

New year brings big changes to eastern Ontario dioceses

The merger of the Catholic Church in eastern Ontario that would create one large archdiocese stretching from Ottawa south to the St. Lawrence River is about to become reality.

The amalgamation of the two most eastern Ontario dioceses that would see the current Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall and the Archdiocese of Ottawa merge is awaiting final approval from the Vatican.

The paperwork outlining the proposed merger was completed Dec. 4 and sent for final approval earlier this month, and now it is expected that by the middle of 2020 eastern Ontario will have a newly formed Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' permanent council formally gave its approval for the merger in November.

The merger, which has been in the works since 2016 when Pope Francis called upon the Ottawa and Alexandria-Cornwall dioceses to examine the possible amalgamation of the two entities, is considered a foregone conclusion because of all the preparation work that has been done.

Ottawa Archdiocese communications director Robert Du Broy said while those who have been working on the project since 2016 in the two dioceses have a pretty good idea how the new archdiocese will move forward after the merger, until final approval is given there could be some changes pending feedback from the Vatican.

Alexandria-Cornwall has 27 parishes with a Catholic population of about 60,000, according to the CCCB. The Ottawa archdiocese serves about 395,000 Catholics with 107 parishes and missions.

In a previous interview with Canadian Catholic News, Ottawa Archbishop Terrence Prendergast said one of the reasons to amalgamate Ottawa with Alexandria-Cornwall is the protection of French-language Catholic services in eastern Ontario because of the difficulty of finding bilingual priests who could serve as bishops.

As well, the two separate dioceses are a good fit because many of the parishes of both Ottawa and Alexandria-Cornwall dioceses are near the same highway and more closely linked to each other than to the neighbouring Archdiocese of Kingston.

ARCHBISHOP PRENDERGAST PREPARES TO STEP ASIDE

While the upcoming change to the archdiocese structure in Ottawa and the Cornwall-region of the Church in eastern Ontario is a major undertaking, it will not be the only significant change within Ottawa in the new year.

Ottawa Archbishop Terrence Prendergast is stepping down from his position.

“Earlier this year, I turned 75 and submitted my resignation to Pope Francis, as canon law requires,” Prendergast said in his speech at his annual charity dinner on Oct. 30.

“His Holiness accepted my resignation according to the Latin formula ‘*nunc pro tunc*’ or, ‘now for then.’ This means accepted already – ‘*nunc*’ – for implementation at a future date – ‘*tunc*’ – to be determined. The note graciously suggested that I will celebrate my Silver Jubilee as a bishop in the spring of 2020, after which consultations for my successor will get underway,” he said.

There will be a special Mass in April in the Ottawa Archdiocese to mark the 25-year anniversary of Prendergast’s elevation as a bishop, and then a larger celebration in June 2020. Communications director Robert Du Broy said the official merger timelines could change, it is understood at this point that Prendergast will still be Ottawa’s archbishop when the official change to the diocese occurs.

Prendergast, who is originally from Montreal and ordained as a priest in 1972, was nominated as a bishop in 1995 and served as Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto before becoming Archbishop of Halifax in 1998. He was named the 10th Bishop and ninth Archbishop of Ottawa in 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI.