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Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore in a video message on May 22, 2024, concerning the final Seek the City reorganization plan for his archdiocese, which will see 30 parishes close within the city limits. (NCR screenshot/YouTube/Archdiocese of Baltimore)

Nate Tinner-Williams

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The Archdiocese of Baltimore has released the [final plan](#) for its [Seek the City](#) reorganization, including the closure of nearly half its 61 parishes within Baltimore city limits. 10 of the churches set to be merged out of existence are predominantly Black.

The news, concluding a process that began in 2022, was announced on May 22 with [a video message](#) from Archbishop [William Lori](#) describing the ground-shifting move as "difficult" and "dramatic."

"Over these two years, our process has engaged almost 6,000 people in prayerful listening, visioning, and discernment," he said, further explaining the need for financial realignment.

"These decisions were made to pull together gifts and resources, often spread thin across many parishes, to form new communities that are well equipped to carry out the urgent mission before us."

The final Seek the City plan features slight changes from [a tentative proposal](#) released in April. After that announcement, archdiocesan officials met with parishioners for listening sessions across Baltimore City, including with Black Catholics on April 23 at [St. Frances Academy](#) with Baltimore urban vicar Auxiliary Bishop [Bruce Lewandowski](#).

Attendance at that session exceeded capacity, and the archdiocese's Baltimore Review reported that Seek the City director [Geri Royale Byrd](#) — a Black Catholic — admitted that African Americans would be "the first affected" by the Baltimore reorganization process.

A full third of the churches officially slated to close are Black, including St. Ann, St. Wenceslaus, St. Peter Claver, St. Pius V, St. Cecilia, St. Edward, Immaculate Conception, St. Gregory the Great, Transfiguration, and Blessed Sacrament. Two other parishes the archdiocese has described as having a "significant Black population," St. Anthony of Padua and St. Thomas More, will also close.

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The changes in the nation's oldest Catholic diocese mirror those announced in recent years in metropolitan areas around the country, and will go into effect in various stages for different parishes. The reorganization in Baltimore is said to be related to limited monetary resources, falling Mass attendance, and declining population in the city proper.

The notably diverse archdiocese — which covers the city, county, and neighboring counties of Baltimore — has long been under a cloud of financial distress, filing for bankruptcy in 2023 following millions of dollars in payouts due to clergy child sex abuse.

That filing came just before [a Maryland law](#) went into effect that would allow alleged survivors of child sex abuse to sue defendants without regard to the statute of limitations. The aftermath of that legislation has intersected with the final stages of Seek the City, with abuse claims allowed to be filed through May 31 of this year.

In his letter to the faithful this month, Archbishop Lori repeated an official stance that the new parish closures are not directly related to the bankruptcy development.

"I assure you; they are not," he said, adding that the future of shuttered churches in Baltimore cannot be generalized.

"I have heard speculation, connecting future sales of properties to supporting the bankruptcy settlement. This is not true. During implementation some properties will be repurposed while some will be sold. Proceeds from any building sale will remain in the parish and follow the people to the newly formed parish. This is Church law, and it is supported by civil law."

Black Catholics have reacted to the finalized reorganization plan with varying emotions, ranging from relief — for members of historic [St. Francis Xavier Church](#), for example, one of the nation's oldest Black parishes — to disappointment over closure and reticence to merge into an unfamiliar context.

"Today there are a few Catholic Church parishioners in Baltimore that are feeling good that their parishes will still have worship. Many will have different emotions after seeing the final proposal knowing that their current home will be closing," said

Rudy Dehaney, a formation director at [St. Matthew Catholic Church](#) who shared his thoughts on social media following the announcement.

"While I feel better off than most, it will still be hard. So take time for prayer, a good word, a song, or conversation for everyone who will have a tough time and hope for perseverance in troubled times and that a new, loving, accepting home may be found. But today, tomorrow, or much longer we grieve. Let us be comforted."

Editor's note: This article was [originally published](#) at *Black Catholic Messenger*.