

Catholic Community of South Baltimore merges into one parish

Three churches in South Baltimore have formalized a union that has been more than four decades in the making.

Holy Cross, Our Lady of Good Counsel and St. Mary, Star of the Sea, merged into The Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish July 1. Since 2004, when the parish began sharing Triduum services, the three had operated with merged parish councils, under the name of Catholic Community of South Baltimore.

No adjustments have been made to the parish's Mass schedule. Asked what will be different, Father Patrick Carrion, pastor, answered, "Not much."

"The whole point was to let this naturally unfold," he continued. "Through the years, it just became one."

Father Carrion began serving as pastor to all three parishes in 2008, when they began sharing a payroll. Five years later, in 2013, the community began filing one consolidated report with the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Earlier this year, according to a timeline shared by Father Carrion, the pastoral council, corporators, finance committee and staff determined it was time "to create one canonical parish, one legal corporation while continuing the three churches for worship."

He said that no objections were raised during planning and listening sessions at all three churches, which total 600 families and 1,100 parishioners.

The churches that comprise the Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish pre-date the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation.

Holy Cross, on East West Street, opened in 1858 to serve German immigrants. Good Counsel, in Locust Point on Fort Avenue, named for nearby Fort McHenry, was founded a year later. St. Mary, Star of the Sea, on Riverside Avenue, opened in

1868.

According to Father Carrion, his predecessors “always found a way to bring everyone together.”

In 1972, the three combined their parish schools into the Catholic Community School, with campuses at Good Counsel and St. Mary, Star of the Sea. In 1989, it began operating solely on the campus of the latter, in a building that now houses St. Ignatius Loyola Academy.

In 1993, now-Springfield, Mass., Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski was named pastor of both Holy Cross and St. Mary, Star of the Sea, which are separated by a brisk, five-minute walk.

He was succeeded by Father Thomas Malia in 1999, when an emergency helped erode parish loyalties that could be fierce. Roof damage forced the temporary closure of St. Mary, Star of the Sea, sending its parishioners to Holy Cross for Mass.

“St. Mary’s people went to St. Mary’s, and Holy Cross people went to Holy Cross,” said Diane Ryan, who moved from Rochester, N.Y., to Cross Street in the late 1980s and registered at the latter church, of the worship dynamics. “The people at Holy Cross softened to visitors, and St. Mary’s people got used to going elsewhere.

“It was the best thing that could have happened, in terms of twinning the parishes. We became more cohesive.”

Ryan eventually co-chaired the twinned parish council that served Holy Cross and St. Mary, Star of the Sea. In 2004, Good Counsel was added to that shared governance and the name, Catholic Community of South Baltimore, was adopted.

Under Father Carrion, office staff began overseeing their specific duties at all three parishes, which had already been sharing religious education and young adult ministries.

Deacons Kevin Reid and Mark Cohagan assist Father Carrion. Michael Angelucci is the director of music at all three churches.

“It’s a seamless experience for me,” said Ryan, who continues to volunteer with the parish every second Wednesday, when it prepares and serves a meal at Baltimore Station, a shelter for veterans battling addiction and/or homelessness. “I enjoy the physical spaces, being in different places. Music is high on my list, and the homily is second. Those two are met, wherever I attend.”

Father Carrion said that the last baptism entered in the separate records maintained by the three former parishes was 10-month-old Jane Hazel Anderson, whom he baptized June 30 at St. Mary, Star of the Sea. The sacrament was first offered at that church 150 years ago, Nov. 2, 1868, when the name Emmam Marian Francisciam Stone was written in the St. Mary, Star of the Sea registry.

“All information in that era was written in Latin,” Father Carrion said. “The child’s name was probably Emma Mary Frances.”

The girl was three days old.

The sacrament of matrimony was celebrated at the new parish for the first time July 6, when Deacon Frederick Bauerschmidt officiated at the marriage of Walter Grio and Julia Carolan at Holy Cross.

Email Paul McMullen at pmcmullen@CatholicReview.org