

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ who are members of the parishes of Saint Dominic, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Joseph and Saint Mary of the Woods,

It is with great excitement and hope that I greet you on this second Sunday of July in the Year of our Lord 2024. I am sure that in the future, all throughout the Diocese of Peoria, we will refer to this as “The Year of the Mergers.” The question we cannot yet answer is whether we will look back on this year fondly or not. Certainly, it will mean change and adjustment. I believe the Lord desires this change and adjustment to be fruitful for our faith. I believe He also desires this change and adjustment to plow the spiritual fields of those who are not yet in our pews, to plant new seeds in many hearts, and to bring forth the fruit of faith in them also. I am hopeful and I am excited.

This past Pentecost, Bishop Lou assigned me to oversee the merger of these four historic parishes. I have begun speaking with the Fathers John Baptist and Deogratias, and we are on the same page as we consider the way forward with care. There are others who will navigate with us, but we don’t know who they are yet, and this is the purpose of my writing. We must put together a Parish Transition Team.

We have four parishes and will have equal representation from each parish on the Team, three members from each parish including: one trustee from each parish, one experienced member of each parish who knows the history, and one parent from each parish who has young children (or a young person still hopeful of having young children in the future). With this makeup, we can look to the wisdom of the past while planning for the future.

I am asking the parishioners of the parishes to nominate whomever they think would be good for this Team. The Team will begin meeting in September on a monthly basis until the merger is completed in two years. Once the Team is selected, we will distribute to every member a book called *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission, Pastoral Strategies for an Apostolic Age* published by the University of Mary. This small, 90-page book appears to be the book of the decade for the Catholic Church in America and provides a great perspective to consider how the Holy Spirit is moving in our Church today. It will be a valuable resource for getting the council thinking in the same direction, with hope, and I will expect each member to read it before our first meeting.

We will begin taking nominations to the Team now through the end of July. To nominate a member of your parish to the council, either place an envelope in the collection basket containing your nomination or visit www.smowCatholic.com to submit a name electronically. Along with the person’s **name**, your nomination should include a short **paragraph** about why you think this person would make a great member of the council.

In the meantime, I remain in Washington DC until the end of July where our bishop has asked me to continue Canon Law studies. You are in my prayers. Let us pray for each other.

In the Holy Name of Jesus Christ,
Fr. Corey