



January 25 & 26, 2025

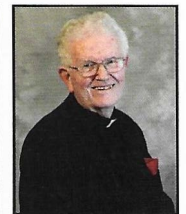
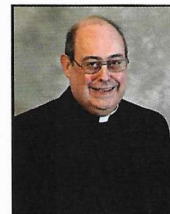
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we celebrate the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, in this weekend's second reading, we are given a powerful reminder of the unity and diversity within the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of the body to emphasize how each part, though different in function, is integral to the whole. He also reminds us that we must not lose sight that in our baptism, we are called to be co-workers in the Kingdom of God.

This weekend is an opportunity for us to pause and reflect on the life of our Church here in the Hazleton Deanery. As outlined in the Diocese of Scranton's *Vision 2030 Pastoral Planning Process*, our parishes are experiencing the realities of declining Mass attendance, a diminishing number of clergy, financial challenges, and infrastructure needs that require our collective attention and action.

With this in mind, I find it important to write to all parishioners of the Hazleton Deanery to inform you of some significant challenges we must face together in the coming year - and share some initial conversations I have had with the clergy of the deanery regarding a possible path forward.

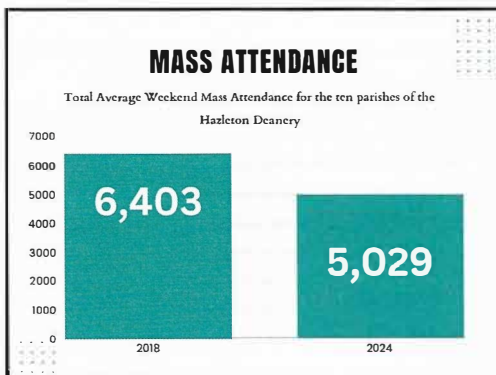
Father Michael J. Piccola, who has graciously served the People of God for 47 years, recently notified the Diocese of his intention to retire in June 2025. We are so thankful for his many years of faithful service, the last 14 of which were served as Pastor at Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish. While Father Piccola will be retiring from full-time ministry, he has generously acknowledged that he will still be available to help celebrate Masses in the area even after his formal retirement date.



Fr. Piccola

Fr. McHugh

Furthermore, Father Connell A. McHugh, who graciously came out of retirement to serve as Sacramental Minister at Holy Name of Jesus Parish, West Hazleton, and Holy Rosary Parish, Hazleton, may at times need to scale back his current responsibilities.



The adjustments made relative to both of these priests will undoubtedly lead to change. I know that change often brings uncertainty, but I trust that with God's guidance and your deep commitment to the Church, we will navigate these transitions together.

For many years, there has been a growing need for greater collaboration among the ten parishes in the Hazleton Deanery. I know that each church community is filled with dedicated people who are united in our mission and in our shared love of Christ. Mass attendance, however, has dropped by 22-percent over the last six years. I believe now is the time for us all to look collectively at our parishes with an eye toward the future, asking ourselves how we can best serve the people

entrusted to our care, and how we can remain a source of hope and light in our community.

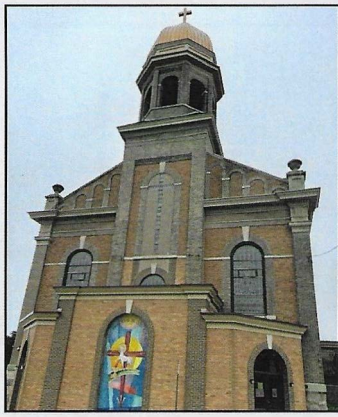
Just as Jesus, in His ministry, was constantly calling people to change and to be open to new paths, so too must we be open to the changes necessary to ensure that our parishes continue to be vibrant centers of grace and mission. On the following pages, I am offering a proposal for our parishes to partner with one another in a more coordinated way. Our most important priority is this: ensuring that every member of our community continues to experience the sacraments, the preaching of the Word of God, and the pastoral care they need to grow in faith.

As we discuss these ideas more openly, I ask that you approach the coming months with hearts full of charity, open to new possibilities, and always ready to serve one another. May we draw strength from the truth that we are united in Christ through baptism. This shared foundation provides hope and confidence that, even in the face of change, God will continue to work through us!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

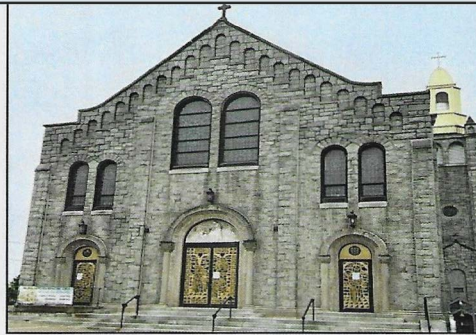
Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Scranton

Vision 2030 Blueprint Proposal for Hazleton Deanery

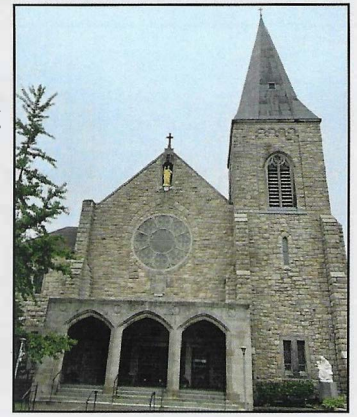


Most Precious Blood Church
131 East Fourth Street
Hazleton, PA 18201

Most Precious Blood Parish, Hazleton
Queen of Heaven Parish, Hazleton
Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish, Hazleton



Our Lady of Grace Church
750 North Vine Street
Hazleton, PA 18201



Saint Joseph Church
604 North Laurel Street
Hazleton, PA 18201

All located north of Broad Street within a mile of one another, the Hazleton parish communities of Most Precious Blood, Queen of Heaven and Saints Cyril and Methodius must all begin working together in a more coordinated way for mission and ministry. The following steps are proposed for the future:

PHASE I - Now through July 1, 2025

Begin Consolidation Planning for Most Precious Blood and Queen of Heaven Parishes

For six years, Most Precious Blood and Queen of Heaven Parishes have been working together in a linkage with a single Pastor. Because both parishes have remained independent throughout this linkage, they each have their own Finance Council and the administrative and financial work can often be redundant.

Because both parishes are already accustomed to sharing a Pastor, we are proposing that Most Precious Blood and Queen of Heaven Parishes enter into a **consolidation starting July 1, 2025**.

A consolidation of two (or more) parishes combines the resources of the existing parishes and actively creates a new, combined parish. This move will allow for streamlined administrative and financial work.

While both churches would remain open through the consolidation process, discussions will need to be held regarding the long-term sustainability of Our Lady of Grace Church. Engineering reports have indicated that the facility would require extensive infrastructure repairs in excess of \$2 million to maintain.

Conversation and consultation with both English- and Spanish-speaking parishioners regarding the church's future will be a necessity, and great care should be given regarding where/when Spanish Masses will be held.

PHASE II - July 1, 2025 and beyond

New Parish Administrator to be Appointed for Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish; Greater Collaboration Needs to Begin with Consolidated MPB/Queen of Heaven Parish

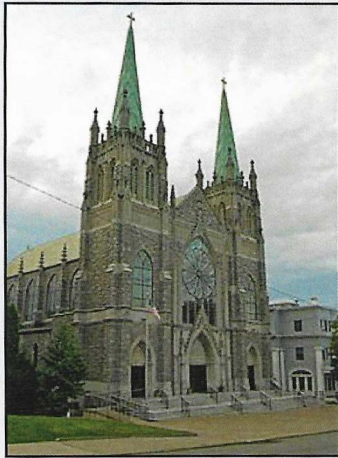
While facing significant challenges with the number of ordained clergy available, when Father Piccola retires, the Diocese of Scranton does plan to assign a new priest as Parish Administrator for Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish.

It is extremely imperative, however, that Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish and the newly consolidated Most Precious Blood/Queen of Heaven Parish immediately begin partnering together in a more intentional way.

While not envisioned initially for July 2025, Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish and the newly-consolidated parish between Most Precious Blood/Queen of Heaven will be linked together no later than July 1, 2026. Prior to that date, a decision regarding the future of the Our Lady of Grace church building must be made.

Announcing this possibility well ahead of time will allow plenty of time for collaboration and consultation with all the faithful, and will proactively work to address future pastoral needs of each parish community.

Vision 2030 Blueprint Proposal for Hazleton Deanery

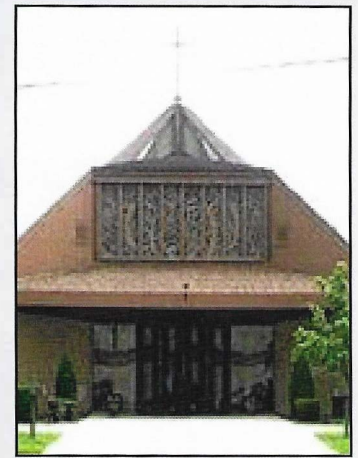


Saint Gabriel Church
122 South Wyoming Street
Hazleton, PA 18201

Annunciation Parish, Hazleton
Holy Name of Jesus Parish, West Hazleton
Holy Rosary Parish, Hazleton



Transfiguration Church
213 West Green Street
West Hazleton, PA 18202



Holy Rosary Church
240 South Poplar Street
Hazleton, PA 18201

Located south of Broad Street, the parish communities of Annunciation, Holy Rosary, both in Hazleton, and Holy Name of Jesus, located in West Hazleton, must all begin working together in a more coordinated way for mission and ministry. The following steps are proposed for the future:

PHASE I - Now through July 1, 2025

Begin Planning for New Consolidation of Annunciation Parish and Holy Name of Jesus Parish in West Hazleton

For several years, Holy Rosary Parish and Holy Name of Jesus Parish have been together in a linkage. At first, they shared a single pastor, and are currently both sharing a Parish Life Coordinator. While there have been many good efforts made to have both communities work together more closely, challenges have been identified.

Demographic changes in the greater Hazleton area have the Spanish-speaking population experiencing tremendous growth at Holy Name of Jesus Parish, and therefore, it is recommended that the parish might be better aligned with Annunciation Parish, which already has a significant Spanish-speaking population.

Therefore, the Diocese is proposing dissolving the current linkage between Holy Name of Jesus Parish, West Hazleton, and Holy Rosary Parish, Hazleton, **effective July 1, 2025**.

At that same time, instead of simply linking Holy Name of Jesus Parish with Annunciation Parish, we are proposing an immediate consolidation between the two parishes beginning on **July 1, 2025**. By consolidating immediately, it will reduce the administrative and financial work that would be needed on the Pastor.

Holy Rosary Parish would remain an independent entity and its day-to-day pastoral care would be provided by its current Parish Life Coordinator.

In the event that Father McHugh needs to adjust his ministry efforts, sacramental care that Father McHugh is not able to provide for Holy Rosary Parish would come from available clergy (both active and retired) in the greater Hazleton area.

PHASE II - July 1, 2025 and beyond

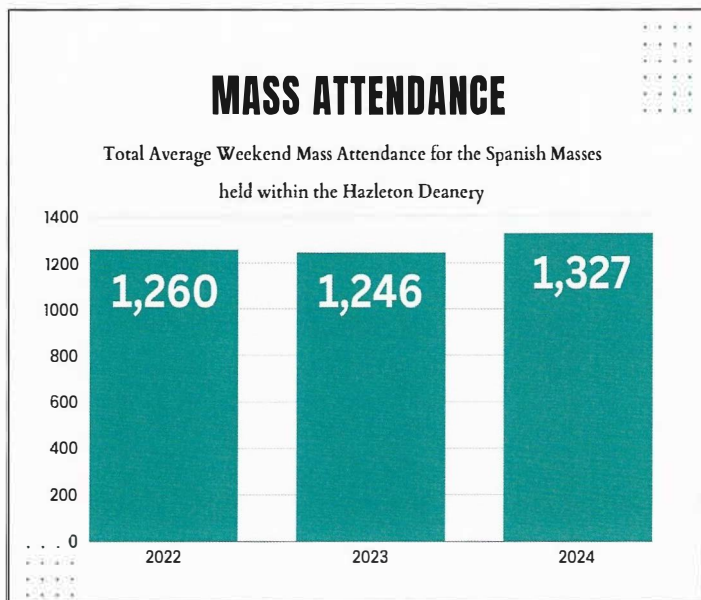
*Consolidation of Annunciation Parish and Holy Name of Jesus Parish Takes Place;
Holy Rosary Parish To Remain Under Parish Life Coordinator Pastoral Care*

While all of the significant steps in this new proposal are outlined above, parishioners of the three churches would likely need to evaluate the best Mass times for each location (and at the deanery level) that would go into effect **July 1, 2025** - given current attendance trends for both the English- and Spanish-speaking populations.

Diocesan professionals in pastoral formation, financial planning, communication, and infrastructure/engineering will be ready to assist in any way necessary.

Opportunities for Evangelization in the Hazleton Deanery

Embracing Newcomers in Our Community & Inviting Participation in Parish Life



Throughout Holy Scripture, we are taught to open our hearts to others. Over the last several decades, the Diocese of Scranton has seen many new immigrants and individuals moving into our communities.

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic population in Hazleton has grown dramatically over the last two decades. In 2000, Hispanics made up less than 5% of the population, but in 2024, that number currently stands at 62% - roughly 18,500 people in all.

The three parishes in the Hazleton Deanery that currently offer Spanish Masses have seen attendance increase by 6% over the last three years - but these attendance numbers represent only a small fraction of the Hispanic population currently in Hazleton overall - which presents an excellent evangelization opportunity.

Collaborate On An Area-Wide Mass Schedule Reflective of Demographic Realities

Because change needs to take place in some form in all six parishes located in Hazleton/West Hazleton, it would be strongly advised that parish leaders examine Mass schedule times from a deanery-wide perspective, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for everyone in the community.

For example, in October 2024, within just the six parishes in Hazleton/West Hazleton, there were **4 regularly scheduled Spanish Masses** with an average weekend attendance of **1,327 people**.

During the same time period in the same area, there were **14 English Masses** offered with an average weekend attendance of **1,723 people**.



Strengthen Bonds Between Parishes, Holy Family Academy and Catholic Social Services



As the parishes in the Hazleton deanery have an opportunity to strengthen their bonds and work together in new ways, the parishes will also be able to expand their reach in the community.

Strengthening partnerships with Holy Family Academy, the only Diocesan Catholic school in Hazleton, as well as Catholic Social Services in the city, will open pathways for shared outreach programs, faith formation activities, and acts of service that embody Christ's teachings.

This united effort can inspire the faithful, attract new parishioners, and create a more vibrant witness to the love and hope of the Gospel. Working together, we can ensure that the missions of all our Catholic agencies and parishes grow stronger, deeper, and more connected.