

The Decision to Close a Church Requires the Active Participation of the Entire Parish Community

The question of whether or not a parish should be closed is a serious matter. For this reason, the bishop has determined that the needs of the parishioners are always to be given first priority.

Only after the question has been given a full hearing within the affected parish and been thoroughly discussed by the parish council will the bishop consider the parish council's recommendation by the parish pastor. The bishop then presents the recommendation to the diocesan presbyteral council so they can be heard on the matter in accord with the law of the Church: *"It is only for the diocesan bishop to erect, suppress, or alter parishes. He is neither to erect, suppress nor alter notably parishes, unless he has heard the presbyteral council."* Canon 515§2

Preserving the Sanctity of the Parish Records is Essential to the Law of the Universal Church

Once the final decision has been made by the bishop the steps contained in this checklist to be followed. These steps help assure an orderly process that protects the rights of the parish and parishioners, the security and sanctity of the sacramental records, and security of financial records and civil documents including assets and deeds.

Steps

- Publicize all dates affecting the parish closing in the bulletin.
- Gather parish volunteers and parishioners to plan the closing liturgy.
- Prepare for the parish audit by locating parish accounts and financial books and notify the diocesan fiscal & property management office when this has been completed.
- Prepare for the diocesan fiscal and properties management and chancery/archives offices to come to the parish.

Steps (Continued)

- Separate and inventory priest's and others' personal items. Have the inventory ready for the audit.
- Develop an inventory of the items that will be moved to the surviving parish.
- Develop inventory of sacred items and other items for archiving purposes.
Sacred items include but are not limited to: Vessels or cups, patens, vestments, Stations of the Cross, statuary, icons, altar, and any other items used in or as part of liturgical worship.
- Dispose or make arrangements for the proper disposition of non sacred and sacred items.
Please Note: All sacred items belong to the parish receiving the parishioners (surviving parish). These items should remain in use in the surviving parish.
If this is not possible, they are to be turned over to the chancery for archiving. If there are items of particular importance to a parish such as statue of the patron if possible it should be transferred to the parish in which most of the parishioners will be attending. This should be attended to well before the actual closing of the parish and this transfer may even be worked into the closing liturgy. How that might be done is touched upon in the closing ceremonies.
- Gather and secure all sacramental records including records of baptisms, weddings, confirmations, and funeral records/deaths for transfer to the surviving parish. **Inform the chancery in writing when the records have been transferred, the person to whom they were transferred and the date of transferal.**
- Provide for ongoing maintenance of sacramental and/or historical records at surviving parish. **Indicate the name of the person with whom this was done and the date it was done and inform chancery of the name.**
- Reschedule all of the weddings or other scheduled events to other parishes.
- Send the parish statistical information to the Chancery noting that it is to be considered the final statistical report.**
- Develop report on parish volunteers and ministries for surviving parish.
- Transfer background checks on employees and volunteers to surviving parish. Make sure they are handled in a secure and safe manner.
- Complete forms for hospital and nursing home coverage by staff/volunteers of new parish.

Steps (Continued)

- Ensure that all affected parishioners are informed of closing to help assure that communion calls and other important sacramental needs are going to be met.
- Work with fiscal and properties management office to**
 1. Help assure the orderly transfer of temporal goods to another corporation (typically the surviving parish into which the parish will be absorbed). Temporal goods include such items as church property, cemetery, and other holdings.
 2. Provide human resource information to all employees.
 3. List all bank accounts on forms provided.
 4. Pay all outstanding bills.
 5. List and settle all financial contracts and agreements.
 6. Settle lease and rental agreements.
 7. Provide information on property for risk management office.
 8. Pay all charge account and credit card bills.
 9. Settle employee tax and benefit issues.
 10. Prepare a list of financial documents from last seven years.
 11. Make sure mail is forwarded & appropriate diocesan offices are notified of closure.
 12. Prepare proper tax filings.
 13. Fill out all financial worksheets and inventories.
 14. **Inform diocese of status of cemetery.**
 15. Work with risk management and office of stewardship and development for the establishment of an endowment fund for the long term care/maintenance of the cemetery.
- Work with stewardship and development office to transfer:**
 1. Data concerning current or pending grant activity.
 2. God's Share pledges.
 3. Current, pending and prospective endowment fund information.
 4. Estate planning data.
- Contact organizations that use property to inform them of status of closing.
- It will not be necessary to file a notice of dissolution of corporation with Secretary of State's office because the corporation will automatically dissolve when corporate papers are not renewed (on an annual basis).
- Develop a plan in conjunction with fiscal and properties management and chancery offices for the disposal of real estate including land and buildings.**