

The Catholic Communities of the Southern Route 50 Corridor: Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Grace, St Joseph's

The purpose of this document is to share with the parishioners of the above parishes, what we have learned since the RCDA tasked us with forming a "Family of Parishes" (Family).

**A glossary of terms is provided at the end of this document.

Frequently Asked Questions=Answers

What are Families of Parishes and why are we creating them?

With the shortage of priests (across the country as well as locally), the Albany Diocese has initiated combining parishes into Families of Parishes. The overarching goal is to provide spiritual and administrative leadership to parishes in the most efficient manner, given the declining number of priests. There are 58 active priests and 126 churches in the Albany diocese. It is time to renew the way our parishes are organized and structured. Our parishes have been tasked with forming a Family of Parishes.

A **Family of Parishes** is defined as groups of parishes, generally three to six, sharing resources to advance the mission of enhancing each other's strengths and working collaboratively to unleash the Gospel around us. This new model will allow the priest and lay staff associated with each parish to better share their gifts and talents. In addition to the priest shortage, we now have fewer material resources.

We *must* move forward with greater collaboration and better stewardship of our resources. And while the impact of the pandemic may feel like a shipwreck, we know that God wants us to continue his mission with the same zeal and dedication of the early apostles. He will be with us every step of the way.

How are we preparing for the transition to a Family of Parishes (Family)?

There are three phases to creating a Family; education, preparation, and implementation. During these phases the Family of Parishes (Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Grace and St Joseph's) will discuss the practical ways in which the priest, staff, and parishioners will interact with each other.

During these phases, the Family's trustees will explore and establish necessary changes to sacramental schedules including Mass, confession, weddings, baptisms, etc. It will be up to the parishes to work together in making decisions in the best interest of the Family, and the priest serving our Family. This process will be rooted in prayer, will be respectful of building and maintaining relationships, and will be marked by timely and honest responses to questions and concerns that are raised.

Please email questions or concerns to the trustees (see contact information in the glossary).

Parishioner information meetings are being planned as COVID will allow.

How will this affect the lives of parishioners?

Parishioners will become part of a larger faith community, working together and leveraging resources in pursuit of our mission to unleash the Gospel. They will still be part of their own parish communities unless their own discernment suggests otherwise. They will worship alongside and work with other members of their new Family. They will share best practices and benefit from competent and improved lay leadership of the various ministries managed through the Family structure.

How will this affect parish staff?

As the parishes come together to form Families of Parishes, they will begin to discuss the practical ways in which the priest and the staff will interact within the Family. A parish may lose some staff members (for example; share one bookkeeper instead of having each parish maintain its own). At the same time, there may be opportunities to add positions that better serve the mission going forward. In addition, we expect that natural attrition (e.g., through retirements and normal staff turnover) over the next few years may assist the parishes' efforts to further consolidate their staff. Staffing decisions will be left to the discernment of the Family, led by parish leadership. All decisions will be guided by a complete focus on mission and the best interest of the entire Family.

Does this mean my parish may close, merge, or cluster?

A Family of Parishes is not the same as a cluster or merged parish. Rather, it is a group of individual parishes led by an intentionally-formed team to address and focus on the mission. As each Family discerns how to best align resources, they may decide to retain their separate identities and worship spaces. Others, after a careful and honest review of existing resources, may opt to close worship spaces or merge with partnering parishes. These decisions will be left to the discernment of that parish guided by a complete focus on mission and the best interest of the entire community.

How will parish finances be handled within the Family?

Families of Parishes will have significant common ministries and outreach that will necessitate the sharing of resources. The trustees, parish finance committees, and Family accountant have the responsibility to ensure that the parishes in the Family share in these resources and costs on an equitable basis. This will require structures enabling transparency of finances and good communication about administrative matters in the Family.

How will moving to Families of Parishes mitigate the priest shortage?

The Families of Parishes model addresses the priest shortage by providing a consolidated lay staff and better support to the priest by working together and reducing the administrative tasks of the shepherd. Volunteer laity will be sought out to take on some of these responsibilities.

Will the mass schedule change? - *Yes, more than once.*

The mass schedules will need to change in order that one priest can say mass at each of the three churches in the Family. Changes will also need to be made once the 'suspension of the obligation' to attend mass is rescinded as we evolve out of COVID into the new normal with increased mass attendance.

A Reflection:

Things will never be precisely to our own liking, or as we each think they need to be ordered. People will not always react in the way that we believe best. We have two choices, despair, get discouraged, complain, and give up in the midst of a difficult journey or take this opportunity to change our faith community for the better. This is an exciting opportunity to work together to build and grow the Kingdom of God on Earth here in our parishes.

The Apostles stand before Jesus worshipping him outwardly but doubting him inwardly. Their actions matter greatly, but their interior attitudes and dispositions matter as well. They needed something – or Someone – to change their hearts. As we prepare for Families of Parishes, seeking to cast away doubt and put off our bad habits, we have to beg for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit: *“Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful in the Diocese of Albany and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And You shall renew us.”*

Glossary of Terms

Church	Building used for worship and gathering
Close	The bishop issues a formal decree that removes the consecration of the church.
Cluster	Group of parishes working together but with their own church and their own pastor
Family accountant	Accountant for Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Grace, St Joseph’s
Family of Parishes	Several parishes under the leadership of one priest and a pastoral team
Lay Staff	Paid staff that is not a member of the clergy
Merger	Two or more parishes coming together as one
Mission of Christ	The mission of Jesus is to preach the Good News – to give people an understanding of the Kingdom of God and to serve the poor and needy.
Parish	Community of faithful with its own church and pastor
Pastor	Priest in charge of a parish or a Family of Parishes.
Priest	Ordained minister of the Catholic church
Sacramental Minister	A priest assigned to perform sacramental ministry in a parish whose pastoral care has been entrusted to a pastoral administrator
Trustee	Trustees act as liaisons between the members of the parish, help to administer and develop parish policies and oversee the financial aspects of operating the church.
Unleash the Gospel	Spread the words and mission of Jesus Christ
Volunteer	A person who freely offers to help others by devote their time and talent.

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