



11/19/2025

ONE IN FAITH Area Catholic Community of

St. Mary - Melrose, Sacred Heart - Freeport

Immaculate Conception - New Munich

St. Rose of Lima - St. Rosa, St. Michael - Spring Hill

St. Andrew - Greenwald, St. John - Meire Grove

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Beginning in 2015, a task force was created to look at ways to effectively serve the parishioners of our diocese with a diminishing number of priests. The Diocese collaborated with Emmaus Partners, a consulting firm for Catholic organizations, to take a deeper look at our current reality and trends through research, demographics and financial data analysis. Responding to the challenges of today, and in the hopes to provide for the needs of tomorrow, this developed into the diocesan restructuring effort called '*All Things New: Honoring the past, inspiring the future.*'

During the last year, representatives from each parish have worked together, with the parishes of their Area Catholic Community (ACC) to compose a proposed plan implementing the design parameters and guiding principles of this restructuring effort. This proposed plan was presented for affirmation in October 2025. After much prayer, discernment, and consultation, the proposed plan for our ACC has been affirmed by the Committee for the Affirmation of Plans (CAP). This is an important, first step in the approval process.

This plan — available at www.oneinfaith.org and www.sacredheartfreeport.org — reflects the path we have been called to walk together. It honors our shared mission, rooted in our Catholic faith and tradition, while embracing the possibilities of a vibrant future. The CAP members have voted to affirm the One in Faith amended plan which proposes two managing corporations (St. Mary's and Sacred Heart) and closes the church buildings of St. Michael in Spring Hill and St. Andrew in Greenwald. The remaining church buildings continue to remain open with at least one weekend Mass.

Presentations were given at Sacred Heart in Freeport and Saint Mary in Melrose on Tuesday, November 18. This was an opportunity to present the motivating factors for these decisions, the process that produced this proposed plan and to address immediate questions and concerns. Change like this can be very difficult, but we are invited to trust that the Holy Spirit is leading us and helping us to face to the challenges of today and preparing for the needs of tomorrow.

The next step in the process is consultation with the Diocesan Presbyteral Council, followed by review and decrees from the bishop. Once all ACC plans are approved by the bishop, the diocesan plan — comprised of the plans of our 29 ACCs — will be shared, and official decrees will follow.

While the plan is not yet final and may require modification as neighboring ACC plans are revealed, we are encouraged to begin moving forward with its goals in mind. A plan — even

when approved — remains a guide, not a guarantee. It cannot foresee every future circumstance, and flexibility will be essential. What must remain constant is our shared purpose and commitment to Christ's mission.

We will continue to keep you informed as updates become available. In the meantime, let us stay focused on what truly matters: our faith, our love for one another, and our dedication to renewing a Church that serves both present and future generations.

As your pastor, I recognize the range of emotions this process may stir. There is sorrow in letting go of the familiar but also grace in embracing what lies ahead. I invite you to walk together in patience, charity, and prayer as we take these next steps — united in hope and trust.

In Christ,

Fr. Mitchell Bechtold
Pastor

Fr. Daniel Walz
Pastor