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Archbishop Nienstedt responds to petitions for appeal of parish mergers

Saint Paul, MN, November 19, 2010 -- In response to information received from parishioners in their petitions to reconsider parish merger decisions announced by the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis last month, Archbishop John C. Nienstedt is modifying two of the 14 original mergers. He has confirmed the original merger decisions in the remaining 12 mergers.

In the New Prague area merger involving St. Benedict, St. John the Evangelist, St. Joseph, St. Scholastica, St. Thomas and St. Wenceslaus, the Archbishop has modified the merger to remove St. Thomas of Derrynane (in the community of Saint Thomas) from the merger. Instead, St. Thomas will merge with St. Anne of LeSueur. The other details of the St. Wenceslaus merger remain the same: the remaining four parishes will merge into St. Wenceslaus and the St. John the Evangelist, St. Scholastica, and St. Wenceslaus buildings are identified to remain open. The Archbishop has issued new decrees for the New Prague area merger as well as for the new merger of the parishes of St. Thomas and St. Anne.

In the case of the northeast Minneapolis merger of Holy Cross, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Clement, and St. Hedwig, the Archbishop has confirmed his original decision to merge these four parishes, with modifications as outlined in a new decree of merger. First, the name of the combined parish community after the merger will be Holy Cross. Second, the effective date of the merger has been changed to take place upon the retirement of Father Earl Simonson as pastor of St. Clement parish. Father Simonson's retirement will take place by July 1, 2013. Finally, as a point of clarification, the Archbishop has reaffirmed the Polish nature of the combined parish community, including the continued offering of Mass in Polish and the Archbishop has stated that Mass will continue to be offered onsite to residents of Catholic Eldercare facilities that are adjacent to the church buildings of St. Anthony of Padua and St. Hedwig.

With the revisions announced today to parish mergers taken into account, 21 parishes are scheduled to merge into 15 receiving parishes. The net effect of the changes, after implementation of all the announced mergers, is a total of 192 remaining parishes compared to the current number of 213 parishes.

A merger decision does not necessarily mean that the merging parish's church building will close. Decisions regarding the church buildings of the newly combined parish community will be made by local leaders in consultation with the Archbishop and Presbyteral Council, a representative body of priests.

Parishioners at parishes affected by these new decrees of merger, who believe they are negatively impacted by a decision, have until November 29th to request in writing that the Archbishop reconsider the decision. Parishioners affected by the 12 mergers confirmed by the Archbishop may appeal the Archbishop's appeal response to the Vatican. More information about the appeal of a parish merger may be found at <http://planning.archspm.org/wp-content/uploads/Appendix-A.pdf>

"As we embark on the changes recommended by the Archdiocesan Strategic Plan," Archbishop Nienstedt said, "I ask all Catholics to remember that we are one local Church whose greatest gift is our faith in Jesus Christ and in his Body, the Church. Despite the challenges involved, especially for those affected by the mergers proposed, I ask our Catholic faithful to remain strong in the practice of their faith and equally strong in their resolve to continue building the new parish communities that will begin to unfold. Throughout this process, I encourage us to pray for each other."

Archdiocesan staff members are working with pastors, lay leaders, and parishioners at affected parishes during this time of transition. Pending appeals, the first round of mergers will go into effect on January 1, 2011. Changes will roll out over the following months and years. The changes will not all happen at the same time.

The Archdiocese announced its Strategic Plan the weekend of October 16th and 17th, 2010. The plan shapes the vision for the future of the local Church and restructures parishes to foster a more vibrant faith community. It is intended to ensure the Church's continued vitality for the 800,000 Catholics in the 12 county area it serves. The Strategic Plan is the result of 20 months of study and consultation, that includes the input of thousands of people from across the Archdiocese -- pastors and other clergy, parish and Catholic school leaders and staff, parishioners and Catholic school families. A 16 member Strategic Planning Task Force comprised of clergy, religious, and lay members was charged with gathering and analyzing this input, as well as demographic and other data, when formulating recommendations to the Archbishop.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Strategic Plan is available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese on the Archdiocese's web site: www.archspm.org.

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