

PARISH MODELS

DIOCESE OF MADISON, WISCONSIN

MODEL ONE: MERGED PARISH

Merged parishes create a new parish configuration which is able to provide many more activities and opportunities than the original parishes could have managed on their own.

The merger process allows parishes to:

1. Use priestly leadership more effectively so that more communities can celebrate the sacraments regularly. (By having fewer parishes, more people will be served without burdening the priests who are currently serving parishes.)
2. Join forces to form a larger, more vibrant worshipping community,
3. Reduce overhead, and use resources more effectively and efficiently.

When done sensitively and cooperatively the merging of parishes will ordinarily create a more viable parish situation. Remember, communities are merging and some churches will be closing.

A merged parish happens when:

- Two or more parishes come together to form one new parish. Merged parishes are new canonical entities and the new parish obtains the assets as well as the liabilities of the parishes which formed it.

- A new name is given to the parish which may be a brand new name or a combination of the former parish names. Usually the new parish has one worship site, but permission may be given for several worship sites for a limited time period.

MODEL TWO: LINKED PARISHES

Many parishes are already linked in the Diocese of Madison. Linked parishes happen when two or more parishes share a pastor. Linked parishes do as many things as possible cooperatively especially given that the pastor/administrator is striving to serve two or more separate parishes.

Characteristics of linked parishes include:

- The parishes remain independent corporations and canonical entities.
- The parishes are separate communities of faith.
- The parishes may have a common parish council and some common committees.
- According to Canon Law, linked parishes must have separate finance councils.
- Linked parishes do many things cooperatively such as programs and in-services.
- Joint staff meetings where cooperative planning happens are marks of well functioning linked parishes.

MODEL THREE: PARTNERSHIP PARISHES

Parishes enter into partnerships with other parishes when:

- They create joint programs.
- When appropriate, they share staff to enhance the quality of ministry and practice good stewardship of resources.
- They share in-services or retreats for parish pastoral councils finance councils or parish committees.

Examples of ways parishes can partner include:

- A common catechetical program.
- A shared youth ministry program or adult formation program.
- Support for a common Catholic School.
- A joint RCIA program.
- A shared parish outreach program.

The key to successful partnership parishes is an attitude of cooperation which results in finding opportunities for sharing resources to enhance the quality of ministry in each parish. Partnership parishes also work together, where possible, on “twinning” with inner city parishes or in support of a mission parish outside of the United States.

MODEL FOUR: PARISHES UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF A PARISH DIRECTOR

According to canon law (C. 517.2) every parish must be assigned a priest who will either provide or supervise the regular pastoral care of a parish. In a situation which the bishop deems appropriate he may appoint a deacon, vowed religious or a member of the laity to be the Parish Director under the supervision of a priest. In some dioceses the bishop’s appoints an assisting priest(s) to provide sacramental ministry and a supervising priest to oversee the pastoral care of the parish.

The primary role of the Parish Director is to see that spiritual and pastoral care are provided to parishioners, oversee the general operation of the parish, coordinate the ministry of worship, education-formation, human concerns and administration. The Parish Director is accountable to the supervising priest and is appointed by the Bishop. (This model is used in the Diocese of Green Bay, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, the Diocese of San Bernardino as well as other dioceses, though the titles of the position may differ.) (The salary of a Parish Director, who usually has a Master’s degree in Theology or Religious Studies, is about \$50,000 including benefits. The stipends and expenses for an assisting priest for a year are about \$10,000.)

MODEL FIVE: LEADERSHIP TEAM SERVING MORE THAN ONE PARISH

This model envisions one or two priests and qualified professional lay people and/or deacons working as a team and serving three to four parishes. While this approach is not prevalent, it has been and continues to be successfully used in the Diocese of Green Bay. In the city of Green Bay three parishes are being served by a team, with the fourth parish expected to join the cluster within a year. A variation of the model was used in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee as six parishes merged into one parish with multiple Churches being used. Currently the parish in Fond du Lac is served by a team of priests and lay people. Some churches have been closed and a new parish Church is in the process of being built.