

Holy Week, heavy hearts: Some Baltimore Catholics still searching after parish closures

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Months after dozens of catholic parishes were closed in Baltimore, and during Christianity's holiest week, people are still looking for places of worship to call home.

While one closed parish is appealing to Rome to reopen, some of its former parishioners are trying to keep their community of faith together.

Every other Friday, Ed and Joanne Selinski host what they call a prayer jam in their home.

More than a dozen people sat in a circle, singing, reading from scripture and praying.

Ed Selinski said the prayer jam has been happening for several years and is a continuation of an old tradition.

"2,000 years ago people gathered in their homes and called it community," Selinski told the group. "And it was the beginning of the Christian faith."



Ed and Joanne Selinski lead the prayer jam in their home.

Selinski is a former parishioner at St. Pius X on York Road near the city-county line. It closed after Christmas and was folded into the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen two miles away.

[The Archdiocese of Baltimore said it needed to close 31 of its parishes because of cratering attendance.](#) Church buildings that could seat 25,000 people were seeing just a few thousand show up for mass.

In the Selinski's kitchen afterwards, Jay and Sheri Massa said the loss of Saint Pius was heartbreaking and the house worship is helping to fill the void while they search for a parish that's a good fit.

"It's a nice place to be right now," Sheri Massa said. "And it's our community from Saint Pius. It's people that we know, that we love, that have watched our kids grow up that know our family."

Carol Pacione, who was St. Pius's Pastoral Life Director for 13 years, said in January she went to a meeting where members of closed parishes were encouraged to talk about their feelings.

"And so I went and heard people angry, people upset, people feeling abandoned, people feeling grief, all I think very natural," Pacione said. "And people saying 'I don't know where to go. I've gone here and here and it's not me, it doesn't fit.'"

The loss is perhaps felt even more during Holy Week.

Margie Brassil, a member of St. Pius for 25 years, said she wept while celebrating mass at another parish this past Sunday: Palm Sunday.

“It’s not just the building, it’s the people, because now we’re scattered,” Brassil said. “And that’s the hard part.”

Brassil and other parishioners have appealed to the Vatican to reopen St. Pius. They raised \$12,000 to hire a specialist in canon law.

Sitting at her dining room table, Brassil flipped through her folder filled with appeal-related documents. While appeals are not often successful, Brassil believes Saint Pius has a strong case. For one thing, she said the archdiocese’s data shows there are close to 1,000 Catholics within a 10 minute walk of Saint Pius.



Photo Courtesy: Margie Brassil
Christmas Eve 2024 Mass at St. Pius.

“Some of them may be going to other churches,” Brassil said “Some of them may have just stopped going to church after COVID. We could with a good strategy reach out to them and increase our numbers.”

Also, she said the parish’s finances are OK and the building is in good shape.

At least half a dozen parishes [reportedly](#) are appealing their closure. Christian Kendzierski, an archdiocese spokesman, said he cannot comment on the appeals since it is a canonical process.

“All of the parishes involved in the process, like St. Pius X, are part of a reimagining of Catholic life in Baltimore City and some of the surrounding areas,” Kendzierski said in a statement. “The goal is to re-ignite and realign the Church in these areas to carry out its Eucharistic Mission.”

Margie Brassil said St. Pius would be satisfied if the Vatican would allow it to operate as a worship site within the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen’s parish. St. Pius could offer mass and other special occasions using visiting priests.

“There’s a community here,” Brassil said.

Some things are still continuing at St. Pius, although the doors are locked.

Volunteers are tending a bioretention garden on the grounds that helps control stormwater runoff. Former parishioners continue to help out at Our Daily Bread, which is run by Catholic Charities and provides lunches and helps people find jobs and health care.

Carol Pacione said some have found a new parish. As for those who continue to look, Pacione said she hopes they won’t give up.

Pacione said, “They want their communities to reflect what they see as important for a community and as people of the gospel.”