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## Churches take final step toward merger

Most churches don't take a break in the middle of the sermon to hold a mile-long parade, but most churches don't go through what Asbury United Methodist Church and Oakland Avenue United Methodist Church are doing.

The two south Minneapolis churches have spent the summer merging their two congregations. The final step -- literally, in this case -- will take place Sunday.

The service will start at 10:30 a.m. at the Oakland Avenue sanctuary, 4405 Oakland Av. The Rev. Mary Buckley, current pastor of Asbury, will deliver half the sermon, at which point everyone will leave the building and march over to the Asbury facility, 4501 Bloomington Av., where the Rev. Roy Vanderwerf, current Oakland Avenue pastor, will finish it.

"The reverse roles [of having each pastor preach at the other's church] is part of the merger process," Vanderwerf said. "We voted to merge in May, and we've been in the process of consolidating ever since. Usually, when you do these sorts of mergers, you lose people [in terms of members jumping to other churches]. So far, I'm not aware of us losing anyone."

The new church does not have a name yet. "That's one of the things we still have to work out,"

Vanderwerf said. As for the location, "for now, our plan is to use the Asbury church, but that's going to need some updating, so that's also up for discussion. We might end up selling both buildings and buying a new one."

Oakland Avenue has about 125 members, while Asbury has 140. Even combined, the congregation won't be large enough to support two full-time clergy, leaving something else that needs to be worked out. Vanderwerf said that both he and Buckley are ready to yield to the other if that's what the new congregation wishes.

"One thing about the United Methodist structure is that we're guaranteed to be placed at another church," he said. "So [leaving a job] is not an issue."

As for Sunday's procession, it's going to be a bona fide parade, complete with a drum group, classic sports cars (including a Corvette that a member converted to an electric engine) and even a float, of sorts: The Oakland Avenue baptismal font will be loaded onto a boat and towed to the Asbury church.

### A new home

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet opened a new facility in Minneapolis this week. The SJC Ministry Center, 2200 Nicollet Av., opened for business on Tuesday and followed up with an open house on Thursday.

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The order, which has its main office at 1884 Randolph Av., adjacent to St. Catherine's University in St. Paul, envisions its new Minneapolis outlet as a way to reach out to the immediate neighborhood, said Sister Marie Herbert Seiter, head of the sisters' Ministry Collaborative. To that end, its first tenant is Learning in Style, a program that provides courses in English, math, computer use and citizenship to immigrants.

The refreshments for the open house were provided by graduates of the program who, it turns out, took the citizenship lessons to heart.

"A young Chinese couple offered to provide the food," Sister Marie said. "We were thinking of wontons and egg rolls. They wanted to serve hot dogs and hamburgers."

## Your chance to sound off

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis is in the midst of a strategic planning process that will shape the future of its parishes and schools. So far, the work has been done primarily by a 13-member task force of clergy and lay people that Archbishop John Nienstedt appointed in February. Now it's time for the folks in the pews to get involved.

Starting this morning and extending through early October, the archdiocese is holding a series of public hearings. The first one is at 9:30 a.m. today

at St. Richard's, 7540 Penn Av. S., Richfield. This also serves as the main meeting for Minneapolis parishioners (although you can attend any hearing you want).

That will be followed by a session at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Church of St. Peter, 2590 N. Margaret St., North St. Paul.

The other hearings: St. Wenceslaus, New Prague, Sept. 22; St. Pius V, Cannon Falls, Sept. 26; All Saints, Lakeville, Sept. 28; Holy Spirit, St. Paul, Oct. 1; Holy Name of Jesus, Wayzata, Oct. 6, and St. Timothy, Blaine, Oct. 8.

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