

## Living Stones FAQ

### **1 When will the implementation of the Living Stones plan take effect?**

As of this writing (July, 2017), there is no set date to implement the work done by the Living Stones Committee. Throughout the diocese, just about every parish has been asked in some way to review its pastoral and administrative policies and procedures in order to respond fruitfully to the reality of fewer church members, shrinking finances, and fewer priests.

### **2. Why can we not have a priestless parish?**

It depends on what is meant by priestless. Just as the Church needs a leader, the Pope, just as a diocese needs a leader, the Bishop, so too, a parish must have a Pastor. The Catholic Church is a Eucharistic community, people joined together as a body nourished by the body and blood of Christ and his word. While many people, especially deacons, can tend to many of the pastoral issues in a parish, only a priest or bishop can celebrate the Eucharist. Without the Eucharist, there can be no parish.

There may be some parishes without a resident pastor, but every parish has a pastor. For example, Msgr. Aucoin resides at St. Anthony Parish, but is also pastor of St. Patrick's.

### **3. How will a parish provide pastoral care for the people if there is no resident pastor?**

Whether or not there is a resident pastor, every parish relies on paid and volunteer ministers to respond to the pastoral needs of fellow parishioners. Most Faith Formation programs depend upon dedicated volunteers to teach and assist. Most outreach to the homebound rely on Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Church decorating, fund raising, and social events must have people willing to donate their time and talent. Advisory councils such as pastoral council and finance councils rely on people of the parish. Each parish has several commissioned lay ministers whose talents will be essential for accomplishing parish ministry. In addition, many volunteers are available to do secretarial work, answer phones, provide rides to the needy, give food to the hungry. The pastor and/or Pastoral Associate (deacon or lay person) and/or Parochial Vicar will make assure the availability and implementation of all needed ministries.

### **4. How will financial resources be shared between each church?**

Currently, St. Anthony and St. Patrick parishes are linked. The revenues and expenses of each parish remain in the parish. Funds are never mingled. The same would hold true if three parishes (Holy Family, St. Patrick, and St. Anthony) were linked together. Equitable arrangements would have to be made for the items that are truly shared by all three parishes. For example, right now, there is one bookkeeper for all three parishes. The person is paid by Holy Family. St. Anthony and St. Patrick, in turn, reimburse Holy Family for their share of the expense. When all three parishes are linked, a determination would have to be made concerning which activities, expenses or revenues are unique to one parish and which are shared.

The situation would be quite different if all three parishes are merged/combined into one parish with three worship sites. All revenues and all expenses would be paid from one fund. Administratively, a merger would be a much simpler operation. All sacramental records would be combined into one. All financial activity would be combined into one. In New York State each parish is a unique corporation. In a merger, all three parish corporation would be merged into one. The merged parish would gain a new name, but each individual church building would retain its own name.

#### **5. What is the difference between a linked parish situation and a merged parish situation?**

As mentioned above, St. Patrick and St. Anthony are linked parishes. Officially, the only shared items between the two parishes are the two priests and two deacons.

If the three parishes are merged, then, as explained above, we become one parish with three worship sites. Everything and everyone is shared.

#### **6 How will religious education and sacramental preparation be organized, e.g. RICA, marriage prep, first communion, confirmation, catechism for public school children?**

This question focuses basically on faith formation. If the parishes are merely linked, then theoretically each parish would continue doing its own faith formation programs. However, given the current numbers involved in these programs, it would make sense to develop single faith formation program and sacramental preparation programs. A single program does not necessarily mean that everything would take place at one location. It does mean that there would more than likely one person responsible for organizing and implementing the faith formation and sacramental preparation programs.

If the parishes were to merge, then clearly there would be a single program, not necessarily in one location, but one person in charge with volunteers from each of the current parishes which would now be one parish.

#### **7. Will the individual churches have control over liturgical planning, such as music ministry, deacons, lay ministers, altar servers?**

The answer to this question depends on whether there is a linkage or a merger of three parishes. In a linked situation, liturgical activity would take place as it currently does because we would still have three parishes.

If the three parishes merge, then liturgical ministries would occur in any of the three buildings. However, as is now done in most parishes, those volunteering for liturgical ministries, could state a preference to volunteer for a particular Mass.

#### **8. How was daily Mass at St. Anthony's decided? It seems that St. Patrick's would be more centrally located to serve the entire city. As it stands now, a parishioner living on our State Street has to drive across the entire city to get to St. Anthony's. If St. Patrick's had the daily Mass, then it would be more reasonable and fair taking into account the entire city population.**

Practice has shown us that daily Mass attenders will go wherever the Mass is celebrated at the time they find most convenient. Currently, the 7 am Mass at St.

Anthony is the most populated in the city and people from all parishes, even outside the city, participate. The Eucharist is a celebration of a community. Given the actual attendance numbers, the smaller size of St. Anthony's more conducive to creating a community atmosphere.

**9. Why not just have one anticipated Mass and three Masses on Sunday. This seems like it would be more than ample for the population served. Examples:**

**HF: anticipated 4 PM**

**SA: 8 AM**

**HF: 9:30 AM**

**SP: 11:00 AM**

**SP: anticipated 4 PM**

**SA: 8 AM**

**HF: 9:00 AM**

**HF: 11:00 AM**

What is proposed above does not provide for a Sunday evening Mass. In a community the size of Watertown, if possible, there should be a Sunday evening Mass especially since there is no other Sunday evening Mass in Jefferson County.

Even with the current attendance at the 4 pm Mass, many of whom are not St. Patrick parishioners, there is still plenty of room to accommodate more. In recent years, people have begun to think that only one person can fit in a pew. Also, people are now treating pews like seats in a theater. For many, many years, people in a pew would always move in when someone wanted to sit in the pew. We will have to learn to make room for all. Likewise, look at any of our Masses, most Masses have plenty of room in the front pews.

**10. Why so many Masses? It would seem to be more prudent to plan on one priest with no assistant. If by chance an assistant was provided, it would be easier to add Masses, if needed, than to take away.**

The commitment of the diocese is to have two priests for the three current parishes. Perhaps, the future will reduce the number to one priest. However, if we can provide more service to the people, we should do so.

**11. Has the decision already been made on the *Sunday Masses (times/locations)* since the committee did not allow parishioners to have a voice on the daily Mass times/location or the anticipated Mass time/location?**

The report given recently in parish bulletins stated: "the Committee is considering the following schedule..." No final decision has been made. The Living Stones Committee work is being discussed at parish Pastoral Council meetings, Finance Council meetings, and, in the future, there will be opportunities for great discussion of the issues at the parish level in a format to be determined.

When parish linkages take place, there is an effort to avoid unnecessary changes. The 4 pm Mass at St. Patrick's is well established and already serves the community well with plenty of room for more people. Likewise, the 7 am daily Mass at St. Anthony's is the daily Mass with the greatest attendance with people from many different parishes.

**12. What can be done to keep the noon Mass as it serves a different demographic as the 7am mass? Would you consider alternating between the morning and noon mass?**

Besides the current 7 am Mass at St. Anthony, there is 8 am at the Precious Blood Monastery and the 8:15 at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Would those who currently attend the noon Mass consider going to one of the earlier Masses.

Alternating between noon and 7 am could be a possibility. However, experience has shown that alternating schedules only leave people confused.

Also, regarding the times for daily Masses, there are other considerations such as the time of funerals and the fact that a priest should take off one day per week.

**13. What duties consumes most of the priest's time and how could we lighten his responsibilities, so he has more concentration on the sacraments? If it's spiritual counseling, can we hire a full time catholic counselor? If it's committees, can we delegate volunteers to attend in his place and report back to pastor?**

As mentioned earlier, in a linked parish or merged parish situation other means to provide necessary services will have to be developed. A pastor can give authority to others to act, but he can never transfer responsibility. So, there will definitely be some delegation of duties. However, in some cases, it is easier for a pastor to be present so that a discussion item can be resolved on the spot rather than reporting to the pastor and reporting back.

**14. Why can't St. Patrick's, Holy Family and St. Anthony's keep their finances separate?**

If the three parishes remain merely linked, then the finances would be kept separate. If the three parishes merge into one parish with three worship sites, then the new single parish assumes all liabilities and assets of the three previous parishes and Glenwood Cemetery.

**15. If parking is an issue for St. Anthony's, why can't we purchase the former Wendy's site?**

Currently St. Anthony's rents the former Wendy's parking lot for \$500 per month. The land cannot be purchased right now because there are environmental issues on the lot. Exxon-Mobil is responsible for monitoring the soil contamination and has placed several monitoring wells on the property which are surveyed approximately every three months. Once the soil contamination reaches an acceptable level, a purchase can be considered.

**16. Why do all have to support St. Patrick's Catholic Cemetery?**

Actually the name is Glenwood Cemetery. It is not a separate corporation, but has been the sole responsibility of St. Patrick's Parish. For the past two years, near Memorial Day, the parishes have taken a special second collection for the support of Glenwood Cemetery.

**17. Holy Family has the most parishioners, why are only two Sunday masses being proposed?**

This question seems to suppose that there will not be a merger of parishes, but that they will simply be linked under one pastoral administration. Over the past years, St. Patrick's and St. Anthony's have already reduced the number of Masses on the weekend. Given the size of Holy Family and the average weekly attendance, two Masses are deemed adequate.

However, if it is decided to merge the three parishes and become one parish with three worship sites, then the location of the Masses is relatively irrelevant. The result of merging into one parish means that all parishioners now have a choice of a unified schedule with three different church buildings.

**18. If a merger of the three local parishes takes place, what will the role be of the two parishes not selected as the main worship site?**

If there is a merger there is one parish. Also, there is no "main worship site." All three buildings are used depending on the need.

**19. If we won't see these problems for a few more years, why do we have to make these proposed changes now?**

These proposed changes are not for right now. Rather, we are working on a plan for when the merger or the official linkage will take place. We do not have a date, but we know that it will happen when the clergy shortage directly affects us. In other words, we are being proactive rather than reactive.

**20. Will my weekly donation stay in my parish? Or be shared?**

If the parishes are merely linked, then the envelope money will go to the parish designated on the envelope. The plate money (loose money, not in an envelope) will go to the parish where it is received. If the parishes are merged, then the money will be shared by the one parish to respond to the needs of the whole parish, including all its buildings.

**21. Will the operational expenses of our cemetery be shared equally?**

The cemetery is supposed to be self-supporting. Currently, the cemetery is the sole responsibility of St. Patrick's. However, the cemetery does operate at a deficit, currently about \$40,000. So, St. Patrick's has been subsidizing the cemetery. If the parishes are , the cemetery responsibility will remain with St. Patrick's. If the parishes are linked, then the three parishes could consider some equitable formula for subsidizing the cemetery. Such an arrangement would be proper since the cemetery is used by all parishes. The main reason for the cemetery operating in a deficit is due to cremation. The result has been fewer graves are sold; fewer burials. Since fewer graves are sold, then less money is put into endowed care for the future upkeep of the cemetery.

If the parishes are merged into one parish, the cemetery should continue to operate on its own, but, as needed, it will be subsidized by the one new parish.

**22. Will my children be welcome to serve as altar servers in all parishes? Can I serve as lector, greeter, EM, sacristan or usher in all parishes?**

If the parishes remain separated i.e. merely linked, then it would be expected that persons perform their liturgical ministries in their own parish. However, if the parishes are merged, then all three church buildings become worship sites of the one parish and parishioners could exercise their liturgical ministries at any one of the buildings. However, it would seem suitable that people could, in volunteering, express their desire to exercise their ministry at one building or the other and/or one Mass time or the other. This is currently done in the parishes.

**23. Can I choose the church that my Mass intention will be celebrated?**

If there is one parish i.e. the parishes are merged, then, in requesting a Mass, a person could ask for a particular time and/or church building. However, it should be noted that all requests may not be able to be honored because others have already reserved a particular time or place.

**24. Will all churches benefit from St. Anthony's bingo night, spaghetti suppers & Mt. Carmel Feast?**

The Living Stones Committee has not yet discussed this issue. However, as is now the case with the linkage of St. Patrick's and St. Anthony's, the profit from these events stays solely with St. Anthony's parish. If the parishes are merged into one parish, then a determination would have to be made. In other words, would the income from these events be considered a restricted income and what would the restrictions be?

**25. Will there be just one Altar & Rosary Society?**

Again, if the parishes are linked and thus remain three separated parishes under one pastoral administration, then it would seem appropriate to continue with three different societies. If there were a merger, then a decision, with full input from the members of these societies, will have to be made. If the society actually takes care of the church building in some way, it could be appropriate to retain an altar-rosary society dedicated to one building. The best answer to that question can be found by having discussions with the persons involved.

A similar question could be asked about the Men's Mt. Carmel Society at St. Anthony's. The current by-laws require membership in St. Anthony's parish. Perhaps that could be reviewed in the future.

**26. Will my elderly parents be able to choose the church that their funeral mass will be celebrated?**

Funerals, even now, can be held in a parish church other than the person's own parish. The important consideration is having a funeral celebration for the deceased. The person's or family's wishes for a particular church building, whether the parishes are linked or merged, should be respected.

**27. Will Thursday Adoration still be held at St. Patrick's Church?**

The location(s) and time(s) of adoration will have to be determined. The same question could be asked about the Tuesday afternoon adoration at St. Anthony's and the daily adoration at Holy Family.

**28. Will there still be daily confession offered? If so, where? If not, what will the hours be?**

Currently, the priest is available for reconciliation before the 7 am Mass at St. Anthony and the noon Mass at St. Patrick. Saturday afternoon reconciliation is available at Holy Family. It would seem appropriate that similar times and locations be available in a future linkage or merger.

**29. The Diocese, through the North Country Catholic and Watertown Daily Times, has said that they currently have about 50 priests now and are projecting to have 30 priests within the next few years. With 90+ parishes spread across a large geographic area, which would preclude much consolidation, how is Watertown going to merit two priests (a Pastor and Parochial Vicar)? Shouldn't this plan be based on the provision of one priest to service all three parishes?**

The commitment to having two priests serving the current three parishes is a strong commitment. Certain areas of the diocese will have parochial vicars. After all, there is still a need for parishes to "train" the newly ordained. It is very imprudent to assign a newly ordained priest as pastor. So, the prospects of having a parochial vicar are very strong.

**30. Is it prudent to schedule the 9 AM Mass at Saint Patrick's (capacity 434) given that the average combined attendance for the current 9 AM and 9:30 AM Masses is 433 (231+202)? What will be done to accommodate those Sundays when attendance is above the average? Will you turn participants away? During the survey period, how often did the combined attendance at those two Masses exceed Saint Patrick's capacity? It seems that Holy Family is the only church that could safely accommodate the expected population attending the 9 AM and 11 AM Sunday Masses. Additionally, Faith Formation participants could also go directly to the Graystone building following 9 AM Mass much as they could go prior to the 11 AM Mass.**

Perhaps this item can be revisited. After all, the release published in the bulletin said only that the committee is considering what it published. Nothing is yet set in stone.

**31. What is going to happen to the religious ed programs: RCIA, confirmation years 1 & 2, and Sunday programs K-8?**

The Living Stones Committee has not yet given full consideration to the various faith formation programs in the parishes. An appropriate arrangement for faith formation will require the catechetical leaders from each parish along with other experienced faith formation individuals to meet and discuss the possibilities for faith formation.

The Living Stones Committee has thought that a three-parish program could be arranged whether the parishes are linked or merged. Having a single program would

certainly provide the opportunity to engage the current strengths and resources of each parish.

**32. Will the envelopes be centralized, or will it matter if I'm registered at one parish and I drop my envelope in the collection at one of the other parishes?**

The answer depends on whether the parishes are merely linked (three entities under one pastor) or merged (one parish with three worship sites). In the former arrangement, the envelopes are given to the parish indicated on the envelope. In the latter, all envelopes become the income to the one parish with three worship sites.

**33. Will each parish maintain their music ministries, or will a couple organists be hired to handle all the masses?**

Whether the parishes are linked or merged, a determination would have to be made for the number of organists. Also, there would have to be some form of music ministry at each of the Masses.

**34. If one of the main reasons for the merging of parishes is a shortage of clergy, then what is the diocese doing to promote vocations? Can't we just continue to bring in priest from other countries?**

Before answering the question about what the diocese is doing to promote vocations, perhaps the more fundamental question is what are the people doing to promote vocations. When was the last time a mother or father encouraged a son to consider the priesthood? When families are spending Sunday morning bringing their children to hockey, lacrosse, football, soccer, dancing, skating, and who knows what other events, not a lot thought about religious vocations is going on, much less just basic practice of the faith. When parents merely drop off their children to faith formation classes or depend on the Catholic school to "take care" of religion in their children's lives, but hardly ever attend liturgy or see it as important, what chance is there for the children to consider religion much less a vocation to priesthood or religious life.

The diocese does have a full-time employee charged with promoting vocations. Part of her responsibility is implementing a vocation promotion program designed last year. Each parish is supposed to have a vocations committee. St. Anthony's has an active committee and publishes vocational promotional items in the parish bulletin. Holy Family also has a vocations committee. The pastor of St. Patrick's was unsuccessful at finding people from St. Patrick's interested in forming a vocations committee. The diocese provides a training programs for members of these committees.

The question about bringing in priests from other countries sounds as if they can be imported just like other commodities. For a priest from a non-western country, a least one-year is needed to begin being comfortable with the American way of life. In addition, even if he is already a native English speaker, more than likely his version of English is different from ours. If he comes from a non-English speaking country the enculturation is that much more difficult. Furthermore, while there are priests who come to the United States from other countries, those countries from which they come need these priests for their own ministry needs. In addition, when priests come for only a few years and return home, the USA diocese must start all over again with a new priest.



**35. Before merging parishes in one of the largest cities in the diocese, has the diocese looked at closing smaller parishes and combining them with those in nearby cities?**

Watertown is the largest city in the diocese. There have many various linkings and mergers throughout the diocese including a city/large village merger with a more rural parish. Throughout the diocese many smaller parishes have been linked or merged together. For example, in the Potsdam area, five parishes have merged into two, and the two are linked together with one pastor. The three parishes of Plattsburgh, each now with a pastor, have already decided to merge rather than link. Those three parishes are within a mile of each other.

**36. In a merger of parishes, shouldn't we keep the name of "MY" parish, since it is the oldest parish in the city?**

If the three parishes merge into one parish, the parish would receive a new name. However, the three churches buildings would retain their current names. For example, when the parishes in Malone merged, the new name became St. Andre Bessette (Brother Andre of Montreal). The church buildings kept their names: St. John Bosco, St. Joseph, Notre Dame, and St. Helen's.

**37. Wouldn't it be wiser just to use "MY" church for Sunday masses, since we are the largest Church building?**

The wise decision would be to make all decisions based on the needs of the Catholic community of Watertown while showing consideration to the history and lives of the people of all three parishes.

**38. Will my grandchildren be able to make their first communion in "MY" church, as my family has done for 100 years?**

The most important issue is that the grandchildren will make their First Communion. Given the current practice of the faith, that is not a foregone conclusion. The location for the celebration of First Holy Communion is really quite secondary. Already, for example, parishes already combine together into one church for the celebration of Confirmation. The celebration of First Holy Communion could take place in all three churches. However, right now, we do not know the answer to that question. The most important goal, in a merged parish arrangement, is to develop a sense of unity and community.

**39. Wouldn't it be better to have the three local parishes share finances, staff, and facilities, for a period, to see if it works rather than rush into a merger?**

Already St. Patrick and St. Anthony do what is suggested by this question. It works. However, especially for finances, everything is doubled, and two sets of books are kept. The same bookkeeper also keeps a separate set of books for Holy Family.

**40. Will any parishes, church buildings and schools close or merge at the end of this planning process?**

This question presumes a merger of parishes rather than a linkage. The process to merge takes less than a year. So, no closing would be expected in that period of time. We do not know what the future may hold.

There is always the possibility closings. However, it is not known at this time which ones. This is a consultative process. The parishes of the diocese are being asked to plan for the future, a future where the faith can be actively practiced especially in the celebration of the Eucharist. Our buildings need to support the ministry of the parish, and the Sunday Liturgy is the center of our lives as Catholics.

**41. To better understand the basic causes of a need to merge parishes, is there a website that I can go to look at the demographics of the Diocese of Ogdensburg?**

Knowing the current demographics of the diocese would not reveal more than what we currently know: there are fewer priests, fewer practicing Catholics, some younger practicing Catholics do not have the same dedication and devotion to their parish as do older generations. Checking Wikipedia for the Diocese of Ogdensburg will give some basic information about the history of the diocese. Links on that webpage will bring the users to more information about the history and current status of the diocese.

**42. What will the benefits be to the Catholic Community of Watertown of a merger of the three local parishes?**

If there is a merger, then there will certainly be cost savings. Likewise, faith formation of our children can be more focused involving more children. There will still be the opportunities for adult faith formation, classes to prepare couples for the baptism of their children, funerals, communion brought to the homebound, etc. In addition, with our reduced parish income, we will be able to live more realistically within our means. Total envelope & plate income at the parishes has declined as follows

	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>
<b>HF</b>	531,018	502,547
<b>SP</b>	400,801	340,570
<b>SA</b>	385,057	323,908

**43. What is the most important considerations in all of our discussions?**

Providing for the religious and pastoral needs of parishioners and creating a sense of unity and strength among all parishioners are the most important considerations. All must understand that we are Roman Catholics joined in parish unity.

**44. How can I make my feelings about a possible merger known?**

Keep reading the bulletin for information about the work done by the Living Stones Committee. Make known to members of the committee any questions or reservations that you might have. When your opinion or comments are asked for, please make them as was the case on a recent survey done among the parishioners. Come to any open meetings about the linking of the three parishes. Write to your pastor.

**NOTE:** In the diocesan plan, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish will remain under the care of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. For that reason, that parish is not directly included in the discussions among Holy Family, St. Patrick, and St. Anthony.