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RESOURCES FOR MERGING PARISHES**PLANNING FOR A MERGER**

The process of merging parishes provides many opportunities to grow in faith, to increase in love and acceptance and to be imbued with hope. While the merger process can lead to a real renewal of faith for parishioners, there are many losses along the way. The losses must be grieved through a process of remembering and renewing before new grace-filled energy is realized and a new parish community can be created. When the Bishop directs parishes to merge, the primary organizing responsibility for that rests with each “Parish Implementation Team” combined with the support of the Cohort.

I. The Parish Implementation Team

The Parish Implementation Team, as noted in other places in this guide, is made up of five people including the pastor or administrator from each parish that is being merged. This team is charged with implementing the Bishop’s directives with other parishes in the Cohort. The team acts like a “steering committee” assisting the pastor or administrator in the process, taking on some of the merging responsibilities and acting in a leadership role in the process. The Parish Implementation Team helps ensure effective and sustained communication throughout the process. The Parish Implementation Team works with the pastor or administrator to accomplish the following tasks related to merging, as well as the other ministry directives given to the Cohort by the Bishop.

- to assist in providing for the pastoral needs of the parishioners during this time of transition;
- to assist with the tasks which need to be accomplished that are described in the documents which follow;
- to ensure the smooth transition of several parishes into one new parish community;
- to be proactive in inviting parishioners to remember their past, hold it sacred, ritualize the gifts given to the parish and plant new seeds for the future;
- to be a sounding board and an inspiration during the merger process;
- to help in forming a new parish pastoral council;
- to implement with the other Cohort members all the directives of the Bishop.

The Parish Implementation Team members may not be members of the Parish Staff or other Parish Clergy who will have a distinct role in the implementation as they have direct responsibility for ministry initiatives.

Parish Implementation Team Meetings

As noted in other places in this guide, it is recommended that the Parish Implementation Team choose a chair and a secretary. The chair’s job is to facilitate the meetings, work with the pastor or administrator to put together an agenda and ensure follow-up to decisions made at the meeting. The secretary is charged with keeping minutes and following up with any written reports that need to be made during the merger process. It is recommended that at the beginning of the process the Parish Implementation Team meets regularly to lay out the tasks and calendar the process. At the discretion of the Pastor, members of the Parish Staff or other Parish Clergy may be included in these meetings, or

act as a resource to the Parish Implementation Team. The meetings should not be more than two hours. At times it will be important for all the parishes involved in a particular merger to meet and plan.

The Parish Implementation Team will be assisted by a member of the diocesan Project Management Team. They should become familiar with the canonical and pastoral areas which need to be addressed in the merger process, such as celebrating the past, renewing the present and planting seeds for the future, human resource issues, cemetery issues and items such as how to form a new parish pastoral council.

It is recommended that some common town hall/parish-wide meetings be held during the process. This is one way to keep parishioners informed, help them get to know one another and provide an opportunity for prayer and reflection. Trained Facilitators are available to help with town hall meetings. Please speak to the Project Manager assigned to assist your cohort to arrange for facilitation.

Once the merger happens, the Parish Implementation Team focuses with the Cohort to continue working on implementing the remaining directives of the Bishop.

Please refer to the General Organizational Materials section of this guide for more resources regarding running meetings, scheduling and related issues.

II. Dealing with Change

There is an article, “*Working with Change*” in Section 6 of this guide which is provided as a resource. You may want to duplicate it and study it as a Parish Implementation Team in order to understand your own feelings and those of others as you go through the merger process. The “in between time,” when you are experiencing the ending of what was and waiting for what will be, is a “wilderness” zone. There are many ups and downs in the wilderness. Unpredictability is a word that often describes these months. People take several steps forward and fall back a few. Over a period of time with renewed energy new beginnings do happen and more stability follows.

III. Focus on the Parishioners

Do not put all your energy as a Parish Implementation Team on the “tasks and checklists.” A lot of attention needs to be given to the parishioners and their feelings and needs. Many may be experiencing a great deal of loss. Things will not be the same. Their parents and grandparents, and perhaps great grandparents, have built the parishes that are merging. They need to be remembered and celebrated. Storytelling, rituals and times for the parishioners from the merging parishes to gather to get to know each other, pray and enjoy social events are critical during the merger process. There are rituals included in this section for your consideration. They are “starter” ideas and need to be adapted to your situation.

IV. Special Invitations

As the time gets closer to the actual merger, people need to be welcomed and formally invited to join the new parish. Personal contact should be made so all know they are welcome and needed for a vibrant new parish to emerge from all the planning. If people have not “registered” for the new parish they should receive a pastoral visit to help them know how important they are and

how much the new parish wants them to be a member. In some cases people will join parishes other than the one that is part of the merger process for convenience or personal reasons. This is fine as long as they know they are welcome at the newly merged parish. The personal contact will make all the difference in the world.

To effectively merge parishes we need to honor the past and cherish the memories of it, name the present strengths and struggles, recognize the losses and hurts and generate hopes and dreams for the future. All this is part of living out the “life-death-resurrection” mystery as disciples of Jesus Christ. Our faith will support us in this journey as the Spirit of the Risen Christ is ever present to us.

ALL THE CHECKLISTS IN THIS SECTION NEED TO BE COMPLETED AND RETURNED TO Sherrie Sporek, 8 WEEKS BEFORE YOUR SCHEDULED INAUGURAL MASS FOR THE NEW PARISH COMMUNITY. See the Diocesan Resource List in Section 6, page 1 for staff available to assist you in this endeavor.

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SUMMARY CHECKLIST FOR MERGERS

THIS CHECKLIST IS A SUMMARY FROM THE WORK OF EACH PARISH IN THE COHORT INVOLVED IN A MERGER. THE SUMMARY, ALONG WITH THE BACK-UP CHECKLISTS, ARE DUE TO SHERRIE SPOREK 8 WEEKS BEFORE THE SCHEDULED MERGER

	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE AGENTS' SIGNATURE
	1. Read and studied the merger materials in the Implementation Guide	
	2. Completed the Pastoral Transition Issues Checklist	
	3. Studied and implemented what was necessary to do based on the Cemetery Checklist	
	4. Studied, used, adapted or created new rituals dealing with loss and new life before the merger happened.	
	5. Studied the materials and have a plan to begin a new parish pastoral council and finance council.	

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We have worked as a Parish Implementation Team to be a pastoral presence to the parishioners to accomplish the tasks listed above and other things which we saw that needed to happen for a successful merger.

Signatures:

Name

Parish

Date

PASTORAL TRANSITION ISSUES AND CHECKLIST

√	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE AGENT
	1. Gather parish pastoral councils for at least one joint meeting to plan for merger.	Pastors and Administrators as well as finance and pastoral council chairs of the parishes about to be merged
	2. As the councils are gathered explain that the major work of merging will be done by the Parish Implementation Teams. Identify members to serve on the various committees needed during the transition. Some are named below.	Pastors and/or Administrators of current parishes about to be merged
	3. Form a subcommittee to address transition, grief and loss issues. The Reid Group, Diocesan Planning Personnel or your Cohort's assigned Project Manager may assist in addressing the issues.	Pastors and/or Administrators
	4. Form a subcommittee to address gatherings, rituals, and celebrations	Pastors and/or Administrators
	5. Form an evangelization subcommittee to address membership, retention of existing members, welcome new members and strangers, seek out those who have left.	Pastors and/or Administrators
	6. Plan gatherings that celebrate the history of the parishes; plan gatherings that allow for the ritual celebration of loss; plan gatherings that begin to sow seeds of a new beginning and hope for the future.	Pastors and/or Administrators with the Office of Worship
	7. Address Worship Pastoral Issues	Pastors and/or Administrators, Parish Implementation Team and Diocesan Office of Worship
	8. Address Religious Education Pastoral Issues	Pastors and/or Administrators, Parish Implementation Team and Diocesan Department of Catechesis
	9. Address Outreach Issues	Pastors and/or Administrators, Parish Implementation Team
	10. Form other needed committees for Spiritual and Pastoral Renewal, Vocations, Pro-Life, Youth Ministry, etc. Please refer to Cohort and Planning Commission Recommendations	Pastors and/or Administrators, Parish Implementation Team
	11. Provide ongoing training for new pastoral commissions and committees.	Pastors and/or Administrators
	12. Review structures, plans, progress, etc. using the Criteria established by the Planning Commission.	Pastors and/or Administrators and Parish Implementation Team

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√	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE AGENT
	13. Develop an implementation plan that includes both written and face-to-face communication.	Pastors and/or Administrators and Parish Implementation Team
	14. Plan a celebration to inaugurate the new parish.	Pastors and/or Administrators with worship subcommittee
	15. Evaluate needs of all parish organizations and provide a “welcome home” in transition.	Pastors and/or Administrators and Parish Implementation Team

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TEMPORALITIES MERGER CHECKLIST

In collaboration with Diocesan CFO as team leader for Effective Administration

√	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE AGENT
	<u>I. Accounting and Financial Information</u>	
	A. Financial	
	1. Assemble for review all prior records; include liabilities, future revenues, assets, receipts (income), and disbursements (expenses) for the last accounting period	Pastors and/or Administrators
	2. Itemize liabilities; Require third party support for liabilities; contact vendors directly where amounts are in question and no third party support is provided (i.e. statements)	Pastors and/or Administrators
	3. Itemize any revenues; List any Employees	Pastors and/or Administrators
	4. Itemize future revenues (pledges); contact pledgers regarding merger and secure notice of payment of pledge to future merged parish and determine those pledges to be assigned to new parish (Assignment and Assumption of Right of Payment)	Pastors and/or Administrators with Diocesan Finance Office
	5. Itemize assets; Require third party verification of all financial assets, (i.e. statements), including real estate	Pastors and/or Administrators
	6. Determine proper amount of “holdback” by Parish to allow payment of liabilities; Determine Assignment and Assumption of Liabilities	Pastors and/or Administrators guided by Diocesan Finance Office
	B. Church property	
	1. Prepare inventory of all parish real estate holdings and buildings	Pastors and/or Administrators in consultation with councils
	2. Prepare inventory of major parish property such as office equipment, computer hardware, furnishings, appliances, church art, artifacts, sacred vessels, vestments, etc.	Pastors and/or Administrators in consultation with councils
	3. Conduct a needs assessment in light of available property	Pastors and/or Administrators in consultation with councils
	4. Develop a plan for disposition of excess office equipment, furnishings, appliances	Pastors and/or Administrators in consultation with councils
	5. Calculate outstanding Mass obligations and assess ability of new parish to fulfill within one year of merger. Insure that all outstanding Mass obligations are satisfied in accord with the norms of Canon Law. (Canons 952-958)	Pastors and/or Administrators
	C. Estimate income and expenses for next fiscal year	Pastors and/or Administrators and Finance Council(s)

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	II. <u>Transfer of Parish Documents to New Parish</u>	
	This transfer must occur by Effective Date of Merger	
	1. Transfer all parish documents	Pastors and/or Administrators
	2. Obtain appropriate Employer Identification Number (EIN) and other tax exemption identifiers from the Diocese for the new parish entity	Pastors and/or Administrators

DISPOSITION OF SACRAMENTAL RECORDS IN A MERGER

The sacramental records for all parishes involved in the merger must be transferred to a single parish office for the merged parish. The records must remain at the merged parish location and must be cared for and protected adequately (*Canon 535*).

DISPOSITION OF ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS IN A MERGER

Administrative records could include but are not limited to the following:

- parish bulletins
- construction documents
- deeds
- financial records (ledgers, daybooks, cash books, payroll records, tax related records, etc.)
- parish council materials; finance council minutes
- records of parish organizations, e.g. St. Vincent de Paul Societies, Christian Women, Holy Name Society, Usher Society, etc.
- marriage case files
- personnel files
- photographs

What must merging parishes do with records of this type?

The administrative records for all parishes involved in the merger must be transferred to a single parish office just prior to the parish reconfiguration. The records will remain at the new parish site.

**FORMING A NEW PARISH PASTORAL
COUNCIL FOR A MERGED PARISH**

A new parish pastoral council represents a newly formed parish. This does not mean that former council members cannot be part of the new council. The following suggestions are offered as a way to begin.

1. Consult the Diocesan Directive for establishing a Parish Pastoral Council.
2. Have representatives from each parish.
3. Terms should be staggered so that members are gradually rotated off the council.
4. For at least the first six months, spend time helping council members get to know each other so that they can function more effectively.
5. Consider a half day retreat where council members become better acquainted and have an opportunity to pray and share faith together.
6. Initially spend time on developing mission, values and vision statements for the new parish. Be sure that parishioners are involved in these processes. They provide a wonderful opportunity to develop a cohesive parish spirit and sense of community.
7. See Section 6 of this Implementation Guide for reflection on how to prepare and run successful meetings.
8. Contact the Diocesan Department of Pastoral Planning for assistance in establishing a new parish pastoral council.

**FORMING A NEW PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL
FOR A MERGED PARISH**

A new parish finance council represents a newly formed parish. This does not mean that former council members cannot be part of the new council. The following suggestions are offered as a way to begin.

1. Consult the Diocesan Norms for Parish Finance Councils
2. Have a few representatives from each parish
3. Terms should be staggered so that members are gradually rotated off the council.
4. For at least the first six months, spend time helping council members get to know each other so that they can function more effectively.
5. Consider a half day retreat where council members become better acquainted and have an opportunity to pray and share faith together.
6. See Section 6 of this Implementation Guide for reflection on how to prepare and run successful meetings.
7. Prepare a new Parish budget.

RITUALS FOR MERGING PARISHES ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

Introduction

As parishes go through a process of merging, great bewilderment is often felt by parishioners. Some feel abandoned, uprooted and lost. Some are excited about the new possibilities and opportunities. Others feel betrayed and become apathetic. Many feel like they are in a wilderness zone filled with uncertainty. They are uncomfortable and distressed. It is often a formless grief.

Calling communities together several times during the process of merging parishes, to ritualize their moments of grief and the hopes for the future can be sustaining. Acknowledging what is staying the same and what is changing, as well as what people's hopes and dreams are for the future, will be healing and move people forward toward becoming a new community of Catholic believers, pray-ers and do-ers!

Rituals have power to heal, to comfort, to give new insights and to sustain during times of terrific change. As Catholics we are a ritual people involved in story and symbol, both of which are used in our sacramental system. Please adapt these to your own circumstances.

PRAYER SERVICE: Christ Our Light

Preparation Committee: 3-4 members from each parish

Preparation:

- Ask each person to be prepared to tell a story about their parish, or to bring a symbol of their parish.
- Provide candle tapers and paper followers for each participant.
- Have the Paschal Candle present in front of the altar, with the crucifix near the altar.
- *Holy water in a basin with aspergillum for the blessing of candles.*
- In the parish hall, prepare a social following the service, with foods from each participating parish.

OPENING HYMN

Priest: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Priest: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

All: And with your spirit.

Priest: We are in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He teaches us, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am, in the midst of them." Therefore, as we assemble for the worship of God, to seek His divine assistance and grace in this time which is painful yet filled with hope, let us ask God to dispel the darkness by first helping us to see our own need for humility and conversion.

PSALM RESPONSE:

PSALM 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom should I fear?
The Lord is my life's refuge;
of whom should I be afraid?

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Hear, O Lord, the sound of my call;
have pity on me, and answer me.
Of you my heart speaks; you my glance seeks.

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Your presence, O Lord, I seek.
Hide not your face from me;
do not in anger repel your servant.
You are my helper: cast me not off.

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the Lord
in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord with courage;
be stouthearted, and wait for the Lord.

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

At this time, the people may be invited to express a brief word on the readings that they have heard, and how these readings and the faith of the Church shed light on the feelings that they are experiencing.

After an appropriate time, the priest or deacon gives a homily.

After the homily, a brief period of silence should be observed. After the silence, some members of the assembly should come forward with baskets of the candle tapers to be blessed.

Blessing of the Candles

Member of the faithful:

On the day of our baptism, we were given the gift of Faith. We know that this faith could not have been received in a vacuum; rather, this faith was handed on to us through the Church, and indeed our baptism was our entrance into the Church.

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We come this evening to give thanks to God for the many blessings He has given to us through our life of faith lived out in our parishes. We also come to God with heavy hearts, and with sadness, as we recognize that our parishes are not able to remain the same as they were in the past.

We ask you, Father N., to bless these candles, which we will light from the Paschal Candle, the candle from which at our baptism, our entrance into the Church, we received the Light of Christ. Our parents and Godparents promised to help us keep this light burning brightly until the day of the return of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. May this light now remind us, even in this time of darkness, of the Faith we possess in the loving Providence of God our Father, the Hope we share in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, the Charity which is ours through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the unity we which belongs to us through our membership in the Body of Christ, the Church.

Priest: God of power,
 who enlightens the world and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin,
 bless + these candles.

Let the light of these candles
illuminate our hearts and minds,
that they may reflect always the splendor of Christ,
the Light of the world,
who is Lord, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Beginning with the priest and deacon, all come forward, take a candle from the basket, and light their candle from the paschal candle, and return to their places.

When all have lighted their candles, the priest invites the assembly to make the Profession the Faith:

Priest: With trust in God’s mercy, let us bring our prayers to Him.

Response: *Be with us, Lord.*

Deacon: For the Church, that God will strengthen us in this process of parish reorganization, so that we may always be strong witnesses to the Gospel we profess, let us pray to the Lord.

For the times when we doubt the presence of God on our pilgrimage of faith, for those who have lost hope and need encouragement, let us pray to the Lord.

For those against whom we harbor anger, that God will give us the grace to forgive, let us pray to the Lord.

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For the times which seem to us dark, lonely, and filled with sadness, that we may understand that through every moment, we possess the glorious hope of salvation through Jesus Christ and His Church, let us pray to the Lord.

For all those who are supporting our efforts, and helping us to build strong parishes where the Word of God will be heard, the Sacraments received, and the presence of God, in the holy tabernacle and through acts of charity will be made known, let us pray to the Lord.

For all those who have died, who handed the Catholic faith on to us, who have built our parishes, and have sustained our Christian life, that they may be received into their eternal home in Heaven, let us pray to the Lord.

Priest:

Loving God, hear our prayer. Moved by your Holy Spirit dwelling within our hearts, we humbly ask you, to bless the Diocese of Trenton at this time of profound parish renewal. Send your Holy Spirit upon our clergy, religious and lay faithful, so that we may imitate the fidelity, love and zeal of the early Church. Grant us the humility to preserve and teach the Catholic faith which has been handed on to us, so that we may worship you in Spirit and in Truth. Increase our charity, so that we may generously attend to those who pass before us in need. Bless us with missionary zeal, so that through the proclamation of the Good News, we may be salt, light and leaven to those who are distant from your love.

Holy Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, Saint Joseph, Saint Peter, Saint John Neumann, Saint Katharine Drexel, Saint Frances Cabrini, (*here name parish patrons*) and all the saints, allow us to join our prayers to yours. Through our union with you in prayer, lead us to the glorious banquet of Heaven, where you praise the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who is Lord for ever and ever. Amen.

Priest: Let us pray with confidence to the Father, in the words our Savior gave us.

All: Our Father....

Deacon: Please extinguish your candles.

Priest: The peace of the Lord be with you.

All: And with your spirit.

Deacon: Let us offer one another the sign of peace.

Priest: The Lord be with you.

All: And with your spirit.

Priest: May almighty God bless + you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
All **Amen.**

Deacon: Let us go in peace, to love and serve the Lord and one another.
All: **Thanks be to God.**

Closing Hymn

Hail, Holy Queen

After the hymn, all are led into the church hall by the processional cross and the Paschal Candle, if possible.

The cross and Candle are placed in the center of the room.

When all have assembled, grace is said. All are invited to share the different foods which were provided from each of the parishes (preferably those foods that are customarily enjoyed by the particular parishes), then a representative of each parish comes to the microphone, and each gives a brief history of his/her parish. Those members of the faithful who wish to tell a story about their parish are invited to come forward to the microphone. If any have brought with them symbols from their parish, they are asked to show them to the people at this time. The representatives should also act as moderators, to ensure that the time of sharing moves along.

At the end of the sharing, the pastor or pastoral administrator comes forward, and reinforces the themes that were brought forward during the time of sharing, and ties them together through the lens of our Catholic faith.

The pastor or administrator makes reference to the cross and Paschal Candle in the center of the room, to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, who is our light in darkness.

Finally, all those who contributed prepared the foods and the social are thanked, and all stand, and pray the Hail Mary together, asking Her who is the Mother of the Church, for her guidance and prayers.

FINAL MASS FOR A MERGING PARISH WHERE A CHURCH MAY BE STILL USED IN THE FUTURE

SITUATION: The parish is merging with another parish and the church is not the designated worship site, though the church may be used regularly as an additional worship site or occasionally for weddings, funerals or liturgy. Even if the church is used as an additional worship site, it is no longer the identified worship site for the newly merged parish. Therefore, it is appropriate to have a final celebration of Mass before the specific parish merges and no longer exists as the parish community it has been.

ENVIRONMENT: Pictures of the parish community through its history; perhaps a banner with the beginning and ending dates; pictures of pastors, pastoral administrators, school principals (if applicable); could have a “looped” powerpoint of pictures from the past. Depending upon how accessible the data is, you could have a list of those baptized, confirmed, made their first communion, etc. in the parish. If names are not available, the number of baptisms, etc. could be on a banner.

If appropriate, have special reserved seats for the “oldest members” or “charter members,” “newest members,” etc.

LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

Mass of the day

Music: You might consider having music from different eras of the parish that are still well known, such as Holy God We Praise Their Name, or Marian hymns, as appropriate for liturgy.

Welcome to the special celebration of God’s many blessings to the parish

Opening Prayer: Adaptation of opening prayer to the event

Homily: connect the readings to the many years the parish community has received God’s blessings and been a sign of God’s presence to the greater community. Focus on how the blessings and charism of the parish will continue to enrich the larger merged parish.

General Intercessions: Include petitions related to the history of the parish and gratitude for God’s blessings

Announcement Time: You could use this time to do a brief presentation/testimonials on the positive difference the parish has made.

Water Blessing: You may want to have a special blessing with holy water being sprinkled on the congregation to go forth and use their gifts to help form the new parish

community. You may also want to give a memento, such as a small vial of holy water, to each member as a sign of their baptismal commitment to continually build the Reign of God as they move forward to be part of a new parish community.

Closing: Depending upon if artifacts will be moved to the new parish worship site, these may be “ritually” moved at this time. If the church is to be used as an additional worship site, the artifacts may not be moved at this time.

Memory Book: You may want to consider making a memory book (like a scrap book) of key, events, gifts, talents, history, etc. to present in the opening liturgy of the new parish along with any removable artifacts that are appropriate.

SOCIAL CELEBRATION

It is highly recommended to have a social following the final parish liturgy. If the Mass is in the morning, the meal celebration may be a brunch. If the final parish liturgy is late afternoon or evening, it might be appropriate to have a “wine and cheese” or a pot luck supper.

RITUAL FOR SUSPENDING A CHURCH’S USE
With Adoration and Transfer of the Blessed
Sacrament to the New Church

Following the Prayer after Communion, the celebrant, led by incense, cross, candles and the other ministers of the altar and the deacon, processes to the Baptistry. The Litany of the Saints is sung.

Procession to the Baptistry

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to God, our almighty Father, for the gift of Baptism, our entrance into faith, into the life of the Church. (*silent pause*)

As we profess the holy Catholic faith handed on to us in our Baptism, let us thank God for all those who have been born into the life of Christ through Baptism in this church throughout its _____ year history.

Assembly: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

The celebrant sprinkles the people with holy water. While doing so, the Litany of the Saints is continued. The Litany should include the patrons of the church to be closed, as well as the patroness of the Diocese of Trenton, and those saints to whom the members of the local community have devotion, including those whose images are found within the particular church.

Celebrant: Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of faith, which you have made possible to us through the grace of Baptism. We thank you for the gift of the Church, the Body of Christ, into which we have been baptized, and through which we will find salvation. Bless all those who have received the gift of faith through this font with the grace of perseverance. By your grace, we ask that you especially touch the hearts of those baptized here who have left the practice of our Catholic faith, so that they may return to the life-giving font of the sacraments.

Assembly: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Procession to the Confessionals

Deacon: Let us give thanks to God, our almighty Father, for the forgiveness of sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (*silent pause*)

Let us be grateful to Him, that He has forgiven us through this sacrament of healing whenever we have begged for His mercy, and let us thank God that He has delivered from the slavery of sin those who received this sacrament in this church.

Assembly: Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us, poor sinners.

Celebrant: Loving God, we thank you for revealing to us through Jesus Christ, your Son, that you do not wish the sinner to die, but to return to you and live in freedom. Through your Holy Spirit, inspire many to return to this sacrament of mercy and healing, so that all your sons and daughters may be restored to your likeness through grace.

Assembly: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Procession to the Stations of the Cross

Deacon: Let us give thanks to God, our almighty Father, for the mystery of His Son's glorious Cross. (*silent pause*)

Throughout the _____ year history of this church, countless men, women and children have followed the Way of the Cross, meditating devoutly on our Lord's passion and death.

Celebrant: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Assembly: Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Celebrant: Gracious God, we thank you that your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, accepted death on the cross for the salvation of mankind. We ask that all those who have united their own sufferings and trials to those of Jesus Christ may be given an increase of hope in his glorious resurrection.

Assembly: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

At this point all sing Stabat Mater.

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Procession to the Altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Deacon: Let us give thanks to God, our almighty Father, for having given to us His own Mother as our Mother and the model of the Church. *(silent pause)*

The faithful who have entered the doors of this church have hurried to her for refuge, seeking her intercession and protection in order to live more perfectly the Christian life, and to be united more closely with the will of God and the hope offered through His Word.

Assembly: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Celebrant: Father, we thank you that your Word became flesh through the Virgin Mary. May all those who have sought her intercession, prayed for her help, and united themselves with the mystery of Christ through the holy Rosary, become more like Him who is our life and our salvation.

Assembly: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

At this point all sing Immaculate Mary.

Procession to the Statue of the Patron Saint of the Church

This occurs if the patron of the church is a saint or saints other than the Blessed Mother and is represented by a painting, statue, or other image within the church.

Deacon: Let us give thanks to God, our almighty Father, for our patron/patroness, _____ . *(silent pause)*

Through his/her life, example, and intercession we have sought to become participants in the life of the Blessed Trinity, and have been encouraged to love even our enemy.

Assembly: Dear Saint/s _____ we thank you for guiding us on our pilgrim way. Pray for us to God, that we may remain faithful to Him and continue to serve Him all our days.

Celebrant: Father, we thank you for the example of Christian life which Saint/s _____ has given to this community for _____ years. May we who have been inspired by his/her example and helped by his/her prayers one day enter into the joy of Heaven, our true home.

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Assembly: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Procession to Ambo

Deacon: Let us give thanks to God, our almighty Father, for sending us His Word, Jesus Christ. (*silent pause*)

From this ambo, the Word of God has been announced through the proclamation of Sacred Scripture and the tradition of the Church handed on through the preaching of her sacred ministers.

Assembly: The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.
The command of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eye.
The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
The statutes of the Lord are true, all of them just;
More desirable than gold, than a hoard of purest gold,
Sweeter also than honey or drippings from the comb.

Celebrant: Loving God, we thank you that we have heard your Word through the announcement of the Church. Strengthen us to give, by word and example, true witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that all may come to believe in you.

Assembly: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Procession to the Altar

At this time all sing Psalm 63. The Ciborium containing the Blessed Sacrament is taken from the tabernacle and placed on the corporal in the center of the altar. The empty tabernacle remains open. The celebrant and deacon together with the ministers and indeed the whole congregation kneel in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. The celebrant places incense in the thurible and incenses the Blessed Sacrament.

Celebrant: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the gift of the Eucharist, your real and living presence among us. (*silent pause*)

On the altar of this church you have allowed us to join you in this holy and perfect sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. You have handed over your life to us through this holy sacrament as we worshipped you at Sunday Mass, special feast days, Confirmations and First Communions, celebration of

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the Sacrament of Marriage and anniversaries, and funerals celebrated here in hope. You have quietly waited for us, as you remained present in the tabernacle to speak to us, and to receive our humble prayers and requests.

As we prepare to leave this church, we ask you to remain with us again. Show to us your love for us, and help us always to return to the Eucharist as the source and summit of our Christian life.

At this time, all sing O Sacrament, Most Holy, or another Eucharistic Hymn. All remain in silent prayer for a few moments, and then the celebrant receives the humeral veil, takes the ciborium, and begins, led by the cross, candles and then the thurifer, to lead the procession out of the church to the new church.

If the procession is by foot, then a litany or another song may be sung.

When the celebrant and the faithful arrive at the new church, the celebrant carrying the Blessed Sacrament, led by the cross, candles and thurifer, leads the people into the church, and places the Blessed Sacrament on the altar, and kneels in prayer, while the faithful enter the church. If a litany was not being sung during the procession, then a suitable Eucharistic hymn may begin as the priest places the Blessed Sacrament on the altar.

When the faithful are assembled, a few moments of silence are observed, and then the Tantum Ergo is sung by all. The celebrant incenses the Blessed Sacrament. After the incensation, and after the hymn is ended, the Deacon or the celebrant goes to the altar, and takes the Blessed Sacrament to the tabernacle for Reposition. The Divine Praises are said.

If appropriate, the welcoming pastor, or if indeed, the same celebrant, welcomes the faithful to their new house of worship.

After these remarks, all sing: Holy God, We Praise Thy Name.

Every opportunity should be made to provide a place for refreshments and fellowship with the entire community of the faithful.

Special thanks is given to Monsignor John Bendik, Pastor, Saint John the Evangelist Church in Pittston, Pennsylvania for his assistance in preparing this ritual.

**MODEL FOR A MASS CELEBRATING THE
INAUGURATION OF A NEWLY MERGED PARISH**

Before Mass Begins:

1. The Pastor or Administrator welcomes the Faithful from each parish community.
2. A Commentator reads a brief history of the parishes that are being combined.
3. The Sacramental Books of all of the parishes to be made into one parish are then presented to the Pastor or Administrator.
4. The Commentator calls out the name of the first parish, and its Sacramental Books are presented to the Pastor or Administrator.
5. As the Books are being presented, the first verse of a hymn may be sung.
6. When the Books have been presented, and the stanza of the hymn is finished, then the second parish's name is called.
7. As the Books are being presented, the second verse of a hymn may be sung.
8. This process continues for as many parishes are represented.
9. After the presentation of the Sacramental Books which are distinct to each parish, the Liturgical Books which are common to all parishes are brought forward, presented from each of the parishes that will form the one new parish. They may be brought to the Pastor or Pastoral Administrator under a banner of the new parish.
10. At this time, the Mass begins.

PROCESS FOR SELECTING A NEW NAME FOR A MERGED PARISH

WHY ARE PARISHES GIVEN NAMES?

Parish communities are named after saints in order to inspire the faithful to follow the example of the saint's life and to seek the special protection or intercession of the saint for the parish. Saints are known for the holy way they lived their lives and how they contributed to the Reign of God on earth. All titles of persons in the Trinity and of Mary are appropriate names for parish communities, as well as all names of canonized saints, and those who are beatified or named "blessed." Archangels such as Michael, Raphael and Gabriel can also be used as parish patron saints.

WHO WILL CHOOSE THE NAME OF THE PATRON SAINT FOR OUR NEW PARISH COMMUNITY?

Bishop O'Connell will name the new parish communities. Normally new parishes will receive new names. However, in some circumstances the Bishop may decide to retain the name of one of the parishes for the name of the merged parish. Bishop O'Connell has asked for three suggestions from the parishes that are merging with rationales for the suggestions.

WILL OUR CHURCH BUILDING HAVE A NEW NAME?

No, once a church building is dedicated, it keeps its name. When a new parish community uses the church building, the new parish name is used, rather than the church name. If a parish has more than one worship site, for clear communication, especially for the times and places of Mass, the parish community name and the church building name may need to be used. For instance if the new parish community's name is Resurrection and there are multiple worship sites, the Mass schedule may be listed as: Resurrection Sunday Mass Schedule; 9:00 Mass at St. Michael; 10:30 Mass at St. Boniface, etc.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN GIVING SUGGESTIONS ABOUT THE NEW PARISH COMMUNITY NAME?

There is no hard and fast rule about this. It is suggested that the parish councils, parish and Cohort implementation teams and / or other leadership groups from the parishes that will merge meet to discuss the name possibilities. It would be helpful if a small group would meet before the larger group to do some research on possible names. This should not preclude the larger group from also adding names. One place to obtain a list of names and a short description of each saint is on the web site: <http://www.catholic.org/saints>.

DO PARISHIONERS AT LARGE HAVE A SAY IN THE NAMES TO BE GIVEN TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION?

Once a list has been narrowed down to between 5 and 10 names, parishioners may be asked for their input to help further narrow the list to not more than three to be given to the Bishop. This is another way of helping all parishioners become aware of the changes happening in their parish communities.

ARE THERE ANY NAMES WE SHOULD NOT CHOOSE?

It is better from a communication perspective not to choose a name that is already used many times in the Diocese. This is not a hard and fast rule, but it is confusing when there are too many parish communities with the same name. There are plenty of saints. Often a parish community will choose a unique name that helps identify it, gives the people a great intercessor and also helps others know about the saint.

CAN WE HAVE HYPHENATED NAMES SUCH AS HOLY NAME-ST. MARY?

Again there is no hard and fast rule about this. Hyphenated names are permitted, but there are advantages to choosing a new name for the new community of people who will form a new parish community. New beginnings often call for new names. A new name is indicative of a new shared identity.

WHEN DO WE HAVE TO CHOOSE OUR SAINT'S NAME?

You are asked to submit your three suggestions for a new parish name with rationale to the Bishop no later than 12 weeks before the actual merger, so that canonical and legal papers can be prepared with the new name of the parish community.

IS THERE ANYONE WHO CAN HELP US WITH THIS PROCESS?

Diocesan Planning Personnel, or your Cohort's Project Manager will be happy to help you with this process.