

West Baltimore churches transition into one parish

As the congregations of St. Peter the Apostle, St. Martin and St. Jerome churches in West Baltimore prepare to unite as one in February, they will celebrate a final weekend Mass in their respective houses of worship Jan. 26 and 27.

While the three parishes have been known collectively as Transfiguration Catholic Community since 2004, Mass continued to be celebrated at the individual structures and the congregations remained separate, said Father Mark Carter, O.F.M. Cap., Transfiguration pastor.

Beginning Feb. 2, parishioners of the three churches will come together to celebrate Mass at Transfiguration Catholic Community Church, located on the corner of Scott and W. Hamburg streets, in the former St. Jerome Church.

“There are a lot of hurt feelings,” said Geraldine Burton of Woodlawn, who has been a parishioner of St. Martin since the 1960s. “When you are losing something that is important to you, there is a lot of pain.”

The final Mass for St. Peter the Apostle will be 4 p.m. Jan. 26. The final Mass for St. Jerome will be 8:45 a.m. Jan. 27 and the final Mass for St. Martin will be 11:15 a.m. Jan. 27. The celebrant for all three Masses will be Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar.

Because less than 400 families were affiliated with Transfiguration, officials from the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Father Carter and parishioners agreed last year it had become too costly to operate all three churches. The decision was made to make St. Jerome the one structure used for regular worship by Transfiguration parishioners.

Built in 1877, the soon-to-be named Transfiguration Catholic Community building is the newest of the three churches, and Father Carter plans to move familiar objects from St. Martin and St. Peter the Apostle into the structure and to have interior renovation work completed by next fall.

“We will rededicate the new Transfiguration later on down the road, after we renovate,” he said. “We’re going to put a mosaic of the Transfiguration above the altar, repaint the inside of the church and make a larger gathering space in the back end of the building. We will redo the sacristy and have a place for the children’s Liturgy of the Word and also for choir practice. Eventually we’ll put in air-conditioning.”

Because baptisms, weddings, funerals and other special Masses will continue to be celebrated in the St. Martin and St. Peter the Apostle buildings after the congregations merge into one church, no special ceremony is needed to “de-sacrament” the structures, the Transfiguration pastor said. “We would only have to do that if we were not going to use those churches anymore.”

Currently, there are no plans to sell the other buildings, but to find efficient uses for them within the Transfiguration parish, Bishop Madden said.

Portions of the rectories at St. Martin and St. Peter the Apostle already are being rented to outside parties, and the possibility exists for Transfiguration to enter into long-term lease agreements with other faith communities for the two church buildings, Father Carter said.

A new sign reading “Transfiguration Catholic Community” will be placed on the St. Jerome building before all three congregations begin to worship in the unified church, he said.

Masses will be offered at 4 p.m. on Saturdays and at 8:45 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. on Sundays. Weekday Masses will be offered at 8 a.m.

Like Father Carter, longtime St. Martin parishioner Jerome Towns believes a unified congregation will ultimately make the parish stronger. However, Mr. Towns also recognizes the transition will not be easy and there will be a time of mourning for everyone involved.

Ms. Burton said she is relying on her faith in God to deal with her pain.

“But with sadness and all of the feelings I have, the growth is coming in, by giving me an opportunity to be involved with other people,” she said. “I feel like God is

calling me to do different things in life. I'm following God's plan. With that strength, I can conquer anything."

Those planning to attend are asked to 410-685-5044 or e-mail transfigbalt@archbalt.org to properly plan for all three celebrations.