

# Questions and Answers about Families of Parishes

## 1. What is a Family of Parishes?

Over the next two years, all parishes of the Archdiocese of Detroit will join other parishes in new groupings called “Families of Parishes.” Families of Parishes are groups of parishes, generally three to six, sharing resources to advance the mission. This new model will allow the priests, deacons, and lay staff associated with each parish to better share their gifts and talents with the whole Family of Parishes.

## 2. Why are we creating Families of Parishes?

Before the pandemic, the local and universal Church were already facing significant challenges, including the shortage of priests to care for parish communities. The corona virus pandemic and its associated health and economic crises accelerated these problems.

We now have fewer resources to continue the mission. Archbishop Vigneron, in consultation with clergy and lay advisors, has determined that now is the time to act.

Our mission to unleash the Gospel hasn’t changed, but how we approach that mission must shift in response to our circumstances. We must move forward with greater collaboration and better stewardship of our resources.

## 3. What is the timing for Families of Parishes to be formally put in place? When did this process begin?

We anticipate that there will be two waves of Families of Parishes. The first wave will begin preparation in January of 2021 and will launch in July of 2021. The second wave will begin preparation in January of 2022 and will launch in July of 2022.

The process began in 2014 with the Year of Prayer. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Archbishop Vigneron set into motion a mission to awaken the Catholic Church in Southeast Michigan and ignite the Faithful to Unleash the Gospel. 2016 included a Time of Listening, the Mass of Forgiveness and the Synod For Detroit. The Beatification of Blessed Solanus Casey took place in 2017, A Witness to Hope, and the Pastoral Letter, Unleash the Gospel was released in 2018. The Holy Spirit

## 4. How will Families of Parishes groupings be chosen and when will they be announced?

Our vicars, working with the priests, created a preliminary list of parish families. This list will group 3 to 6 parishes per family, all should share a border with at least 1 other family member. Pastors will have a say in the proposed groupings during vicariate meetings. In October, the list of parishes will be presented to Archbishop Vigneron for his consideration and the final list will be announced for Advent 2020. Some changes or adjustments may be necessary as the formation process begins.

## 5. What is the anticipated number of families of parishes?

We would expect 60–80 Families of Parishes.

## 6. Will all parishes be part of a Family of Parishes?

Yes. Each parish in the Archdiocese of Detroit will be part of a Family.

**7. How will ministering in a Family of Parishes affect the lives of priests?**

Each priest in a family will continue to benefit from the contact and support of their own parishioners while establishing relationships with parishioners of other parishes within the family. Ministering opportunities will be shared among the priests as they determine what works best for the family. Priests who have a particular charism or who desire to focus on a particular ministry may finally have more opportunity to fulfill that desire or explore that charism. As there will be one assigned priest in the role as leader, he will be responsible for the administration of the family but supported by lay staff and deacons as well as his brother priests. All priests within the family will have more time to engage in the work of ministering to the family community.

**8. How will becoming a Family of Parishes affect the lives of parishioners?**

Parishioners will become part of a larger faith family, working together and sharing faith and resources in pursuit of our mission to unleash the Gospel. As relationships are formed, there is greater opportunity for deeper encounter with Jesus Christ or deepening of relationship with Him. As there will be multiple priests ministering within the Family, there are greater opportunities for grace and access to the Sacraments.

**9. What happens with the previously formed Leadership Teams and their functions?**

While final recommendations regarding this matter will come from the Governance/Leadership, Mission Direct, and Mission Support teams, each Family of Parishes is anticipated to form a Leadership Team with representatives from each parish within the family, that operates in much the same way as current Leadership Teams do.

**10. Does this mean our mission to unleash the Gospel has changed?**

Not at all. All parishes within the Archdiocese of Detroit will be in a family that bears witness to Jesus Christ, living out our Baptismal call to evangelize, sharing the gifts and resources that God has provided. A Family joins together to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ, unleashing the Gospel for all.

**11. How will this affect the parish Missionary Strategic Plan and our Sent on Mission efforts?**

The process of functioning as a Family and fulfilling the call to be joyful missionary disciples will be enhanced by the creation of a missionary strategic plan for the Family with input from each of the parishes through their representatives. This strategic plan will provide direction and goals for how the Family will fulfill its mission to raise up joyful missionary disciples and bear witness to Jesus Christ in accord with Unleash the Gospel. We are still sent on mission!

**12. What other dioceses have made similar changes to Families of Parishes?**

The Archdiocese of Detroit has consulted with and learned from several dioceses that have previously re-structured in order to better align their resources and advance their mission. In particular, parishes in the Diocese of London, Ontario have united in Family groups that resemble what we envision for our Archdiocese. Other similar restructuring has taken place in the dioceses of Boston, Chicago, Green Bay and Cincinnati.

**13. Who will develop the models and structures for the Families of Parishes?**

There are three teams working on developing models for the structure and governance: Governance and Leadership Team, Mission Direct Team, and Mission Support Team. These teams meet monthly and include priests and laity. As these teams discern and decide, there are numerous other teams working on developing an implementation process. The entire process includes priests and lay persons.

**14. Will the Families of Parishes groupings be determined by existing vicariate and regional boundaries?**

Not necessarily. The Families will be formed according to the best interest of parishioners. Each Family grouping will consist of parishes that are geographically contiguous, meaning they border at least one other parish in the Family. We do not intend to create “islands” of parishes grouped with distant parishes.

**15. Does this mean my parish may close, merge, or cluster? Or that a worship site may close?**

No. This process does not involve any new merging or clustering of parishes. Whether a worship site closes is a decision independent of the Families of Parishes process.

**16. How will Families of Parishes affect poorer parishes? Will those less affluent parishes be forced or encouraged to close?**

There is no pre-existing plan to force, encourage or guide parishes with fewer resources to close. Current guidelines for the Families of Parishes process include each parish retaining their separate identities, integrity and finances. Each Family discerns how to best align resources that exist within the Family. Decisions will be left to the discernment of the Family, with assistance from the Archdiocese of Detroit, guided by a complete focus on mission and the best interest of the entire community.

**17. Are national/personal parishes to be included in Families of Parishes? What about parishes cared for by religious orders?**

These parishes will be included in Families of Parishes, considering the needs of each particular parish. Superiors of priests who serve our national parishes and those served by religious orders will collaborate with the Archbishop and his team to determine how best they can contribute to and benefit from this new model.

**18. Is it possible for Family of Parishes not to be next to each other but to be grouped according to interests and according to ethnic groups?**

It is possible, but the intent is that Families will be geographically contiguous so we do not create “islands” of parishes grouped with distant parishes.

**19. What happens to parishes that are already clustered as they join the family?**

Clustered parishes are considered individual parishes and are counted as such when grouped within a family. Likely the cluster would remain the same as a pastor will not serve in two distinct families. During the discernment phase, these matters will be discussed and decided among the priests and vicars. If priests wish to build upon already-existing clusters, that may be possible. Or parishioners may be better served if their parish becomes part of a different family.

**20. Who will lead the Families of Parishes? What will be the role of our parish priests?**

Leadership of a Family of Parishes will rest with a Pastor, with the support of the pastors of each of the parishes within the Family. The Governance and Leadership Team, as well as the Mission Direct and Mission Support teams are continuing to develop the details. The Archbishop has laid the foundation for these teams of priests and laity to discern what best serves the needs of the lay faithful as they unleash the Gospel and remains consistent with Canon Law. Any recommendation to the Archbishop from these teams is based upon significant amount of research and input from several sources.

This new structure will allow for multiple priests to serve the Family of Parishes with their unique talents and experiences, creating a leadership and governance structure that maximized all resources for mission.

**21. When will Families of Parishes begin operating as such?**

The first wave will begin preparation in January of 2021 and will launch in July of 2021. The second wave will begin preparation in January of 2022 and will launch in July of 2022.

**22. Can pastors involve their parish leadership in discussions about how to group parishes, before any firm decisions are made? How can the general faithful partner with their pastors to share the discerning process of Families of Parishes?**

If a pastor wishes to discuss these matters with his leadership team or his parishioners, he is certainly free to do so. This type of conversation may give pastors greater insights into the history of a parish and past collaboration opportunities. Ultimately, the decision is based upon discussion with the priests and determined by the vicar.

Throughout the entire process we are encouraging all the faithful to support this initiative through prayer. As pastors, at their discretion, begin to share details with their leadership teams and parishioners, this may serve as an opportunity for the faithful to share their thoughts with the pastor, who can then, again at his discretion, share this insight with the priests of the vicariate.

**23. How will parishes prepare for the transition to a Family of Parishes?**

Rooted in prayer, parishes will be able to properly prepare for this transition. During the preparation phase, it is important that each Family of Parishes communicate openly both internally and externally to explore changes beneficial to the family. Listening to the needs of others will be equally important to having the opportunity to share. All involved should seek to obtain information through available development opportunities.

**24. How will moving to Families of Parishes help mitigate the impact the pandemic has had on parish finances?**

The financial crisis brought about by the pandemic, including the high unemployment rate in Michigan and the temporary suspension of public Masses, has caused a significant decrease in parish offertories. While parishes within a Family will remain canonically and financially distinct entities, there is great potential to realize savings through economies of scale, the use of common tools and resources, as well as the sharing of some staff positions.

**25. What is envisioned for the role of "Parish Finance Executive"?**

The position of a parish financial executive is modeled after the existence of a financial administrator for any other organization, including our own Archdiocese of Detroit. More details about how this position will operate on a day-to-day basis will be worked out by the Mission Support Committee. The vision involves attending to the daily administrative needs of the Family so that the pastor can focus on ministry.