

Merging of Parishes -- Frequently Asked Questions

What is a merging?

Merging is the joining of two or more parishes in a single new or consolidated parish. The new or consolidated parish may consist of one site or one Mother Church with satellite ministry and/or worship sites. The parish has one parish pastoral council, stewardship/finance council and commissions.

How does it differ from a clustering?

Clustering—two or more parishes, remaining somewhat independent, sharing a pastor should be seen as a first step in a process which could lead to a merger of parishes.

Why not remain as a cluster?

We must ask ourselves is clustering the best use of our human and capital resources? Many pastors in a cluster situation are finding that the duplication of administration and meetings are very taxing on them physically. They find that they are getting burned out. Could we expand our resources for ministry by merging? In a cluster we might be maintaining many unnecessary buildings and could we utilize them differently since most of our parishes are a few miles apart?

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 (first and second choice) to the Cardinal; he 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 the Parish of _____ comprised of the church of _____ and the church of _____. The Parish of St. John comprised of the church of St. Peter and the church of St. Paul.

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 parishes acquires all assets and liabilities inclusive of debts. 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 account. In January, new envelopes will be distributed to the consolidated registered members.

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Will people lose their jobs?

Yes, 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 are written to reflect the ministry needs, prayerful discernment takes place, and interviews with the pastor to be may take place, (in parishes that have been clustered and the pastor will remain as the new pastor shared ministry may be in place). The pastor is the final decision maker in the staffing of the parish. Assistance and support is available to the pastor and staff during this transition.

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

Many of our pastors, clergy, lay professional ministers, support staffs, and lay leadership will experience new configurations of parish life in the future. **The key components for facilitating change in the structure of a parish community are prayer, vision and leadership.** The 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.

