

Minutes from Vestal-Endicott Parishes meeting on 20 January 2026

Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

January 20, 2026 – Our Lady of Good Counsel, Fr. Hobbes Room

Attendees: Fr. Prior (Our Lady of Sorrows & Our Lady of Good Counsel), Fr. Kirkman (Sts. Ambrose, Anthony, Joseph), Fr. Joseph Ahukana, Dc. Bill Matts (Sts. Ambrose, Anthony, Joseph), Diane Julian (St. Joseph), Jim Silkworth (St. Joseph), John Cummiskey (OLGC), Mark Goodwin (OLGC), Eric Donaldson (OLGC), Mark Whiting (St. Anthony), Mike Brunner (St. Ambrose), Bob Brown (OLS), Luke Stanton (facilitator), Jim Gill (St. Joseph – St. Casimir), Brian Schmidt (OLS), Dc. Paul Heiland (OLGC), Chris Free (OLGC)

Absent: Kim Potter (OLGC), John Bombaski (St. Ambrose), Bernadette Van Donsel (OLS), Dave Archer (OLGC), Ron Kaye (St. Anthony), Dc. Tom Harley (OLGC), Dc. Michael Carroll (OLGC), Dc. Ed Blaine (OLS)

Opening

Fr. Prior opened our gathering with a warm and prayerful start. Luke Stanton facilitated the discussion.

Survey Feedback – Your Voices

We continued our heartfelt review of the online survey responses received as of January 20, 2026. A clear bar chart summary of the responses was shared and carefully reviewed during the meeting. (This visual helped us see the strength of various themes at a glance—thank you to everyone who contributed to making the data so meaningful.) Jim Silkworth also provided a thoughtful summary of comments from the open-ended section. Paper responses continue to be added for a complete final tally. At the end of these minutes is a high level summary of the data from the Surveys so far.

Your honest input has touched us deeply. The bar chart highlighted broad agreement that some form of change is necessary for long-term sustainability, while also showing strong feelings around preserving community identity, sacramental access, financial stewardship, trust in leadership, and opportunities to grow faith formation—especially for families and younger generations. Many comments express real concern about losing the "family" feel of our parishes, yet there is also genuine hope: that a thoughtful, pastoral approach could lead to renewed vitality, better ministry, and growth if done with care and unity. We are so grateful for your openness and love for these communities—it guides everything we do.

Proposed Mass Schedule (effective July 1, 2026)

With your feedback and ongoing prayerful discernment in mind, we discussed this proposed schedule for our combined Vestal–Endicott community (served by two priests: one pastor and one parochial vicar):

- **Our Lady of Sorrows (Vestal – “OLS”):** Saturday Vigil 5:15 pm, Sunday 8:30 am and 11:30 am
- **Endicott Parishes** (exact church locations still to be finalized): Saturday Vigil 4:00 pm, Sunday 8:30 am, 10:00 am, and 11:30 am

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We remain especially attentive to accessibility—particularly for our elderly parishioners and those with mobility needs—as we move toward final location decisions.

Facilities & Pastoral Next Steps

We spoke with deep respect about the future of our cherished church buildings, ministries, and parish families. No final recommendation or decisions on closures or assignments have been reached. Before any next steps are announced, Fr. Prior and Fr. Ken will meet with Bishop Lucia and Fr. Seibt to receive clear diocesan guidance on:

1. A reasonable, pastorally sensitive timeline for announcing the final Endicott Mass locations and hosting churches
2. Important logistics beyond Mass times—such as church size/capacity, building condition and repair needs, ongoing carrying/maintenance costs, parking, accessibility features, space for faith formation classes, parish halls for events and community gatherings, and overall access for all
3. The shared name/brand for our consolidated Vestal–Endicott faith family
4. A reverent, prayerful process for respectfully winding down any church that may close—including honoring donated assets, sacramental items, memorials, artwork, and the sacred memories and history each place holds for generations of families

Our goal is to handle every aspect with the love, gratitude, and dignity these communities deserve.

Closing Reflection

Dc. Paul Heiland closed with a moving reading from 1 Corinthians 1:10–13, 17—a Scripture passage that feels especially fitting as we seek to remain one in Christ through this time of transition.

Next Meeting

Tuesday, February 3, 2026 at 6:30 pm, Our Lady of Good Counsel (Fr. Hobbes Room)

We remain truly thankful for your patience, your prayers, and your continued care for one another and our parishes. We are listening closely, praying with you, and committed to proceeding in a way that honors our shared faith journey. Please keep the Steering Committee, our priests, and all five parishes in your prayers—we are keeping each of you in ours.

In Christ's peace and love.

Summary of January 2026 Parishioner Survey Results (Reflects on-line inputs only to date; paper submissions will be included and updated with the on-line results.)

(Approximately 350–356 responses from across our five parishes: Our Lady of Sorrows ~36%, St. Anthony of Padua ~26%, Our Lady of Good Counsel ~19%, St. Joseph ~13%, St. Ambrose ~7%)

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- Have you noticed a “crisis of faith?” **72% Yes** | 7% No | 21% Maybe
- Are you surprised by the data? (Church / local parishes / finances & facilities) **Only 17–21% Yes** | **64–74% No** | **9–15% Maybe** (Most are not surprised by the trends we are seeing.)
- Do you understand that the status quo is no longer tenable? (Church / local parishes / finances & facilities) **82–84% Yes** | **2–5% No** | **13% Maybe** (Very strong agreement that continuing exactly as we are is not sustainable.)
- Are you willing to “let go” in order to grow? **56% Yes** | 9% No | **35% Maybe**
- Are you willing to give more to mission than to maintenance? **44% Yes** | 8% No | **48% Maybe**
- Are you willing to collaborate for the sake of mission? **66% Yes** | 3% No | 31% Maybe
- Will you support the clergy, staff, councils, etc.? **86% Yes** | <1% No | 14% Maybe

What This Means for Us

Your answers reflect honest realism about the challenges—declining participation, priest shortages, aging facilities, and financial pressures—while also showing real hope and generosity. Most people are not in denial about the need for change; instead, many express readiness to adapt, collaborate, and even sacrifice for a stronger, more mission-focused future. The higher number of “Maybe” responses on some questions (especially around letting go or shifting resources) tells us people want to proceed thoughtfully, with transparency, pastoral sensitivity, and a focus on renewing faith life—especially for families, young adults, and those who feel distant.

This data aligns closely with the open comments shared earlier: deep love for our parish “homes,” concern about sacramental access and community identity, but also hope that consolidation could bring renewal, better ministry, and growth if done with care and unity.

We are deeply grateful for every response—it helps guide us prayerfully and practically. As we continue discerning with the Diocese, your voices remain at the heart of this process. Please keep praying for wisdom, unity, and courage for all of us. We are in this together, and God’s grace is with us.

Thank you again for sharing so openly. We are truly grateful and keep you all in our prayers.