

Minutes from Vestal-Endicott Parishes meeting

Meeting at OLGC, Fr. Hobbes Room, 10 February 2026

Attendees: Fr. Prior (OLS, OLGC), Scott Hotalen (OLS), John Cummiskey (OLGC), Mark Goodwin (OLGC), Eric Donaldson (OLGC), Dc. Paul Heiland (OLGC), Dc. Tom Harley (OLGC), Chris Free (OLGC), Kim Potter (OLGC), Fr. Kirkman (Sts. Ambrose, Anthony, Joseph), Gina Kane (Sts. Anthony, Joseph), Diane Julian (St. Joseph), Jim Silkworth (St. Joseph), Don Mastro (St. Joseph), Terri Broden (St. Joseph), Ralph Broden (St. Joseph), Mike Brunner (St. Ambrose), John Bombaski (St. Ambrose),

Absent: Bob Brown (OLS), Brian Schmidt (OLS), Bernadette Van Donsel (OLS), Dc. Ed Blaine (OLS), Dc. Michael Carroll (OLGC), Dave Archer (OLGC), Dc. Bill Matts (Sts. Ambrose, Anthony, Joseph), Fr. Joseph Ahukana (Sts. Ambrose, Anthony, Joseph), Ron Kaye (St. Anthony), Mark Whiting (St. Anthony), Jim Gill (St. Joseph - St. Casimir), Luke Stanton (facilitator)

Minutes (taken by Dc. Paul Heiland)

Agenda

Dc. Heiland led the meeting.

1. Purpose: To come together in faith, share updates with openness and care, and move forward together as one family of parishes.

2. Opening Prayer

Fr. Prior opened the meeting in prayer.

3. Introductions & Welcome:

Introductions of all present, noting some new attendees, including Jim Silkworth (on-line). Luke Stanton joined on-line briefly, but had to step away due to a scheduling conflict.

4. Recap of Our Last Meeting

The overview of the January 20, 2026 meeting was focused on survey update and Mass schedule. See items 5 and 6 below.

5. Parishioner Surveys & Feedback Summary

Began with a review of the January survey response. Paper and electronic responses as of this meeting total 610 (approximately half of the responses are paper input). The paper responses have been scanned for retention purposes. More survey responses are expected to be received and will be added to the tally.

The data shows consistent results from January's meeting; there has been no significant shift in the parishioners' understanding of the issues. A review of the comments has been made by multiple steering committee members (J. Silkworth, L. Stanton, M. Brunner). Luke Stanton's were included in the preceding meeting's (January 20, 2026) minutes. Jim Silkworth's assessment was provided on January 20, 2026 and is included as Attachment A. Mike Brunner's assessment came in an email on January 28, 2026 and is included at the end of these minutes as Attachment B.

6. Update Following Fr. Prior's Meeting with Bishop Lucia

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Fr. Prior met on January 28, 2026 with Bishop Lucia in which the Bishop outlined his expectations at this time for the Endicott parishes. Fr. Prior shared the Bishop wants a Mass schedule (outlined in last meeting and updated in today's meeting), a "name" for the Endicott Parish which would be consolidated from the four parishes for financial and corporate books as one church and one presiding business address. No church closures are at this time, but the four churches would be named under the new name with their current church name.

A "Name the Parish" subcommittee was created (from steering committee members volunteers): Christine Free (chairperson), Terri Broden, Scott Hotalen, Diane Julian, Kim Potter. Coordination was begun with those members after the meeting adjourned to determine the date(s) to meet, when to return the initial names results to Fr. Prior and Fr. Kirkman and when the voting by the parishioners will occur and how that is to be completed.

We discussed the Mass schedule again as it relates to Faith Formation classes and working to allow for families to attend Mass after/before class easier. Here is the outcome of that discussion:

- OLS (**no change**) – Saturday vigil (5:15 pm), Sunday morning (8:30 am and 11:30 am)
- Endicott – Saturday vigil (4 pm) - no change, Sunday morning - **8:00 am (changed from 8:30 am), 9:30 am (changed from 10 am), 11:00 am (changed from 11:30 am)**. Locations were not decided.
- It was also discussed about adding back an early (7 am) or late (7 pm) Mass to either Vestal or Endicott; it was not finalized at this time.

7. Priest Leadership Update & Pastoral Planning Timeline

From Fr. Prior, the Bishop is still looking at this community as one pastor and one parochial vicar (associate) for the OLS-Endicott parishes.

8. Open Floor & Sharing – none.

9. Closing Prayer & Next Steps.

Dc. Heiland closed the meeting in prayer.

The "Name the Parish" subcommittee is to develop a list of ~10 names and work with Fr. Prior/Kirkman on the list before it goes to vote in the Endicott parishes. The voting weekend will be scheduled in consultation with the priests and subcommittee.

As paper survey results come in, they are scanned by Luke Stanton and entered in to the total results file.

10. Next Meeting

The diocesan Presbyteral Council meets in March; it was decided to wait until the results of that meeting to determine the next Steering Committee meeting date.

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Attachments:

A. Jim Silkworth Survey Assessment (1/20/2026)

Across parishes, parishioners accept that change is necessary, but they are deeply concerned about:

1. Loss of identity and community
2. Reduced access to the sacraments (especially Mass)
3. Financial sustainability and stewardship
4. Leadership, trust, and transparency
5. Declining participation and faith formation

At the same time, there is strong hope that consolidation could:

- Strengthen faith life
- Improve vitality and participation
- Create a more sustainable future *if done thoughtfully and pastorally*

This is not resistance to consolidation — it is resistance to *poorly executed consolidation*.

Major Themes Identified

1. Fear of Losing Parish Identity & Community (Very Strong Theme)

What parishioners are saying

- “Our parish feels like family.”
- “I don’t want to become just a number.”
- “We’ll lose what makes us who we are.”

Interpretation

- Parish identity is emotional, not just operational.
- Consolidation is perceived as a threat to belonging, not just buildings or schedules.

Implication for planning

- Any consolidation strategy must explicitly preserve parish cultures, traditions, and relationships.
- Language matters: “merger,” “closure,” and “absorption” trigger anxiety; “shared services” and “collaboration” are viewed more positively.

2. Mass Availability & Sacramental Access (Strongest Practical Concern)

Common concerns

- Fewer Mass times
- Longer travel distances
- Reduced access for elderly parishioners
- Loss of preferred Mass styles or languages

Interpretation

- Mass schedule = lived faith.
- Parishioners see consolidation as risking spiritual access, not convenience.

Implication

- Any operational consolidation must start with sacramental continuity guarantees.
- Clear, early communication about Mass schedules will reduce fear dramatically.

3. Financial Sustainability & Stewardship (Strong but Divided)

Two competing views

- Group A: “We cannot afford to keep everything going as is.”
- Group B: “Our parish is financially stable — why are we paying for others?”

Interpretation

- There is awareness of financial strain, but concern about fairness and transparency.

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- Parishioners want to know:
 - Where money goes
 - Who decides
 - How savings will be used

Implication

- Financial consolidation requires plain-language financial storytelling, not spreadsheets.
- Parishioners want reassurance that savings will be reinvested in ministry, not absorbed into bureaucracy.

4. Leadership, Trust & Communication (Critical Risk Area)

Repeated concerns

- “Decisions already made”
- “Lack of transparency”
- “Top-down process”
- “We aren’t being heard”

Interpretation

- This is less about priests personally and more about institutional trust.
- Parishioners are afraid consolidation is being done *to them*, not *with them*.

Implication

- The success of consolidation will depend more on process than outcome.
- Visible listening, feedback loops, and explaining *why* decisions are made will matter as much as the decisions themselves.

5. Declining Participation, Aging Congregations & Faith Formation (Shared Reality)

Concerns expressed

- Aging parishioners
- Fewer young families
- Weak religious education
- Low engagement beyond Sunday Mass

Hopes expressed

- Stronger youth and family ministry
- Renewed evangelization
- More vibrant community life

Interpretation

- Parishioners understand consolidation is happening because status quo is failing.
- Many hope consolidation could free resources for renewal rather than just cost-cutting.

Implication

- Consolidation framed solely as “efficiency” will fail emotionally.
- Framing it as a mission-renewal opportunity aligns with parishioner hopes.

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B. Mike Brunner Survey Assessment (1/28/2026):

"I (M. Brunner) spent some time this afternoon reading the paper surveys and tallied, by hand, the number of surveys completed from each parish -

In the 4 batches Dc. Paul uploaded, there are 217 readable surveys and 2 that did not scan in (black blank pages) -

Of the 217 readable surveys - OLS had 42; St. Anthony of Padua had 63; OLGc had 48; St. Joseph had 27; St. Ambrose had 35; 2 surveys did not answer the question of parish -

When added to the 350-356 online surveys makes 568-573 total response to date -

When combined (online + paper) this shows totals by parish of - OLS $\sim 127 + 42 = \sim 169$ (29.5%); St. Anthony of Padua $\sim 92 + 63 = \sim 155$ (27.1%); OLGc $\sim 67 + 48 + \sim 115$ (20.1%);

St. Joseph $\sim 46 + 27 = \sim 73$ (12.8%); St. Ambrose $\sim 25 + 35 = \sim 60$ (10.5%) -

When responses per parish are divided by registered households (a questionably valid/reliable number) - each parish falls within 13-18% -

In the comments I read, similar to Jim Silkworth's comments last meeting - many expressing the don't close my church (loss of identity); loss of access to the sacraments; loss of ability of

the Catholic church to attract and grow the congregation with the closing of churches; a good number concerned with losing the ability to minister to the needy if the food pantry closes; loss

of access to church by bus or easy walkability; loss of daily mass; expressing frustration that we are not being transparent in this process. Hopes in the comments were overwhelmingly for

a growth in the young and families participating in the Catholic Community."