



DIOCESE OF OAKLAND

Frequently Asked Questions

What happens to the people when their parish or pastoral center is closed?

A diocesan bishop is responsible for the pastoral care of all people who live within his diocese. Therefore, he must ensure that people have access to the sacraments, to a Catholic community. If a church building is closed, or a parish is suppressed, those who once used that church building or were members of a suppressed parish must be given the opportunity to celebrate their faith in another location and within another parish.

Bishop Barber is committed to working with the pastor, pastoral council and finance council of each affected parish and pastoral center to find the best solution for their community, so that they can continue to have a place to worship and experience Catholic fellowship.

Where does the money go if a church is closed and the property sold?

Civil and canon (or church) law provide clear guidance on this. The parish carries out its work in the name of the Church. Consequently, the property and goods managed by the parish cannot belong to a private individual. In canon law, the pastor oversees both the pastoral work of a parish and the management of its temporal goods. He is appointed by the diocesan bishop.

The bishop is recognized by both civil and canonical law as a juridic person and the head of the Diocese. Pastors of local parishes share in the ministry of the bishop for the care of the souls of their local parishes.

Bishop Barber will work in collaboration with the “receiving” pastor(s) on the disposition of the sale of church property.

What about the staff?

While most of the parishes being affected have minimal or no lay staff, every effort will be made to assist those who are employed by the parishes in finding new work.

What’s the timeline?

That will be unique for each site. We'll begin now with meetings of leadership from the communities and the Chancery. We are all committed to finding solutions that will work for the majority of our parishioners.

Why can't Bishop Barber just recruit some more priests?

Our Vocation Office, Bishop and many others continue to encourage and support people discerning a vocation to the priesthood. However, even if we had more priests tomorrow, there are other concerns regarding how we can be the best stewards of the gifts and talents of parishioners.

Having more priests in a parish, while an essential element, is not the only factor necessary for a parish to flourish. Our focus is to renew a vibrant parish life. When a community becomes so focused on basic maintenance of facilities, or having to depend upon outside income, the diocese or the generosity of vendors to meet basic financial obligations, it becomes difficult for a parish to fulfill its primary mission.

Pope Francis eloquently describes that mission in No. 28 of *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel): "In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach."

Why can't we just continue what we've been doing?

To continue doing as we are, is a bit like burying our head in the sand. Times change, and in the 2,000-year history of the Catholic Church we have always adapted to the times so that the mission of the Church can be relevant and thrive. This is one of those times, as the Mission Alignment Process (MAP) conducted in collaboration with representatives from all our parishes has indicated. The Diocese of Oakland is not alone adapting to our time and circumstances. Many dioceses in the US and around the world are realigning their parishes for the mission of the church, including merging and closing some churches.

Pope Francis again reminds us that we cannot be so burdened with the past that we cannot birth the future Church: "The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be 'the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.'" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel, No. 28).

For assistance and all media inquiries

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