

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Clustered Parish?

Clustered Parishes have one priest pastor. However the priest may live at another location and be pastor of more than one community. The communities each have a Parish Pastoral Council, and may or may not have geographical boundaries. (See Canons 516, 517, 518, 536, 905).

Why do we have to cluster parishes?

The church of the Archdiocese of Detroit cannot continue to operate as did the church of the last century because of the continuing impact of urban sprawl, fewer priests, the new immigrant and constant changes in economics and ministry needs. The clustering of parishes and the collaboration of parishes within vicariate boundaries will allow for a more effective expression of Church through the sharing of human and capital resources and the coordination of ministerial activities.

What is merging?

Merging is the joining of two or more parishes in a single new parish. The newly merged parish may consist of one site, or one for worship and administration with one for an alternate purpose (i.e. outreach), or have multiple worship sites (e.g., one church and one chapel) etc. The new parish has one parish pastoral council, one stewardship/finance council and commissions.

How does merging differ from clustering?

Clustering involves two or more parishes, remaining somewhat independent and sharing a pastor. It is a step which could lead to a merger of parishes (see above).

Why not remain as a cluster?

We must ask ourselves, “Is clustering the best use of our time, talent and treasure?” Many pastors in a cluster situation find that the duplication of administration and meetings are very taxing on them physically. They are getting burned out and ask “does it make sense to expand our resources for ministry by merging?” In a cluster, parishes may be eliminating ministries to maintain unnecessary buildings.

What are the benefits that come out of clustering?

- Parish communities become more life giving and self-sustaining through the establishment of common goals and the sharing of resources while maintaining individual parish identity.
- New friendships and new small faith communities will emerge within the larger community when collaboration occurs across generational, racial and cultural lines.
- New lay leadership will emerge taking on new roles and responsibilities.
- Parishes will maintain a neighborhood presence of an evangelizing Catholic community especially in areas with few Catholics.

What are the greatest challenges when clustering?

- Scheduling of pastor’s time, and the many meetings he has to attend
- Mass schedules will have to change
- Communication/administration issues between parish sites
- Need for administrative/secretarial assistance for pastor at both/all sites
- Territorialism and Parochialism between parishes

What are key issues for clustering parishes to address?

- Communicate and plan with staffs, parish councils and lay leadership at every step
- Identify common goals, missions and programs and ways to work together
- Provide support and training for lay and staff leadership
- Minimally a Secretary and Pastoral Minister (at least part time) is needed at each site
- In some cases the parishes will need sacramental priest assistance
- Review and redefine job descriptions for all/shared staff

When a merger occurs does the parish take a new name?

Often a new name brings unity to the members of the merging parishes. A prayerful process that includes the parish community is encouraged. The Archdiocese has guidelines for choosing a name. It is important to note that the parish recommends a name(s) to the Cardinal; he then names the parish by formal decree. A merged parish may choose to keep the name of one of the parishes, especially if it has historical significance or was the Mother Church in a geographic boundary.

If two or more worship sites exist, how does one refer to the parish?

It would be referred to as _____ Parish, which contains the church buildings of _____ Church and _____ Church (e.g., St. Mary Parish contains St. Peter Church and St. Paul Church).

How are sacramental records and parish membership handled when parishes merge?

One site is to be designated the main church of worship and administrative site for the parish. The sacramental records of all the parishes are brought to this site. The membership is consolidated to form the new parish list.

Where are archives kept from a merger?

Historic documents that are to be preserved should be sent to the Archdiocesan Archives (1234 Washington Blvd., Detroit, MI 48226). The guidelines for archival material should be followed.

What about sacred objects?

If one of the sites is to be shut down and not used by the newly merged parish, a worship environment committee is formed by the newly merged parish to determine which significant sacred objects the new parish should retain, and how the items will be incorporated into the main worship site. Remaining items to be disposed of will adhere to the Archdiocesan guidelines regarding the disposition of sacred objects. The Office for Christian Worship is available to assist parishes with this transition.

How are finances handled, especially the merging of assets and debts?

The Office of Parish Support Services will assist parishes during this transition. In a merger, the new parish acquires all assets and liabilities of the parishes from which it was formed. In the pre-merger discussions it is important to determine building needs and use, staffing, and budgetary requirements. All finances are consolidated into a new Loan Deposit Program account. In January, new envelopes should be distributed to the consolidated list of registered members.

Will people lose their jobs in a merger?

Some jobs may be eliminated and new positions may be created. Discernment needs to be done by the pastor of the new parish, staff, and the joint stewardship commissions and parish pastoral councils to determine what is needed for ministry in the new community. New job descriptions should be written to reflect the ministry needs of the parish. The pastor will make the final decisions concerning the staffing of the parish. Assistance is offered to the pastor and staff during this transition by Archdiocesan central service departments.

How do we handle differences of ethnicity, cultures, worship styles, youth etc.?

No parish, cluster, or merger is identical. Every parish community has its own individual personality that reflects the history, ethnicity, mission, values, and liturgical style of the members that share their Catholic faith together. The Office of Leadership Services can provide discernment and transition resources. A discernment process will outline suggested ways to build dialogue, to develop a plan and to lead a community through the transition of a cluster, or merger of a parish. Leadership is encouraged to adapt their own practices into the process that speak to the communities that are transitioning together.

What are the key elements for a successful merger and leading a parish through change?

The key components for facilitating change in the structure of a parish community are prayer, vision and leadership. Cardinal Maida's pastoral letter, *The Journey Before Us*, confirms that:

- Since change is ongoing, for the health and well being of the Church, we need to be discerning and open in a spirit of prayer.
- No one parish or school can function apart from the rest of the archdiocese. Each of our parishes and schools has gifts to offer and needs the support and expertise of other parishes and schools.
- Well-trained, competent leadership—clergy, religious, and lay—is a critical building block for the Church of the future.
- Growth and diminishment, change and transformation make sense only against the backdrop of the death-resurrection of Christ, which we celebrate daily in the Holy Eucharist.

The Church is a *spiritual* reality, a communion for the sake of mission, which has visible expression in and through parishes, schools, and institutions. Changes of external structures are intended to build up, sustain, and renew our enduring commitment to share together in Christ's three-fold mission as our priest, prophet and shepherd ruler.