

Rightsize & Reshape | FAQs

1. *How many parishes will be merged, and when?*

A final number has not yet been determined. This will be determined by September 1, following a careful and consultative process involving the diocese and respective parish families.

2. *How will you determine which parishes will merge?*

Road to Renewal will provide data (including numbers of registered households per parish, how many of those registered households are actively contributing, and numbers of sacraments and new Catholics initiated through faith formation) to priests, and will offer recommendations for possible mergers. It is important to note that recommendations will not be made exclusively by financial factors, but geographical considerations and strategy will also be part of the recommendations.

3. *When Road to Renewal was launched, it was suggested that no parishes would be merged. Why, then, this announcement?*

As explained originally by Road to Renewal (as seen on the website's FAQ page), this program was designed to revitalize parish life by creating a parish family model. In our early communications it was stated that the Renewal was not about reducing parishes. When looking at our parishes today and the circumstances of our Diocese, it is apparent that changes need to be made. A process is now being put into place that will help families of parishes right-size and reshape appropriately for the future.

4. *Why are you announcing this now?*

Since Road to Renewal began in 2019, we have measured and observed trends, including registered households per parish, sacramental events, operating balances of parishes, the number of available priests to lead in ministry, and the level of participation by parishioners, all of which significantly compound the issue. The statistics are telling. Nearly half of parishes throughout the diocese are seeing declines in registered households, while more than half of our parishes average just one Baptism per month. Only 12 percent of our parishes initiated new Catholics this past Easter Vigil.

Our Diocesan Chapter 11 reorganization is also helping us to take a hard look at what properties and resources are really needed as the Diocese moves into the future. The infrastructure we have is not scaled appropriately to the current populations, trends or data we have for today moving into the future.

5. ***Why are you calling these mergers and not closures, if certain church buildings will be shuttered?***

Parishes, legally, are not “closed.” Historically, when church buildings closed, the parish was absorbed by another existing parish, enlarging the latter.

6. ***Is this just because of your Chapter 11 reorganization?***

No, but Chapter 11 is helping us to take a hard look at ourselves to determine what our future needs to look like. The reorganization, along with the Renewal will help us to continue the mission of the Diocese of Buffalo and its parish families, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ as robustly as possible, and to continue to be responsible stewards of our available resources, including people.

7. ***How are schools impacted by these changes?***

As we continue this consultative process with parish families, parishes with existing elementary schools will be evaluated just as parishes without schools will be evaluated. There is also a Catholic Schools Strategic planning group that is helping guide our schools and Catholic Education into the future, working very closely with the Road to Renewal.

8. ***How do you define a “healthy” parish community?***

Is a parish community introducing people to and helping them encounter the person of Jesus Christ? Is active outreach happening to nurture and grow the Catholic community and others? For example, are they celebrating baptisms on a frequent and regular basis? Do they engage youth with programming aimed at bringing them together to share and discuss their faith, including evangelization? Do they engage seniors with similar programming? Does the parish community accommodate Bible study groups? Is the parish community utilizing faith formation initiatives to welcome, educate, and support people who seek to become Catholics?

9. ***What can we expect moving forward?***

Like every institution in our community, we are all always in a state of renewal and evaluation. It is our sincere hope that this reshaping of the diocese will successfully reinvigorate the Catholic faith in Western New York. But, as with all complex and involved processes, we will continue to monitor family of parish vibrancy and assess the trends which have led us to these recommendations. Our Church will always be relevant, and we will continue to spread the Gospel to all eight counties of Western New York.