

ARCHDIOCESE OF LOUISVILLE PARISH PLANNING PROCESS 2025-2026

PART II - PARISH RECOMMENDATIONS RESPONSE FORM

NAME OF PARISHES: *Our Mother of Sorrows Parish
St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish*

WHO PREPARED: *Very Rev. Philip Erickson, JCL, KHS, et. al.*

In August 2025, parish staff provided statistical data about Our Mother of Sorrows and St. Elizabeth Parishes in the bulletin (finances, registrations, baptisms, funerals, etc.). At the same time, Father preached¹ about the challenges facing the parishes for four weeks. An open forum was held on Sunday, 24 August 2025, to discuss the information and homilies. Father also gathered a team of nine parishioners² and the two deacons. For two months, this team met³ to examine our data, together with the data reported by our neighboring parishes, and discussed it. Father summarized this discussion in the six-page document of 17 January 2026, providing the document and another open forum on Saturday, 17 January. The summary document and feedback from the open forum were put into the Planning Process form by Father.

Closures

We recognize that such self-reported data, self-reflections, and recommendations are not without dynamics other than cold logic and include human emotion. In regards to the deanery, we are unsure about the circumstances. It seems important to note that anecdotal accounts suggest that neighboring parishes may not be engaging the data as deeply or as prepared for such a discussion. In addition, it is not clear to us that the dynamic along the Bardstown Road corridor is the same as our more immediate area. In regard to our more immediate area (i.e., St. Elizabeth, Our Mother of Sorrows, St. Stephen Martyr, and Holy Family), the data suggests some hard realities.

¹ 3 August 2025, 10 August 2025, 17 August 2025, 24 August 2025,

² The team included: Dutch Boehnlein, Beth Garr, Greg Herberger, Lynnetta Hornback, Linda Klotter, Paul Moon, Vince Osbourn, Bob Schroeder, Katie West, and the deacons.

³ 22 November 2025, 6 December 2025, 20 December 2025, 10 January 2026.

Re: Population Data (1,369 Sunday attendees)

There are roughly 2,022 registered families and about 3,464 active parishioners.⁴ However, this data isn't as useful as the self-reported number of Catholics regularly attending Sunday Mass⁵ - the "Ordinary Time" attendance. Registrations at Catholic schools appears to skew the number of registrations. This suggests that 1,369 Catholics are regularly at Mass on any given Sunday. This population is being served by four Pastors, six buildings, and fifteen masses (i.e., 91 people per the 15 Masses). It seems clear that there are too many parishes and too many masses in the immediate area.

Re: Church Building Usage (seating for 457, ?, 640, 320, 489, 240)

We took eighty percent of self-reported seating capacity, which is the long-standing standard for "comfortably full." In doing this, St. Elizabeth seats 571 and comfortably seats 457 (St. Brigid is unreported; Holy Family, 640⁶, St. James, 320; Our Mother of Sorrows, 489; St. Stephen, 240).

Re: Church Population and Building Capacity

I. A Single Parish Solution

The data suggests that one single Pastor and one single church building could serve the 1,369 Sunday-attending Catholics in the immediate area. In other words, one Pastor with four weekend Masses (1 Vigil, 3 Sunday) could serve the 1,369 "Ordinary Time" Catholics - est. about 342 people per Mass. If this were the case, the church buildings of St. Elizabeth, Holy Family, or Our Mother of Sorrows could comfortably meet that need based on their seating capacity, with St. Elizabeth and Our Mother of Sorrows at about 70% capacity for their "Ordinary Time" Masses.

The same is true with one Pastor with three weekend Masses (1 Vigil, 2 Sunday), with about 456 people per Mass. If this were the case, the church buildings of St. Elizabeth, Holy Family, or Our Mother of Sorrows could comfortably meet

⁴ St. Brigid, 275 registrations/439 people; St. Elizabeth, 237/413; Holy Family, 414/807; St. James, 469/752 people; Our Mother of Sorrows, 198/314; St. Stephen, 429/739

⁵ St. Brigid, 220; St. Elizabeth, 201; Holy Family, 187; St. James, 240 people; Our Mother of Sorrows, 221; St. Stephen, 300

⁶ There are questions surrounding the reported seating capacity of Holy Family. There is no doubt it is a large building, but it might be reporting a smaller framed person's needs.

that need based on their seating capacity, with St. Elizabeth and Our Mother of Sorrows at about 90% capacity for their "Ordinary Time" Masses.

Given the self-reported seating capacity, the church building at St. Stephen Martyr is too small to meet the needs of any single "clustered" community.

II. A Two Parish Solution

However, there are several obvious concerns around the single parish solution. Most obviously, closing/merging six parishes to create one parish might be more than the current "political" resolve. In addition, as opposed to "Ordinary Time" attendance, church attendance and the capacity need of the building will increase on Easter and Christmas.

A second solution suggests a "Watterson Expressway" church campus and an "Eastern Parkway" church, with the possibility of a "regional" school campus between the two parishes. (The people of St. Elizabeth and Our Mother of Sorrows parishes are very concerned and wish to strive to ensure a Catholic education is available in the local area.)

The data suggests that two parishes with two Pastors could serve the 1,369 Sunday-attending Catholics in the immediate area. In other words, each Pastor with three weekend Masses (6 masses in the area), could serve the 1,369 "regular" Catholics - est. about 228 people per Mass. If this were the case, any of the church could meet that need based on their seating capacity, noting that St. Stephen's would be at 95% capacity for all of its 'Ordinary Time' masses.

III: St. Elizabeth and Our Mother of Sorrows

***St. Elizabeth of Hungary's** campus is seen as a historic part and integral to the Schnitzelburg-Germantown area, but the campus is less visible from Eastern Parkway. The church building has a traditionally Catholic beauty, but this also comes with the expense of maintaining it. The church is handicapped accessible, but the ramp is more distant from handicapped parking, apart from a few street spots. On-campus parking is limited and relies on neighborhood street parking. The parish utilizes its space with rentals for ministry, including both the Senior Center and the newly renovated Head Start Program. In addition, there is space for ministry in the original school building, and with the new elevator, the building is handicapped accessible on all three floors. The parish, in regards to all the parishes of the deanery, collects the least in donations and has the least in its*

savings account. If the parish were to close, the property might be valuable based on location, but it also might be difficult to sell given the structures which would not be easily demolished or renovated.

***Our Mother of Sorrows'** campus is very visible, practically at the intersection of two main thoroughfares, Eastern Parkway and Preston, and easily accessible from the expressway. The larger campus includes the church and cafeteria, which are handicapped accessible; the offices and school building are not. On-campus parking, which is next to the church, is available. The church is simple in design, but marble interior has minimal maintenance expense. The parish utilizes its space with renting apartments, which supplements income. In addition, in the case of St. Anne's House, the parish, together with Catholic Charities, is providing affordable housing to victims of human trafficking. If the parish were to close, the property might be valuable based on location along Eastern Parkway and close to the University of Louisville.*

***St. Elizabeth and Our Mother of Sorrows** could be - and ought to be - merged. A merged parish would make office work easier - and has been recently recommended by the Business Manager.⁷ In fact, such a merger would reflect what is already occurring on many levels.*

Parishioners are concerned about the loss of the traditional architecture found at St. Elizabeth. We have seen this happen across the city, and it has been keenly felt in the local area with the closing of St. Therese. The local optic might be troubling. It should be noted that a donor stands ready to make a six-figure donation to St. Elizabeth to repair and improve the facilities. Thus, we have reason to think that the historic building can be preserved at this juncture, even if the two parishes are merged, i.e., one parish with two campuses. Nevertheless, in a merger, the parish could reduce to one campus if the diocese were to make such a decision. However, without knowing the criteria for any decision making at that level, it isn't clear which campus would be more preferable. There are good arguments for both.

⁷ In fact, Father Harris effectively made this recommendation to the diocese (circa 2014).

New Parishes/ Reduction of Clusters/ Adding Additional Clusters

These issues do not seem to be of any concern in our immediate area.

Schools/Child Care Programs

As noted above, the people of St. Elizabeth and Our Mother of Sorrows parishes are very concerned and wish to strive to ensure a Catholic education is available in the local area.

Parish Ministries

It is clear that a better use of resources could benefit parish ministry in local area. We would be a stronger Catholic community if we collaborated and worked together more closely. It makes little sense to be duplicating some parochial positions, when we could be providing a greater variety of ministry. The once stronger regional religious education program needs vitalization. The buildings, although very near and dear to us, are not as important as the Catholic community. At the same time, we recognize that buildings are helpful when properly used for ministry and for providing opportunities for community building.

Other Alternatives

Any "additional changes" to the immediate area have been addressed above.

Submitted on behalf of the parishes this 23rd of January 2026,

Respectfully,



*Very Rev. Philip Lee Erickson, JCL, KHS
Pastor, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish
Pastor, Our Mother of Sorrows Parish*

enc: 1, summary document of 17 January 2026