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## BISHOP SAMUEL AQUILA ANNOUNCES DECISIONS RESULTING FROM YEAR-LONG PARISH REVIEW PROCESS

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Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila, Bishop of Fargo, announced at a press conference today that 23 Catholic parishes within the Diocese of Fargo will consolidate with neighboring parishes by June 2005, one will consolidate in 2006, one in 2009, and the review and possible consolidation of an additional eight parishes will take place by 2010. Some of the church buildings may be designated as chapels for up to five years.

Bishop Aquila also announced that construction of a new parish in West Fargo is under consideration.

The changes are being made as a result of a year-long study. The 159 active parishes in the Diocese of Fargo conducted self studies following a process outlined in *Communities of the Christian Faithful: A Pastoral Letter on Parish Life in the Diocese of Fargo* which was issued July 25, 2003, by Bishop Aquila.

Based upon input from parish members, each parish issued a report on its service to the faithful in areas such as liturgy, religious education and works of charity. They also reviewed the demographics of their communities and projections for growth or decline.

Parishes consolidating by June 2005 include those in the following communities: Hansboro (which is no longer being used but was not yet formally consolidated), Lake Williams, Milton, Osnabrock, Bathgate and Fried (all consolidated this summer), Minnewaukan (October 2004), Alice, Ardoch, Brocket, Burnstad, Cogswell, Conway, Courtenay, Crary, Fulda, Gackle, Jessie, LeRoy, Lomice, Marion, Olga and Page. Kintyre will consolidate in 2006 and Granville by 2009. Those that will be reviewed and considered for consolidation by 2010 include the parishes in Bremen, Hurdsfield, Orrin, Selz, Buchanan, Mount Carmel, Pingree and Wales.

Additional information, including changes in parish clusters and Deanery boundaries, can be found in the pastoral letter at [www.fargodiocese.org](http://www.fargodiocese.org).

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## **Background Information**

### **What is consolidation?**

Consolidation involves the transfer of sacramental records and the welcoming of parish members from the consolidated parish into one or more neighboring parishes. Although a parish officially consolidates with one neighboring parish, parish families may decide to attend a different neighboring parish which is closer to their homes or farms.

### **Why do you call it “consolidation” rather than “closing”?**

Parishes are not the buildings in which the faithful worship. Parishes are “communities of the faithful” – those individuals who come together to worship as the Body of Christ. Although the building may no longer be used, the communities of the faithful will remain active in their love of God and worship through the Mass. They will now join with others in a neighboring community, making a neighboring parish stronger and more viable due to increased members and the talents that they bring to the faith community.

### **What areas were studied through the review process?**

Bishop Aquila called upon priests and parish members to examine each parish’s “organizational effectiveness in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the living out of our Catholic faith.” Some of the areas reviewed, through numerous public and diocesan meetings, included: sufficient numbers of people to assist with the liturgy, education for youth and adults, needs of the elderly, ability to provide pastoral charity, distance to travel and economic viability. Bishop Aquila also wrote that a goal of the review was to ensure that the work required of a priest, including the number of Masses to be celebrated and the number of parishes to be served by one priest, be “reasonably sustainable” for priests of varying ages and abilities.

### **Will the church buildings cease to be used immediately upon consolidation?**

Each situation will be looked at individually. As Bishop Aquila wrote in his pastoral letter, some church buildings may “be maintained as a chapel for a determined period of time, not more than five years, to be used for funerals and weddings only.” A chart indicating which parishes will maintain chapels is included with this information.

### **How are the consolidations being recognized by the Diocese?**

Bishop Aquila will celebrate a commemoration Mass at the parishes which request a Mass. He celebrates commemoration Masses at Bathgate, Osnabrock and Milton tomorrow, August 22. The parishes may decide to do history books or preserve the history of the parishes in other ways. The history of parishes is also retained in the diocesan archives.

### **What happens to the items within the church building after the building is no longer used?**

Items used for the Eucharist, which the Catholic Church teaches is the consecrated body and blood of Jesus Christ, may not be sold or given away. Among these items are the tabernacle, chalices, ciboria and the altar stone. These items will be transferred by the diocese to other parishes or religious houses which have a need for them. Mass vestments and consecrated religious items may be transferred to the neighboring parish which the consolidating parish is joining. The parish councils may decide to distribute to parish families or neighboring parishes non-consecrated religious items and secular items, such as dishes, pots and pans, and other things.

### **What percentage of the Diocese’s total parishes are consolidating?**

We began the review process with 159 active parishes. The 23 consolidations taking place by June 2005 are equal to 14.5 percent of the total parishes.

**How many families are affected by the consolidations which will occur by June 2005?**

Of the 28,593 households reporting in the Diocese, 521 are involved in the consolidations ending in June 2005.

**Are there other changes besides the consolidations?**

Yes. The boundaries of our Deaneries will be adjusted. There are currently nine Deaneries in the Diocese of Fargo. That number will decrease to seven. Clusters of parishes will also be adjusted. See the list that accompanies this information for details.