

STRATEGIC DECISIONS AFFECTING PARISHES

Parishes are a primary means of developing a communion of faith, hope, and love among the faithful in our local Church. While all of the faithful of the Archdiocese are entrusted to the pastoral care of the Archbishop, it is impossible for him personally to preside at the Eucharistic liturgy always and everywhere. Thus, the Archbishop has the responsibility to establish and maintain stable faith communities, and to entrust each community with a pastor, who is to provide the pastoral care for that community. The most common form of faith community is the parish, although faith communities may also be designated as chaplaincies or other non-parish communities. Parishes are generally territorial, which means that the parish includes all the faithful living within a certain territory. However, parishes may also be established for persons of a certain nationality, who speak a certain language, or who worship according to a certain rite. The parish community may worship at one or more sites, either a parish church or an oratory. In short, a parish is a community of people, while a church is a building, when the word is used as it is here to describe a structure.

It is important to understand that the people and parishes of this Archdiocese are the local Church. Nearly 9,000 infants were baptized in parishes throughout the Archdiocese and more than 1,500 adults joined the Catholic Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults last year. During the 2009-2010 school year, nearly 47,000 children and youth were involved in parish faith formation programs and more than 34,000 children were enrolled at Catholic schools here in the Archdiocese. An untold number of adults of all ages engaged in opportunities to deepen their faith through parish programs. Understanding our communion as the local Church helps us be aware of the needs of our brothers and sisters throughout the Archdiocese. It also helps us to appreciate that while we must be one in faith and practice, there is an appropriate diversity among parishes in size and style of worship. The Strategic Plan reinforces our communion by calling all of us into greater collaboration, even as it respects appropriate diversity.



SUMMARY OF CRITERIA FOR LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF PARISHES WITHIN THE ARCHDIOCESE

As part of the strategic planning process, all parishes were reviewed in relation to a standard set of criteria for long-term parish viability: communion; mission; administration; and relationship with the local Church (please see APPENDIX B for the full list of criteria). The Strategic Plan calls all parishes to undergo regular and ongoing evaluation based upon these criteria going forward. Identification of the criteria for long-term parish viability helps us in discerning how to utilize best our collective gifts in living out the mission of the Church at both the parish and archdiocesan level.

COMMUNION: A viable parish celebrates reverent and engaging liturgy, meets the sacramental needs of the faithful, offers faith formation opportunities for all ages, provides compassionate pastoral care, and utilizes the time, talents and treasure of all its members in support of parish life and the local Church.

MISSION: A viable parish makes the name of Jesus Christ known and loved by all through acts of charity, social justice, and outreach. Likewise, a viable parish is committed not only to the needs of active parishioners, but also to those who have left or drifted away from the Church, and those who do not have a relationship with Christ.

ADMINISTRATION: A viable parish is a good steward of the gifts God provides, as well as the contributions of parishioners. This good stewardship entails living within the means of the parish, adherence to sound administrative and finance practices, competent leaders and staff, and a vision for the future.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE LOCAL CHURCH: A viable parish intentionally collaborates with other parishes to create a cohesive fabric of ministry in the Archdiocese in order to more effectively live out the mission of the local Church.

TYPES OF CHANGES IN PARISHES UNDER THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Under the Strategic Plan, there are several types of changes in parishes: mergers, clusters, structured collaboration, and designation as an oratory. Parish mergers and clusters will take place over a period of years and no implementation of structural change is scheduled to begin before January 2011. Certain parishes are identified as requiring close monitoring for debt and other financial sustainability issues. All parishes are expected to communicate and coordinate with one another to improve ministry and increase efficiency.

PARISH MERGER

Parish merger definition: two or more parish communities merge into one community with one pastor; in each merging relationship there is one parish designated as a receiving parish; the assets and liabilities of a merging parish will be incorporated into the receiving parish (this means that the receiving parish will acquire the church buildings of any merging parish); Masses will continue to be celebrated at the church building of the merging parish until a decision which contradicts such use is made by the parish pastoral and finance councils of the receiving parish community, in consultation with the Archbishop and the Presbyteral Council; parish mergers are subject to appeal (please see APPENDIX A); mergers will proceed as the capacity to handle them effectively and pastorally allows.



Steve,
Parishioner at
St. Mathias,
Hampton – part of
a tri-parish cluster

“Be open to the possibilities of change. It isn’t about maintaining what you have. It’s about growth. That growth is both spiritual and communal. You want to grow your community, and individuals want to grow spiritually. That’s what it’s all about.”

PARISH CLUSTER

Parish cluster definition: two or more parishes that share a pastor; clustered parishes may also share some staff and programming; cluster arrangements will not go into effect before June 1, 2011; questions or concerns about cluster arrangements will be addressed at open meetings in each affected parish; parishes in a cluster arrangement retain their parish status and basic organizational structure; clustering does not necessarily lead to merger of parishes.

IDENTIFIED FOR STRUCTURED COLLABORATION

Identified for structured collaboration definition: two or more parishes each with their own pastor that are specifically identified to work in collaboration, i.e.

sharing resources, cooperating on programming, etc.; while all parishes are called into greater collaboration under the Strategic Plan, the parishes in this category are specifically asked to engage in particular cooperation and communication with neighboring parishes; many of these sites may eventually move toward a cluster.

DESIGNATION AS ORATORY

Designation as oratory definition: an oratory is a worship site established for a particular community or group of the faithful; often, oratories are simply another worship site within a parish; there are some limitations as to what liturgical celebrations can take place in an oratory, for example: all communities are encouraged to participate in Mass on Sundays at the parish church; funerals are only permitted in an oratory with a dispensation from the diocesan bishop; there must be a just cause for a baptism to take place outside of the parish church.



Kathleen,
Parishioner at
Lumen Christi,
Saint Paul –
formed through a
tri-parish merger

“For everything that was hard, it seemed like there was a blessing. There was something we were going to be able to do or be in the new space that we couldn’t before.”



Doug,
Parishioner at
St. Mark,
Shakopee –
part of a
consolidated faith
formation program

“I think you’ve got to keep an open mind... [Sharing a program] can strengthen your faith because of the strong collaboration that can take place during that time. It’s a nice way to reflect on your own values, and what’s really important, and what you can give up.”