

December 8, 2023

Dear Friends:

Praised be Jesus Christ! We are writing this letter to you with important updates about potential changes in our parish structures in Dodge County, southern Fond du Lac County, and southwestern Washington County.

The Need for Change

Some parishes in our Archdiocese are comprised of a small number of practicing Catholics. We also have a smaller number of experienced pastors to manage all of our existing parishes. This is a challenge, even with the positive recent trend of larger classes of new priests, and with assistance from international and religious order priests who serve as pastors. Therefore, we need to examine each area of our Archdiocese and ask how we might be able to organize our structures and assign our priests to better utilize our resources and support the Church's mission to worship, teach, and serve.

The greater Dodge County area is composed of 15 relatively small parishes across a large area with low population density. Our weekend and weekday Mass attendance is low compared to the capacities of our worship spaces. Our financial and staff resources are spread thin.

Knowing this, the Vicar for Clergy of the Archdiocese asked for a consultation of the pastors of our area during the Summer and Fall of 2023 led by the Office for Missionary Planning and Leadership. The pastors were asked to consider how the parishes could be structured so they can be governed by fewer pastors, assisted by more associate pastors. This consultation led to the consideration of new "pastoral territories" that could remain fixed for the next 10 to 20 years.

Pastoral Territories Concept

The concept of pastoral territories was shared with the parish trustees, Council chairs, and key parish staff members at two large group meetings in late October and early November. The proposed pastoral territories would be:

- West of Horicon Marsh: Saint Joseph, Waupun; Annunciation, Fox Lake; Saint Katharine Drexel, Beaver Dam; Holy Family, Reeseville; Saint John the Baptist, Clyman; Saint Columbkille, Elba.
- East of Horicon Marsh: Sons of Zebedee, Byron and Oakfield; Saint Mary, Lomira; Saint Andrew, LeRoy; Saint Theresa, Theresa, Saint Mary, Mayville, Sacred Heart, Horicon.
- Southeastern Dodge and Southwestern Washington County: Saint Kilian, Hartford; Saint John, Rubicon; Saint Matthew, Neosho.

Between now and November 30th, 2025, these possible new territories will study how to re-align its operations for maximum sharing of resources:

- Each new pastoral territory is proposed to have one pastor.
- The territories west of the Marsh and east of the Marsh could each have at least one associate pastor, with the possibility of additional associate pastors depending upon need and availability of priests.
- The finance councils of each parish in the territory would meet jointly at the same time and location but maintain their separate identities.
- Each new territory could:
 - Have one combined pastoral council
 - Have a combined administrative staff
 - Share a common accounting and parish financial management software platform
- Each new territory would have a weekend/Holy Day and weekday regular Mass schedule that limits a priest to celebrate two Masses on weekdays, and three Masses on Sundays/Holy Days (this number includes one possible Saturday evening or anticipation Mass) in order to maintain the health of the priest as well as vibrant worship.

A New Parish Model

This new model would require a significant shift in how we think about what a parish is. A parish is no longer a community linked to only one church building. Rather, a parish becomes a territory under one pastor that can include several church sites. This territorial model of parish life has been and continues to be common and successful in many parts of the world, and in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Each pastoral territory can be allowed to maintain its buildings and properties for as long as resources allow if the community believes they are required for its mission, and if the Archbishop also continues to agree with the need.

To Merge or Not

Merging the existing parishes in each territory into one, new parish would offer the simplest and most efficient structure to manage the people, finances, buildings, and resources. However, no one will force parishes to merge. This will be a local recommendation to the Archbishop. Any merging of parishes will require the protection of restricted monies and assets, including any *Love One Another Campaign* monies, so that those assets are only used for the purposes for which they have been given. If parishes decide *not* to merge, they would still have to operate within the parameters of the newly created pastoral territories listed above.

Next Steps

The pastors would work with leadership teams within each proposed new pastoral territory to study possible reorganization. The offices of the Archdiocese will offer guidance and support to facilitate the process. Each proposed new territory would make many local decisions to best implement these possible new realities. The clergy assignments would be changed as described over the course of the next 12 to 18 months. The pastors would guide and lead the majority of the conversations and meetings that could move this forward. They are the primary points of contact for questions and concerns.

Our Hopes for the Future

Change can be difficult, and there is no question that this reorganization could generate disruption from the routines to which we are accustomed. However, we believe these changes could be best for our future. We want to reorganize our structures in a way that will reduce the administrative duplication for our pastors, giving them more time for non-administrative ministry. We want to make careful decisions about all of our church properties so that we can maintain them for as long as possible. We want to welcome more associate pastors into our area, and find strength in sharing resources to support our missions and ministries. We want to be strong together in Christ for our next chapter as a faith community.

Thank you for your generous dedication to the Gospel of Christ and to the Church, and for your support in this new endeavor.

In Christ,

Area Clergy:

Father Will Arnold, Father Ed Kornath, Father Justin Lopina, Father Nathaniel Miniatt, Father John Radetski, Father Britto Suresh, Father Carlos Zapata

Vicar for Clergy, Archdiocese of Milwaukee:

Father Nathan Reesman

Office of Missionary Planning and Leadership, Archdiocese of Milwaukee:

Brad Berghouse, Brenda Cline, Laura Engel, Michael Laird