

GUIDELINES FOR NAMING A NEW PARISH

Often a new name brings unity to the members of merging or new 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 (at least a first and second choice) 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. In some instances a hyphenated name of two parishes may serve in a transition time when the planning process calls for future parishes to join the merged community at a later date. At that time a new name would be determined for the parish.

If two or more worship sites exist, it would be referred to as the Parish of _____ comprised of the church of _____ and the church of _____. For example The Parish of St. John comprised of the church of St. Peter and the church of St. Paul.

In selecting a new name for a parish the following canonical guidelines apply:

1. Canon law requires that our sacred buildings (churches, oratories and private chapels) must be blessed or dedicated and given a title of (1) the name of the Trinity, or (2) the name of Christ, invoked under a mystery of his life or under his name already used in the Mass, or (3) the name of the Holy Spirit, or (4) the name of Mary, under a given title already found in the Mass, or (5) the name of the Angels, or (6) the name of a canonized Saint in the Roman Martyrology, or (7) the name of a Blessed provided the Apostolic See has given it's permission.

Canon law is silent on the matter of naming parishes but clarification was provided by the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments on 10 February 1999, stating, "The name of a parish may commonly be the same name as the title of the parish church".

2. Canon law leaves it to the diocesan bishop to erect, suppress, or notably alter parishes. Since it is his prerogative to establish parishes, it is also his prerogative to name them.
3. Though there is no ambition on the part of anyone in the Archbishop's Office to attempt to stop the popular use of the phrase "Catholic Community" that, in some cases, has unofficially replaced the term "Parish" (e.g., St. Roman Catholic Community), no such designation will appear on an official decree of erection/ merger/suppression or subsequent decrees and correspondence relating to the parish. The phrase "Catholic Community" is a modern convention that could wane in future use. Furthermore, canon law gives legal personality to a "Parish", not a "Catholic Community". At this point in time, it would be imprudent to use the phrase beyond the level of common parlance.

4. The practice in the United States is to give a parish the name of a canonized Saint or other name listed in #1. The question of whether or not the merger of three parishes can give rise to a name such as “Fairhaven Catholic Parish” is an interesting one, especially if there is a plan to maintain three churches within the new territorial parish. At this point in time, however, it would break from the practice of giving a parish the name of canonized Saint or other name listed in #1. Such a change would create an inconsistency in the Archdiocese and, perhaps, confusion to our people inside and outside the parish in question.
5. In the case of parish mergers, the churches in the former parishes, in fact, retain their title; however, if a church building was simply blessed, and not dedicated, the name of the church can be changed by the diocesan bishop, for a grave reason, at the request of the pastor and parishioners. In the case of a dedicated church building, the name can only be changed with the permission of the Apostolic See.

If it happens that one of the churches within a newly merged parish will become the main worship site, as a rule, the parish should be given the name of that church. Nevertheless, there may be dynamics that make such designation contentious, in which case, it could be permitted that the parish be given a name different from the churches within the parish.

6. To revive those names that were used by parishes closed in 1990 and subsequent years, though technically allowed, may cause confusion in the minds of the faithful and in the records of the historical archives.

If the pastor (or administrator) and parishioners would like to submit more than one name, the Archbishop can certainly choose one or discuss with the pastor and parishioners other appropriate names.