

St. Lucy Croatian Catholic Church Listening Session for Planning Area 9-c

May 8, 2026

10:00 a.m.

Ivo Tesija noted that only one of the four options presented today calls for St. Lucy to remain open with Sunday mass services. All of the other options eliminate Sunday masses at St. Lucy, which is tantamount to disbanding this ethnic parish. A parish without masses is no longer a parish, it is only a physical facility without the spiritual component that is the essence of a living parish.

Building on some of the prior comments made by Andy Mutavdzija, who touched on how special (non-territorial) parishes are established and can be terminated under Church Canon Law, Mr. Tesija also pointed out that Canon Law Sections 515 and 518 require “just cause” in order to disband a parish like St. Lucy’s. Financial considerations and even lack of priests are typically not considered sufficient just cause for such terminations.

Mr. Tesija pointed out that even if those critical factors were under consideration here, the parish itself has solved both of them. First, the parish is financially self-sustaining, thanks in large part to the \$2 million plus generous donation from parishioner Mary Sostarich. In fact, the Diocese also benefited by a donation of an equal amount from this St. Lucy parishioner. To turn around and shut down the very parish that led to this exceedingly generous donation only a few months (or years) later seems unconscionable. Clearly, lack of current and future revenue is not a valid factor to disband the St. Lucy parish.

As to the second factor – lack of priests – here again St. Lucy parish presented a solution to the Diocese by finding a Croatian and English-speaking priest (Fr. Matija Zujaj), whose bishop is and continues to be ready to release him to come to St. Lucy. Permission was also sought from the Diocese on February 24, 2026 and rejected by Archbishop’s notice dated March 23, 2026. This inexplicable rejection does not square up with the claimed shortage of priests as being one of the driving factors for the entire Diocese-wide restructuring process. The out-of-hand rejection of Fr. Zujaj’s move to St. Lucy can only be explained if the Diocese already predetermined to disband the St. Lucy parish, without first conducting the necessary just cause evaluation. To make matters worse, we are now advised that our current temporary pastor will only serve at St. Lucy through June 21, 2026, with no replacement named by the Diocese. In essence, this is implementing the Diocese’s shut-down plan for St. Lucy well before the July 2027 restructuring date presented at today’s meeting.

It is not lost on our parishioners that shutting down St. Lucy would result in the parish’s relatively new facilities, located in a desirable area, as well as about \$2.5 million in liquid assets, all then accruing to the Diocese. This would be a heartbreaking result for the parishioners of St. Lucy whose 100-year struggle to build a viable parish would end with a stroke of pen. We believe such action would also be contrary to Canon Law Sections 515, 518 and related rules and regulations. If a shut down is truly inevitable, perhaps a less traumatic option would be to combine St. Lucy’s Croatian parish with one of the other ethnic parishes in the area, such as Lithuania, Albanian or the like.

While this adverse decision will undoubtedly be challenged under the Church’s Canon Law process, a more prudent course of action is to allow St. Lucy to serve its unique parishioner base with proposed transfer of Fr. Zujaj, using its own financial resources.