



11.16.2019

**St. Stephen Parish to merge into St. Joseph Parish, Oil City**

Rev. John Miller, pastor of the partnered parishes of St. Joseph Parish and St. Stephen Parish, Oil City, announced on Nov. 16 that the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, after consultation with the priest council, has agreed to Father Miller's request that St. Stephen Parish be merged into St. Joseph Parish, effective January 1, 2020. On that date, St. Stephen Church will become a secondary church – without mission status – of Saint Joseph Parish, meaning it will remain available for occasional use, such as funerals, weddings and personal devotion. Church law also requires that Mass is to be celebrated in secondary churches every year on the feast of the saint for whom the church is named, which in the case of St. Stephen Church is Dec. 26.

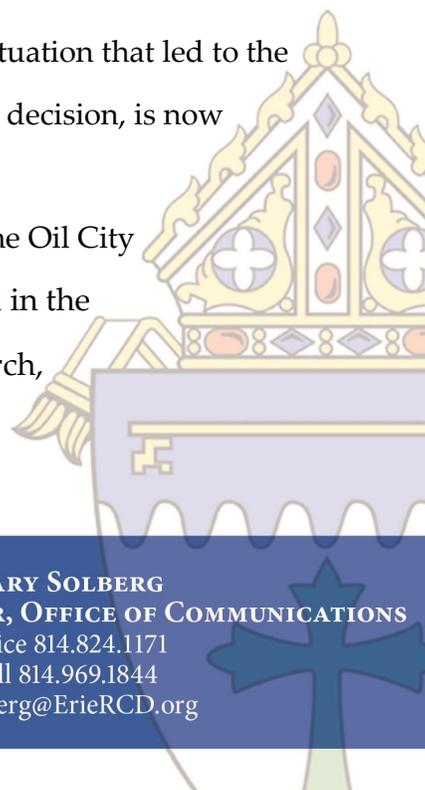
A decree detailing the histories of both parishes, the current situation that led to the request, and an overview of the process that was used to arrive at the decision, is now available at [www.ErieRCD.org/bishop/decrees.html](http://www.ErieRCD.org/bishop/decrees.html).

Both parishes have played a significant role in the history of the Oil City region. The oil boom during the 1860s in Venango County resulted in the establishment of St. Joseph Parish in 1864. The original parish church,

- more -

**ANNE-MARIE WELSH**  
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS  
Office 814.824.1167  
Cell 814.746.6889  
[amwelsh@ErieRCD.org](mailto:amwelsh@ErieRCD.org)

**MARY SOLBERG**  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS  
Office 814.824.1171  
Cell 814.969.1844  
[msolberg@ErieRCD.org](mailto:msolberg@ErieRCD.org)



soon outgrown, was replaced with the current church, dedicated in 1894. Due to the rapid growth of the Catholic population in the area at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, St. Joseph Parish was divided into two separate parishes in 1898, with St. Joseph Parish on the north side of the Allegheny River, and the newly formed St. Stephen Parish established on the south of the Allegheny River. The present St. Stephen Church was dedicated in 1907.

The announcement was expected within the community, as a preliminary plan had been presented to parishioners, followed by a period during which all were invited to offer their feedback. The *ad hoc* planning committee formed in May 2019 focused on the question of how the Catholic community of Oil City could best position itself to build a foundation for the future.

A pastoral planning process involving parishes across the Diocese of Erie was completed in 2017. Pastoral planning now is taking place on the local level, which allows parishes to evaluate their own situations going forward, and to make decisions for their future.

# # #