



SAINT STEPHEN PROTOMARTYR CATHOLIC CHURCH

Greetings in Christ,

February 22nd, 2022

Beginning July 1st of this year, the parishes of St. Stephen Protomartyr and St. Mary will unite as one parish keeping the two worship sites. Cardinal Blase Cupich has also named me pastor of the newly unified parish. This decision from the Cardinal seeks to strengthen our communities and develop a cohesive pastoral and evangelization plan in the area. It also helps address the declining number of pastors available to staff parishes while providing a structure to most effectively build a parish staff to support the current and future ministries. *(On the Parish website www.ststephen.org you can read the announcement and official decree for the unification of St. Mary and St. Stephen Protomartyr).*

We know that this structural change is just the beginning of our journey of renewal. The renewal process calls us to become a stronger Catholic community with a more sustainable presence for the future. It also invites us to reach more people by sharing our discipleship in Jesus Christ, building communities with one another, and inspiring those around us with a more intentional Christian witness.

Uniting as one parish means bringing all we are and hoping to be together as one Catholic community: our gifts, our talents, our hopes, our prayers, our needs, etc.; all will be shared to the benefit and vitality of the entire, unified parish community. St. Stephen the Protomartyr has been designated as the parish church where the parish office and sacramental records will be kept. The schedule of Masses and the sacraments will continue to be celebrated regularly at each individual church *(If any adjustment to the times of a Mass and/or confession may occur after July 1st, it will be communicated in advance once I know from the Archdiocese's Priests Placement Board the answer to my request for an Associated Pastor to the unified parish)*

As St. Stephen Protomartyr and St. Mary parishes unite to form one new parish: all assets, finances, operations, human resources, and facilities management will come together under the new parish with one budget and one Finance Council to serve our entire community. In this regard, I have initiated a conversation with Fr. Lawrence Collins, the Pastor of St. Mary, and the business managers of the two parishes. I am grateful to Fr. Collins' collaboration to make this transition smoothly. Regarding parish ministries, how the parish groups work together and strengthen each other will be addressed as we progress during this transitional time.

One of the first tasks to tackle is understanding the nature of each parish's religious education programs or catechesis for children and adults preparing to receive the sacraments of baptism, first communion, and confirmation. I began a conversation with the coordinators of these programs, and with the input of the catechists, I hope to present by May the new particulars of the religious education programs in English and Spanish for the next school year so families can plan accordingly to register their children.

Following the guidelines of the Archdiocese, I hope to create a unification committee with members of the two parishes to work together to elaborate a mission and evangelization plan for the parish. The committee's first task is to manage the process of considering a new name for the new parish and submit three to five options to Cardinal Cupich, who will select one as the official name of the new parish. Note that the church of St. Mary and the church of St. Stephen Protomartyr retain their titular names.

I want to rely on your support and encourage you to pray during this transition and visit the parish website for future communications and updates. May the liturgical season of Lent help us to enter into a process of renewal of our minds and hearts to build up our communities of St. Stephen Protomartyr and St. Mary with the spirit of the risen Lord.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. David Arcila, Pastor