

# THE AUBURN-N. CAYUGA CATHOLIC PARISHES

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Holy Family • Our Lady of the Snow • Sacred Heart and Saint Ann  
Saint Alphonsus • Saints Mary and Martha • Saint Mary's

February 14, 2018  
*Ash Wednesday*

The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano  
Bishop of Rochester  
1150 Buffalo Road  
Rochester, New York 14624

Dear Bishop Matano:

The parishes of Auburn and Northern Cayuga County have been meeting monthly since the summer of 2017 in an attempt to respond to your letter of 2 May 2017 addressed to all the pastors of the area. Below is our recommendation regarding one aspect of the planning process – the reconfiguration of the parishes in Auburn and Northern Cayuga County. We understand that the number of priests serving in our parishes will likely decline from six to four in the not-to-distant future whenever any of the pastors assume senior priest status or you give one of our priests a different assignment.

But before sharing the results, we would like to mention two popular perceptions: that Auburn is a special enclave within the Diocese of Rochester and that Auburn has been exempt from the pastoral planning process until now. The first perception is true. Auburn is a special enclave because it is a very Catholic city and the parishes have produced over the years a disproportionate number of priests and religious women to the Diocese of Rochester. We hope to revive that tradition.

The second perception is not true. The parishes and Catholic schools have been collaborating and reconfiguring for many years to meet the changing circumstances. Saint Aloysius parish was closed, and the records brought to Holy Family Parish long ago. The churches of Northern Cayuga and Southern Cayuga have been merged respectively into Our Lady of the Snow and Good Shepherd Catholic Community for some years now. Saint Francis & Saint Hyacinth had a joint religious education program long before the merger. Saint Mary's and Sacred Heart have had a joint religious education program for over 15 years. Auburn was the first to have a city-wide RCIA process. Parish social ministry committees have been working together for years. Saint Francis of Assisi Church and Saint Hyacinth Church were first clustered and then merged under the title of Saints Mary & Martha Roman Catholic Parish. Eventually this parish was brought under the same pastor as Saint Mary's Church. Even now, efforts are being made to start an inter parish Emmaus Youth Ministry for high school students as a follow-up to the two-year Confirmation Formation Program.

The Catholic Schools slowly merged over the years culminating in the current Saint Joseph School. During that same period, Tyburn Academy of Mary Immaculate was inaugurated to fill the Catholic high school gap left by the closing of Mt. Carmel High School. The priests have for a long time worked out a schedule for hospital and nursing home coverage. All of this has developed quietly and organically rather than disruptively, perhaps giving the impression to the rest of the Diocese that no changes have taken place in Auburn and Cayuga County.

Now to the matter at hand. In terms of the configuration of parishes, the Planning Committee came up with nine possible scenarios. The individual pastoral councils and finance councils reviewed the nine possibilities generated by the planning team and gave their input to us. At the 16 January 2018 meeting, the planning team quickly reduced the nine scenarios to two, both of which members present could support. They then agreed on their preference which we are now sending to you through this letter.

**Scenario One**, initially the most popular, configures the parishes into three groups: Holy Family and Our Lady of the Snow (4 churches); Saint Mary's and Saints Mary & Martha (3 churches); Saint Alphonsus and Sacred Heart/Saint Ann (3 churches). This would envision three pastors and one parochial vicar, assigned to one pastor but available to all three groupings. **Scenario Two** configures the parishes into two groupings: Saint Mary's, Saints Mary & Martha, Our Lady of the Snow (6 churches); Saint Alphonsus, Holy Family, Sacred Heart/Saint Ann (4 churches). This would envision two pastors and two parochial vicars.

**Scenario One** is a more organic development: Saint Mary's and Saints Mary & Martha are already working together; Saint Alphonsus and Sacred Heart are already sharing some personnel. Holy Family and two of the three churches in Our Lady of the Snow are on Route 34; these two parishes have some shared religious education and a priest who has been pastor in both parishes. This Configuration would cause the least amount of stress among parishioners and has a stronger possibility of keeping all the church buildings operative, with individual pastors in charge of each of the three groups. This scenario would be easier to implement should a current priest opt for senior status or be reassigned. Concern was raised about the "job satisfaction" of a young parochial vicar who would have to be traveling from one group to another; on the other hand, an older parochial vicar might enjoy only having to do Sunday Liturgy and hospital and nursing home ministry.

**Scenario Two** would be a more dramatic shift since it is bringing together parishes that may not have had any historical association with each other. However, there would only be two pastors, each with a parochial vicar. Some felt this is a better long-range solution. This would make Mass planning easier and perhaps elicit more cooperation among the two groups and therefore among the six parishes. There might be a greater advantage for evangelization with more parishes working together. There is a fear that having only two clusters, individual parishes would start to lose their uniqueness. The pastors of two clusters are taking on a lot of responsibility, especially the cluster with 6 churches, spread far apart. Two priests per cluster perhaps offers greater stability for the priests.

After a very careful and courteous discussion, the group was split with 8 for Scenario One and 8 for Scenario Two. At the end, 2 votes went over to Scenario Two. However, everyone agreed they could live with either. For both, great concern was expressed about the role of the priest: how he would manage with the larger administration load, especially in the second, while at the same time offering a strong pastoral presence to each of the church communities. It was felt that you, Bishop Matano, would have the best insight as to how particular priests could effectively minister in each of these scenarios.

At the conclusion of our meeting, it appeared that **Scenario Two (two parishes, each with a pastor and a parochial vicar) is our recommendation to you.** We certainly understand that any decisions regarding parish configuration and priest appointments belong to you. However, unless you reject this proposed parish reconfiguration for the future, we will allow it to inform how we proceed in other areas of this planning process (Mass schedules, ministry and staffing, administrative collaboration, building usage).

Respectfully submitted by the members of the Auburn-N. Cayuga Planning Team:

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**SACRED HEART AND SAINT ANN**

Reverend Michael R. Brown  
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