

## **SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE MERGING OF THE PARISHES**

As you can see from the notice in this weekend's bulletin, the time of the long awaited merger of our parish with North American Martyrs Parish is fast approaching. While some particulars still have to be worked out, I can tell you what has been determined.

First, the effective date will be July 1, 2024. With the merger, East Hartford will become a one Catholic parish town and will be known as North American Martyrs Parish. It will have two locations: Saint Mary's Church and Saint Christopher's Church. Sadly, and as many have long suspected, Our Lady of Peace Church and Saint Rose Church will not be part of this arrangement. Saint Isaac Jogues Church will remain independent to serve the Ghanian community for the foreseeable future.

For what it's worth, I can truly say, to the people of Our Lady of Peace, that I know how you feel. My own home parish, Saint Adalbert's Church in Enfield, was closed in February 2022. In fact, everything that was associated with my Catholic childhood is no more. The school I attended was closed in 2006 and the building was converted into apartments, as was the rectory. My grandparents were among the founding members in 1915. My parents and my sister were married there, and I celebrated my first Mass there. In 1990, I literally "wrote the book" on the history of the church to commemorate its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Its beautiful old-world Polish architecture and decoration inspired my passion for church architecture. Sadly, my mother's funeral was not able to be held there.

I have learned that change occurs generationally. The age of faith that built churches has given way to the present age of secularism. Closings are happening not only to Catholic churches but to most houses of worship. Witness what has taken place in East Hartford in the past five years. When I was in the seminary in the early 1980's we knew that there would be a shortage of priests but no one could have foreseen a shortage of parishioners. We are losing what I call our "supporting generation." When people stop coming to church, churches close.

The priests serving the new North American Martyrs Parish will live at Saint Christopher's rectory. The offices will all be located at the rectory of Saint Mary's. A new Mass schedule has not yet been determined.

On top of all this, the retirement age for priests has been lowered to 71 and, just five days before the merger takes effect, I will turn 71 on June 26<sup>th</sup> and thus will enter retirement or “Senior Status.” Of course, I will remain a priest but will no longer have administrative responsibilities. This will, in fact, free me to help out with priestly activities as needed in the four locations of Saint Jeanne Jugan Parish in Enfield, my hometown. I will reside at the house where I grew up (built by my grandfather in 1924) which I own.

Sadly this is the sign of our times and the only way to reverse it is to become missionaries in our own place and time by the witness we give to our own Catholic faith. We benefitted from the pioneers of long ago who inspired our ancestors, and now it’s our turn to repair the broken chain of faith that we inherited, one generation at a time.

O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, be with us now.

***Father John Gwozdz, Pastor***