

Merger Considerations

1 When would a possible merger take effect?

As of this writing, there is no set date. Throughout the diocese, just about every parish has been asked in some way to review its pastoral and administrative policies and procedures in order to respond fruitfully to the reality of fewer church members, shrinking finances, and fewer priests. As you know, eventually the pastor of the “Indian River Catholics” parishes will become the pastor of St. Paul’s in Black River which will include the parish of St. Rita in Deferiet which will probably be merged with St. Paul. The merged “Indian River” parish would be linked (not merged) with St. Paul’s.

2. How will financial resources be shared each church of a merged Indian River Catholics?

Currently, SM, SJ, ST parishes are linked. The revenues and expenses of each parish remain in the parish. However, expenses are being attributed to the parish where the expense occurs, but paid from whatever money is available. Funds should not be mingled. However, for the past several years the expenses have been paid by whatever money is available. For example, right now, there is one bookkeeper for all three parishes. All revenue is recorded to the parish that receives the income (e.g. envelope and plate); all expenses are attributed to the parish where the expense takes place. Common expenses (e.g. pastor’s salary, rectory expenses) are divided 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 among the three parishes.

The situation would be quite different if all three parishes are merged/combined into one parish with three worship sites. All revenues and all expenses would be part of one fund. Administratively, a merger would be a much simpler operation. All sacramental records would be combined into one. All financial activity would be combined into one. In New York State each parish is a unique corporation. In a merger, all three parish corporations would be merged into one. The merged parish would gain a new name, but each individual church building would retain its own name.

3. What is the difference between a linked parish situation and a merged parish situation?

As mentioned above, SM, SJ, ST are linked parishes. If the three parishes are merged, then, as explained above, we become one parish with three worship sites. Everything and everyone is shared. Each cemetery would remain separate since cemeteries are supposed to be self-sufficient.

4. What about faith formation and sacramental preparation?

Currently, faith formation and sacramental preparation take place in one program as if the parishes were already merged. The celebration of Confirmation already takes place in one of the Watertown parishes. First Communion could take place at the Mass that the family regularly attends.

5. Will the individual churches have control over liturgical planning, such as music ministry, deacons, lay ministers, altar servers?

Already, the three parishes share liturgy preparation. One person chooses the music for all the Masses. Servers, readers, and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist stay in one church. However, they could easily serve at a different church if their services were needed e.g. a holyday of obligation Mass.

6. Why can't SM, SJ, & ST keep their finances separate?

If the three parishes remain merely linked, then the finances would be kept separate. If the three parishes merge into one parish with three worship sites, then the new single parish assumes all liabilities and assets of the three previous parishes. As a matter of fact, right now, no one parish is meeting its financial obligations.

7. Will my weekly donation stay in my parish? Or be shared?

If the parishes remain linked, then the envelope money will go to the parish designated on the envelope. The plate money (loose money, not in an envelope) will go to the parish where it is received. If the parishes are merged, then the money will be shared by the one parish to respond to the needs of the whole parish, including all its buildings.

8. Will my children be welcome to serve as altar servers in all parishes? Can I serve as lector, greeter, EM, sacristan or usher in all parishes?

If the parishes remain separated i.e. merely linked, then it would be expected that persons perform their liturgical ministries in their own parish. However, if the parishes are merged, then all three church buildings become worship sites of the one parish and parishioners could exercise their liturgical ministries at any one of the buildings. However, it would seem suitable that people could, in volunteering, express their desire to exercise their ministry at one building or the other and/or one Mass time or the other. This is currently done in the parishes.

9. Can I choose the church that my Mass intention will be celebrated?

If there is one parish i.e. the parishes are merged, then, in requesting a Mass, a person could ask for a particular time and/or church building. However, it should be noted that all requests may not be able to be honored because others have already reserved a particular time or place.

10. What about the Mass schedule?

There would be no need to add any Masses to our current schedule. Some consideration should be given to cancelling the Saturday Mass at SM. The Mass at 4 pm in Philadelphia could easily accommodate the number of people who now currently attend the 4 pm and 5:30 pm Masses.

11. Will my elderly parents be able to choose the church where their funeral mass will be celebrated?

Funerals, even now, can be held in a parish church other than the person's own parish. The important consideration is having a funeral celebration for the deceased. The person's or family's wishes for a particular church building, whether the parishes are linked or merged, should be respected.

12. Will the envelopes be centralized, or will it matter if I'm registered at one parish and I drop my envelope in the collection at one of the other parishes?

The answer depends on whether the parishes are merely linked (three entities under one pastor) or merged (one parish with three worship sites). In the former arrangement, the envelopes are given to the parish indicated on the envelope. In the latter, all envelopes become the income to the one parish with three worship sites.

13. If one of the main reasons for the merging of parishes is a shortage of clergy, then what is the diocese doing to promote vocations? Can't we just continue to bring in priest from other countries?

Before answering the question about what the diocese is doing to promote vocations, perhaps the more fundamental question is what are the people doing to promote vocations. When was the last time a mother or father encouraged a son to consider the priesthood? When families are spending Sunday morning bringing their children to hockey, lacrosse, football, soccer, dancing, skating, and who knows what other events, not a lot thought about religious vocations is going on, much less just basic practice of the faith. When parents merely drop off their children to faith formation classes or depend on the Catholic school to "take care" of religion in their children's lives, but hardly ever attend liturgy or see it as important, what chance is there for the children to consider religion much less a vocation to priesthood or religious life.

The diocese does have a full-time employee charged with promoting vocations. Part of her responsibility is implementing a vocation promotion program designed last year. Each parish is supposed to have a vocations committee. We do not have one. The diocese provides a training programs for members of these committees.

The question about bringing in priests from other countries sounds as if they can be imported just like other commodities. For a priest from a non-western country, a least one-year is needed to begin being comfortable with the American way of life. In addition, even if he is already a native English speaker, more than likely his version of English is different from ours. If he comes from a non-English speaking country the enculturation is that much more difficult. Furthermore, while there are priests who come to the United States from other countries, those countries from which they come need these priests for their own ministry needs. In addition, when priests come for only a few years and return home, the USA diocese must start all over again with a new priest.

14. In a merger of parishes, what would the new parish be called?

If the three parishes merge into one parish, the parish would receive a new name. However, the three churches buildings would retain their current names. For example, when the parishes in Malone merged, the new name became St. Andre

Bessette (Brother Andre of Montreal). The church buildings kept their names: St. John Bosco, St. Joseph, Notre Dame, and St. Helen's.

15. Will my grandchildren be able to make their first communion in "MY" church, as my family has done for 100 years?

The most important issue is that the grandchildren will make their First Communion. Given the current practice of the faith, that is not a foregone conclusion. The location for the celebration of First Holy Communion is really quite secondary. Already, for example, parishes combine together into one church for the celebration of Confirmation. The celebration of First Holy Communion could take place in all three churches. However, right now, we do not know the answer to that question. The most important goal, in a merged parish arrangement, is to develop a sense of unity and community.

16. To better understand the basic causes of a need to merge parishes, is there a website that I can go to look at the demographics of the Diocese of Ogdensburg?

Knowing the current demographics of the diocese would not reveal more than what we currently know: there are fewer priests, fewer practicing Catholics, some younger practicing Catholics do not have the same dedication and devotion to their parish as do older generations. Checking Wikipedia for the Diocese of Ogdensburg will give some basic information about the history of the diocese. Links on that webpage will bring the users to more information about the history and current status of the diocese.

17. What is the most important considerations in all of our discussions?

Providing for the religious and pastoral needs of parishioners and creating a sense of unity and strength among all parishioners are the most important considerations. All must understand that we are Roman Catholics joined in parish unity.

18. How can I make my feelings about a possible merger known?

Speak with Msgr. Aucoin