paul Church will be designated as the parish church and the sole location for all Masses.
- Father John Larochelle will be the pastor of the newly established parish.
- Father Larochelle will continue to reside at the rectory in Saint Mary Parish in Uxbridge.
- Parishioners will be asked to participate in a process for discerning possible names for the newly established parish. These names will ultimately be submitted to Bishop McManus for his consideration.
- Opportunities to lease or sell the Saint Augustine and Saint Theresa properties will be explored. Proceeds from the sale of these properties will not be used to remediate the debt currently held by Saint Paul Parish, but will instead be used to create an endowment for the newly established parish that will likewise secure and enhance the Church's ministry to the people of Blackstone and Millville.

The Rationale

Many factors contributed to these decisions that were each carefully considered. In the end, it was determined that only two parishes are sustainable in our region given the dramatic changes in demographics, the availability of priests, the ability to support trained professional staff, and the financial burden of maintaining multiple parish properties.

The Masses at Saint Mary and Saint Paul are the most well-attended, and both have the capacity to welcome even more parishioners. Also, while the Saint Mary rectory, offices, and hall spaces are used extensively, the Our Lady of the Valley School building provides additional space for meetings and catechesis, as does the recently constructed Grace Rett Athletic Complex and Education Center. Likewise, the rectory and school building at Saint Paul sufficiently support current parish ministries and activities and offer room for the anticipated growth of the newly established parish in Blackstone. These decisions, although challenging, will provide long-term vitality, and sustain the sacramental and ministerial life of the Church in the Valley.

Some Next Steps

As we begin to process this information, there will be several opportunities to participate in listening sessions with Father Desimone, and to ask questions. More information will be provided at Masses this weekend. Also, in April, following Easter, we will welcome *Divine Renovation's*, Matthew Regitz for a multi-day event whose purpose is to inspire us to embrace a shared vision for the Church and to equip us for the Church's essential mission of evangelization.

These decisions may be difficult to accept and painful to process. In these intervening weeks, let us encourage one another as brothers and sisters should, giving thanks for the graces we have received through our parishes, and then together set out on mission to do the work entrusted to us by Jesus Christ.