



For Immediate Release

Archbishop Paul D. Etienne Issues Decrees for Parish Changes in Seattle

SEATTLE, May 30, 2022 – After more than a year of strategic planning, Archbishop Paul D. Etienne issued three decrees for parishes in Seattle, which will take effect on July 1, 2022. Specifically, the parish of Our Lady of Mount Virgin will be closed, while St. Mary Parish will be merged into St. Therese Parish.

“My goal with these strategic planning efforts is to ensure we are a mission-oriented Church that continually draws people closer to Christ. By bringing together communities and resources, we are better able to provide vibrant pastoral care for all of God’s people,” said Archbishop Etienne, who began these efforts in 2020 in Tacoma, Everett and Seattle. “As part of these efforts, we are also examining our finite resources of clergy, lay leaders, finances, ministry and more so that we may be the best stewards of the gifts we have and balance them across the archdiocese.”

Focus on Seattle

This recent strategic planning effort in Seattle began in 2015 under Archbishop J. Peter Sartain. The priests serving the 16 parishes in the South Seattle deanery hired an outside consultant to develop a set of recommendations for the future structure of the deanery. This effort was paused when Archbishop Sartain announced his retirement in 2019.

Once Archbishop Etienne turned his focus to strategic planning, he appointed a Strategic Planning Committee to review the original recommendations and expand upon them, taking into consideration the needs of the greater archdiocese and other factors such as the presence of schools, outreach ministries and new data related to priest projections. The Strategic Planning Committee partnered with parish leaders to develop a refined recommendation for the South Seattle deanery, which was ultimately approved by the Presbyteral Council and Archbishop Etienne.

For each impacted parish, the Strategic Planning Committee worked directly with the pastoral leader and stakeholders comprised of parishioners who represented the parish community. Together they held multiple listening sessions and planning meetings, providing several opportunities for people to ask questions, share feedback and voice their desires for the future.

“This is a very challenging and emotional process for everyone since it involves changing their own faith community, which is so central to many people’s lives,” said Leigh Stringfellow, director of Strategic Planning. “Everyone goes through the grief process differently and we try to support them along the way, while encouraging them to help plan for the evolution of their community.”

Challenges in South Seattle

In South Seattle, several parishes are clustered together — some within walking distance — unlike other areas of the Archdiocese where people must travel more than 45 minutes to reach their closest parish. Additionally, Seattle is recognized as a growing city, yet many parishes in this area have experienced declining trends, with fewer engaged parishioners who attend Mass or participate in the sacraments, stewardship, faith formation or other parish life activities.

“We simply cannot continue with the status quo,” said Archbishop Etienne. “We want active living parish communities to foster missionary disciples and so I accepted the recommendations to make parish changes in the South Seattle deanery.”

Specifically, the decrees issued by Archbishop Etienne impact the following parishes:

Our Lady of Mount Virgin Parish

Our Lady of Mount Virgin began as a personal parish for the Italian community and since then has welcomed many other cultural communities. Over the past few decades, the Italian community has joined parishes across the archdiocese, while the Vietnamese, Chinese and Lao communities worked with the Strategic Planning Committee to find new parishes where they will be served in their primary languages. Father Hung Nguyen, who served at this parish, requested a leave for missionary work in Laos. Archbishop Etienne granted his request. Starting July 1, 2022, this parish will be closed.

For more information, please read the Our Lady of Mount Virgin [decree](#) and [cover letter](#) here.

St. Mary Parish

St. Mary’s is widely recognized for its dedication to social justice, its outreach to immigrants, its bilingual community and its robust food bank. St. Mary’s will be merged into St. Therese Parish in hopes that together these communities will thrive and enhance both the parish and school at St. Therese, while continuing the great work of the St. Mary’s Food Bank and joyfully living out the Gospel.

For more information, please read the [St. Mary decree](#) and [cover letter](#).

St. Therese Parish

Founded in the 1920s, St. Therese is recognized for its diverse faith community, its commitment to social justice and its Catholic school, which serves students from many ethnic, racial and socio-economic backgrounds. While at one point St. Therese Parish was home for more than 700 families, the parish community has shrunk over the last few decades. Welcoming parishioners from St. Mary’s will help this parish revitalize under the new leadership of Father Woody McCallister. Once St. Mary’s is merged into St. Therese on July 1, 2022, the parish boundaries will change and all the parish assets, including the property and buildings at St. Mary’s, will become part of St. Therese parish.

For more information, please read the [St. Therese decree](#) and [cover letter](#).

“While these decrees represent a key milestone in this process, we are not ‘done,’” said Archbishop Etienne. “We are here to support the parish communities as they complete the merging process and begin to take action to revitalize parish life. I am so grateful to everyone who has been a part of this challenging, yet hopeful journey. Please be assured of my continued prayers for you.”

About the Archdiocese of Seattle

The Archdiocese of Seattle encompasses all of Western Washington, stretching from Canada to Oregon and from the Cascade Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. There are 72 Catholic schools, and 174 parishes, missions and pastoral centers in the archdiocese, with more than 500 weekly Masses celebrated in eight languages. Archbishop Paul D. Etienne leads the archdiocese with his auxiliary bishops, Bishop Eusebio Elizondo and Bishop Frank Schuster. For more information about the Archdiocese of Seattle, visit archseattle.org.

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