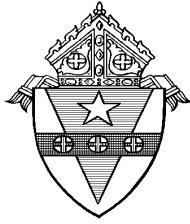


**ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA
PARISH PARTNERSHIPS**

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ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA PARISH PARTNERSHIPS

OVERVIEW

In a Parish Partnerships two or more parishes are connected in almost all areas of administration and in many pastoral areas; while at the same time they remain canonically and financially independent parishes.

Parish Partnerships are an alternative to *parish mergers* (uniting two or more parishes into a single parish) and to *parish “twinning”* (appointing one pastor to serve two or more otherwise separate parishes). It is based upon a model that has been successfully used in a number of other dioceses in recent years.

Parish Partnerships help address our immediate need to make better use of the limited number of priests we have available to serve as pastors. Parish Partnerships also allow smaller parishes to combine efforts to do the work of the Church more economically and effectively.

In time a successful Parish Partnership will help the parishes to grow by combined efforts in evangelization. Vital parishes can also help to encourage vocations to the priesthood. Growing, more vital parishes and increased vocations eventually could obviate the need for the partnership itself.

Parishes are Connected

In a Parish Partnership two or more parishes are connected in almost all areas of *administration*, such as sharing a pastor, other clergy, parish staff, office, rectory, Pastoral Council, Sunday Bulletin and other communications, and outside contractors and vendors whenever possible. Most of these administrative changes are “behind the scenes” and should have minimal impact on the average parishioner.

After the partnership is established, the parishes themselves develop a common *pastoral partnership* plan which will consider having some combined parish activities, ministries and organizations whenever pastorally prudent. The common pastoral plan will also develop ways the parishes will work together in Evangelization efforts.

Mass and other *liturgical schedules* must be coordinated (and perhaps reduced or adjusted if necessary) so as to accommodate the increased obligations of the clergy at the parishes.

The Parish Partnership will develop a plan for the use of the *buildings* of the parishes to determine if by combining some operations any property could be freed up for rental. As a rule, the rectory should be located on the grounds of one parish and the partnered parish office on the grounds of another.

Parishes Remain Independent

The parishes in the partnership remain canonically independent. The parish *finances* are kept distinct. Assets and debts remain with each parish. Each has its own collection envelopes and budget. Each also keeps its own Finance Council. (The Finance Councils could, however, meet together or even be one combined group serving each parish.)

The Office for Parish Service and Support will assist the parishes in developing an agreement for sharing common expenses in a fair and transparent manner. No one system of sharing expenses is able to serve every situation.

Charity, Openness, Good Will

Parish Partnerships create a bond between two (or more) parish communities. As with any good relationship, it is one that will require charity, openness, and good will.

Charity. The partnership of parishes is not like some kind of business partnership where each is looking out for itself. Parishes are Christian communities who look to Jesus as our model and guide. While the parishes are equal partners, it is impossible to achieve equality in all things. Sometimes one parish will give more, sometimes the other. It is like any good human relationship. If the parishioners in a partnership start keeping score, everyone loses. Christian Charity is about putting others first.

Openness. It is a natural human tendency to want to stay with what is familiar and comfortable. As followers of Christ, however, we sometimes have to go beyond our comfort zone for our own good and the good of the wider Church. Parish Partnerships require that we be open to doing things differently. Naturally there will be some trials and some errors. These are normal. The real danger is a negativity that is always looking for problems rather than nurturing a positive openness to new possibilities.

Good Will. We all want what is best for our parishes and for the Church. We may have good faith disagreements as to the best way to proceed, but we always need to respect the good will that we share. A spirit of good will breeds respectful dialogue and provides a way to proceed together.

***“Do not be afraid...
Put out into the deep
and let down your nets for a catch!”
- Saint John Paul II***

CRITERIA FOR PARISHES INVOLVED IN PARISH PARTNERSHIPS

The points below are among the considerations in determining what parishes are the best candidates for a Parish Partnership. In some cases, parishes that cannot be partnered may have to be considered for a merger.

1. The parishes involved should be sustainable both in finances and in the number of parishioners.
If a parish is not sustainable we would have to consider a merger. Other criteria - such as ongoing deficit spending as well as low and declining numbers of parishioners - are "red flags" that a parish may not be sustainable.
2. The parishes should be of a size that a single pastoral staff could serve them.
We would not want the combined numbers too much greater than the parishes in the area and/or the average archdiocesan parish.
3. The parishes should be in a geographical area that would allow for shared programs.
Consideration should be given to the size of the area covered by the parishes, the proximity of the churches, transportation, parking, and any obstacles – such as major highways – that could divide and impede collaboration between the parishes.
4. The parishes should have a willingness to collaborate with one another so as to form a successful partnership.
This could take into consideration parishes that already have a history of working together – such as with shared programs or a regional school. The ability to work together would be important in forming a successful joint evangelization effort. Some parishes unable or unwilling to collaborate with another parish may have to be considered for a merger.

THE NEED FOR PARISH PARTNERSHIPS

Parish Partnerships Help Address Two Difficulties

Parish Partnerships help address two pressing difficulties we face in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia:

1. The Limited Number of Priests we have Available to Serve as Pastors

Over the last ten years the number of archdiocesan priests in active ministry declined by 28%. The average age of our priests is increasing. Not every priest has the talents needed to serve as a pastor. While we are hopeful about increased vocations in years to come, we still must address our needs now and in the years immediately ahead. Parish Partnerships will allow a pastor, with the help of the pastoral team staffing the parishes and active parishioners, to shepherd more than one parish.

2. Smaller Parishes that do not have Enough Active Parishioners and/or other Resources to Engage Effectively in Active Evangelization.

While smaller parish communities can have an intimacy that is sometimes lacking in larger parishes, they often do not have enough people or other resources to engage in effective outreach to non-practicing Catholics and to non-Catholics. Too often their resources are focused solely on serving those Catholics who are already active in the parish. The combined resources of parishes working together in a Parish Partnership enables them to form parish organizations, have parish programs, and engage in outreach in ways that each parish, working alone, would not be able to accomplish. A partnership may also help avoid having to take the more drastic step of merging parishes.

Advantages of Parish Partnerships

Parish Partnerships have several advantages over mergers, over “twinning”, and over simply doing nothing.¹

1. Parish Partnerships have Pastoral Advantages:

- Parish Partnerships avoid the disaffection of parishioners that can often arise from closing a parish in a merger. Maintaining parish identity in a partnership sustains the good will of those parishioners who in many cases the most active and generous in their parish.
- Parish Partnerships allow for the intimacy of smaller parish communities, while providing opportunities to cooperate in activities a small parish alone cannot accomplish and which “clustered” parishes rarely had a strong enough organization to accomplish.

2. Parish Partnerships have Administrative Advantages:

- Parish Partnerships still allow for the same reduction in clergy as a merger or twinning approach.
- By uniting the parish staff, offices, and many activities, Parish Partnerships address a major administrative burden of pastoring twinned parishes.

3. Parish Partnerships have Financial Advantages:

- There would still be pretty much all of the financial benefits of a merger: there would still be the savings from a unified parish administration and some parish property might be freed up and could be rented or perhaps sold for extra income to the parish owning the property.
- Parish Partnerships avoid the imbalance arising from some mergers by which a parish community could either be burdened with a huge debt incurred by another parish or perhaps get a big windfall inherited from a neighboring parish – both of which can be a source of tension within a merged parish community. With Parish Partnerships each parish keeps their own debts and savings.
- With Parish Partnerships the parish community is preserved and finances are kept separate and so all parishioners have an ongoing motive to support their parish - which does not always happen in a merger. So, the total income from the partnered parishes would likely be greater than income from the parish if they were merged.

¹ In a merger two or more parishes are combined into one parish. In “twinning” two or more parishes only share a pastor but otherwise operate independently.

Challenges Involved in Parish Partnerships

While Parish Partnerships have many advantages, they do involve some challenges. These are challenges, however, that can be overcome if they are addressed with charity, openness, and good will. These potential challenges include:

1. Even with a single administration, there will be a burden placed upon the pastor and staff of the partnered parishes in having to oversee multiple activities at multiple sites.

However, a well-trained pastoral staff, including a qualified business manager, and involved parishioners will lessen this burden. It should also be noted that pastoring multiple parishes, while not ideal, has become common practice for priests in many other dioceses.

2. There could be tension among parishioners in maintaining a balance between the parishes.

However, Christian charity and good will on the part of all involved will ease any such tension.

3. Determining the initial financial arrangement for shared expenses between the parishes could be complicated and perhaps contentious.

However, a commitment to financial transparency and the assistance of the Office for Parish Service and Support should lead to an equitable and agreeable arrangement.

“People quite often do what seemed impossible before they did it.

It is wonderful what you can do when you have to.”

- C. S. Lewis

PROCESS FOR IMPLIMENTATION OF A PARISH PARTNERSHIP

There are four phases to the implementation of a Parish Partnership. While some adaptations may be necessary as circumstances demand, the phases and approximate timeline will be as follows:

	PHASE	STARTING	ENDING
1	EXPLORE candidates for Parish Partnerships	November	April
2	PREPARE parishioners, staff, parish councils, clergy, etc.	April	July
3	BEGIN partnership of parishes.	Mid-June or July 1	
4	PLAN Spiritual and Temporal goals of the Parishes	July	February

1. EXPLORE

The Coordinator of Archdiocesan Planning Initiatives gathers initial information and consults with the Moderator of the Curia, the Regional Bishops and the Deans, to identify parishes that are possible candidates for Parish Partnerships. The “Criteria for Parishes Involved in Parish Partnerships” (see above) should guide these proposals. Pastors are also encouraged to alert their Deans and the Archdiocesan Planning Initiatives Office if they think their parish should be considered.

Parishes proposed for partnerships are discussed with the pastors of the parishes recommended, obtaining their input and suggestions. In cases where a parish under consideration is staffed by members of a Religious Institute, the Religious Superior will also be consulted.

A presentation on the concept of the partnership and merger models will be made to the parish leadership (parish councils and staff). Discussions will be held with the pastors and representatives from the parishes involved to consider the advisability of a partnership (or merger) and the best way to proceed.

The proposals are reviewed with the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee and the Council of Priests before they are submitted to the Archbishop for approval.

2. PREPARE

Prayer, Information and Training

During the months leading up to the formation of the partnership a series of informational and training sessions will be held for those most directly involved. All of these sessions will include an important element of prayer and should be supplemented by some joint worship opportunities for the parishioners of the parishes involved. Since we are preparing two communities rooted in Christ to work together, it is crucial for those communities to approach Jesus together in prayer. This also helps lay the groundwork for a joint evangelization effort by the parishes involved.

The training sessions will be organized by the Office for Parish Services and Support, The Office for the New Evangelization, and the Coordinator for Archdiocesan Planning Initiatives.

Parishioners:

During the months prior to the formation of the partnership the parishioners will be kept informed by regular updates in the parish bulletin. These will include a series of FAQs that will continue to explain the concept of a Parish Partnership and will address those specific questions affecting parishioners most directly (e.g. reassurance of no changes with weddings and funerals, continuation of parish organizations, possible changes in Mass schedule.) Parishioners will also be invited to submit any specific questions they may have.

Prayers for the success of the partnership should be periodically added to the General Intercessions. Consideration should also be given to conducting some joint worship services (such as Stations of the Cross and Eucharistic Adoration) so that the parish communities that will be working together have a chance to pray together.

Current Clergy, Parish Staff, Pastoral Councils, and Finance Councils:

Special informational and training sessions will be held for clergy, parish staff, parish pastoral councils and parish finance councils of those parishes involved in upcoming Parish Partnerships.

General Sessions: Some of the sessions will be General Sessions – for all of the parishes involved in upcoming partnerships. These sessions will be geared toward specific groups (i.e. Pastoral Councils, parish staff members). If needed, some sessions may be held more than once and in more than one location. Clergy from the parishes involved are welcome and encouraged to attend as many of the sessions as their schedules allow.

The chart below outlines these general sessions. The specific dates will be announced in January of each year.

Attendees	Topics
Parish Staff Members	Role of Parish Staff in general, employment concerns, and special challenges in serving two or more parish communities in a Partnership. Q and A on specific staff concerns.
Pastoral Councils	Role of Parish Pastoral Council in assisting the pastor in leading the parishes and the special challenges in serving two or more parishes in a Partnership. Q and A on specific council concerns.
Finance Councils	Role of Parish Finance in general, special financial arrangements involved in a Partnership. Q and A on specific financial concerns.

Local Sessions: Several of the sessions will be local – for just the two (or more) parishes involved in each particular upcoming partnership. These sessions will be for all Clergy, Staff, Pastoral Council members, and Finance Council members. These sessions will focus on evangelization using Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic by Matthew Kelly. The purpose is to provide necessary tools for planning future joint evangelization efforts by the parishes.

Pastor (and other clergy):

Current Clergy. Clergy currently assigned to the parishes involved are expected to attend as many of the training sessions as their schedule permits. They play an important role in guiding the parish in these initial stages of the transition.

Appointment of New Pastor. The partnered parishes will share a pastor and possibly other clergy staff. These appointments will usually be made at the end of May and will go into effect on the date of the partnership. In most cases, the current pastors of the parishes involved will be transferred and a new pastor will be appointed. In the event that one of the pastors does remain, he and any other resident clergy would normally be expected to move to the other parish property.

Once the new pastor is appointed he will need to attend several sessions to be updated on the information already shared with parish staff and parish councils.

3. BEGIN

Interim Decisions.

While almost all decisions concerning the particulars of the Parish Partnership will be made in the weeks and months after the establishment of the partnership, a few things will have to be decided before this takes place, so that they can go into effect on the effective date of the partnership. These include questions concerning where the pastor is initially going to live, adjustments to Mass schedules if there are conflicts, and some initial financial issues concerning joint expenses. Normally the Dean will be charged with making sure these decisions are made for the partnered parishes.

These arrangements are just temporary, however, and will be subject to review and revision as a part of the formation of the Partnership Pastoral Plan.

First Days, Weeks, Months

Most aspects of the partnership will take some time to implement. Most will not be in place on the day the partnership goes into effect. It may be necessary, for example, to maintain multiple parish offices for several months, it may take several weeks to combine the Sunday Bulletin, and most parish organizations would continue initially to function as they had before the partnership.

Patience

It will take some time for anyone to have the answers. It will take some time just to determine all of the questions.

“The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of 60 minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is.”

- C. S. Lewis

4. PLAN

It is the parishes themselves - the pastor in consultation with his parish councils and staff – that will decide most of the details on how the partnership will be implemented.

Training

In the months after the formation of the partnerships a training session will be held for partnered parishes to assist them in the formation of a team to draft a Partnership Plan. This plan will guide the partnership for the first several years. The training will address the dynamics of working as a team, elements of a vibrant parish, and some issues to be addressed in the Partnership Plan.

Partnership Plan

The Partnership Plan should be developed over three or four months. It will have to make some practical temporal determinations, such as the location of the parish office, the location of the rectory in which all of the resident clergy will live, any necessary adjustments to the Mass schedule, consideration of parish groups that could be united, use of parish buildings, shared expenses. (Note: while it is best to make decisions as part of a more comprehensive plan, it may be necessary to make some of these determinations before the plan is complete.)

The plan will also identify three practical pastoral priorities for the first years of the partnership, steps to be taken for implementation, a timetable, and a process for evaluation. These practical pastoral priorities could include, for example, outreach to non-practicing Catholics, enhancing adult religious education, or fostering the prayer life of parishioners.

The plan will be submitted for review by the archbishop, the regional bishop/vicar, and dean. It will either be approved as submitted or revisions may be suggested before final approval.

Ideally, the plan should be reviewed and revised every two or three years.

*“Start by doing what is necessary,
Then do what is possible,
And suddenly you are doing the impossible.”
- St. Francis of Assisi*