

[8/3] Toward Becoming One Parish (VI)

By Fr. Steven Lewis, Parochial Vicar

I wanted to keep you up-to-date on the discussions of the joint pastoral council meetings of our two parishes. I haven't yet covered the last meeting on June 10.

We previously discussed how the effort to identify Pillars of Unity surfaced some topics that were in tension. The Music Pillar, categorized under Holy, seems to suggest an opportunity to "be all things to all people," that our larger size as one parish may help us accommodate different preferences at different Masses. The brainstorming that resulted in that pillar raised such topics as "Types of Music at Mass," "Folk Music," "Combined music planning/coordination," "Liturgical Diversity (meet different spiritual needs)."

The Liturgy pillar surfaced under the category of One. It seems to suggest an openness to predictability, that our parishioners should be able to attend Mass at any of our churches and have a substantially similar experience. The brainstorming here included "Liturgy Congruent" (I'm sure exactly what that meant), "Liturgical Uniformity (predictable weekend experience)," "Liturgy – important to have unified services," "Liturgy Committee to plan common seasonal liturgies," "Start funeral hospitality (Martha Ministry) at any location that does NOT have it."

To help the joint pastoral council discuss these matters, I called together those most responsible for the music in our churches and filled them in on the efforts to become one to date. We noted immediately that music does not exhaust all the possibilities contained in these two pillars. We also noted that the ways in which the music program already worked were not likely known by the pastoral councils. That said, we prepared a discussion that began with "today" and then raised four proposals for discussion, to facilitate becoming one parish. Those proposals were:

- To unite around a single hymnal in the new parish. (At present, three of our churches use *Glory and Praise* and Epiphany uses a hymnal that predates the new liturgical translations of 2010.) Note: in 2024, the U.S. Bishops approved a new bible translation and sent it to Rome for approval. This may affect the Lectionary we hear proclaimed at Mass in the coming years. That may be the most opportune time to consider hymnal choice.
- To introduce a new Mass setting (Gloria, Holy Holy Holy, etc.) for our four churches, for the shared experience of learning it together and for use at major parish-wide Masses. We could also change the Mass setting together with the liturgical season.
- To hold some sort of joint event involving the music and liturgy leaders from all four sites (for example, a service of Lessons and Carols or a vespers service) as a means of bringing the two parishes together.
- To form a true liturgy committee across the two parishes (rather than just a music selection committee), which would plan in advance for the liturgy for Holy Days, Feast days, solemn Masses, special rites, etc. (not for just the music but for the entire celebration).

In the light of its ongoing discussions, these recommendations were well received by the joint pastoral council.