

## **Guidelines for Yoked Parishes in the Diocese of Norwich**

### **Introduction**

When parishes in the Diocese of Norwich are yoked, it means that a group of parishes is under the leadership of one pastor. Usually, the yoking of parishes follows a period of time during which the parishes were clustered. Therefore, the pastor of the parishes, along with other clergy, religious and laity, of the parishes builds upon what has already been accomplished in the cluster.

The following guidelines are intended to assist with the continuing process of forming one community from two or more parishes. It must be kept in mind that the process of forming one community is gradual, for priests and people alike. Patience, prayer and good will are essential as the process moves forward.

### **I. Role of the Pastor**

Any priest who is pastor of two or more parishes will face unique leadership challenges. He will be dealing with added administrative duties, more meetings and greater demands for presence at parishes, as well as the need for increased mobility as he travels to and from his parishes. The pastor is also the mediator between two or more communities with separate identities, values, history, and worship style which must be brought into a new sense of unity and cooperation.

### **II. Parish Pastoral Councils**

According to Diocesan Policies, Parish Pastoral Councils are mandated for every parish. The Parish Pastoral Council is an advisory group, whose purpose is to assist the pastor in his leadership of the parish community.

Because yoked parishes are under the leadership of one pastor, the pastor and the individual Parish Pastoral Councils must determine how the Councils will function together for the benefit of each parish, and also be a help rather than a burden to the pastor.

The pastor must make it a priority to communicate regularly with the Parish Pastoral Councils under his leadership. Only when the Parish Pastoral Council is well informed can its advisory function be properly fulfilled. In turn, a major responsibility of the Parish Pastoral Councils is regular communication with the parishioners.

One option for parishes yoked under the leadership of one pastor, is that the Parish Pastoral Councils take on a role similar to a Cluster Committee.

### **III. Parish Business Manager**

The role of the pastor entrusted with the leadership of two or more parishes will be shaped according to the degree of cooperation and collaboration he is able to implement between the parishes he leads. To assist in this task, a pastor might consider the employment of a Parish Business Manager, the expense of which is shared among the parishes under his leadership.

A Parish Business Manager might take on the following duties under the supervision of the pastor and in accord with Diocesan Policies:

- Coordinating Safe Environments records
- Keeping Financial records
- Overseeing repairs/maintenance of all facilities
- Planning and budgeting for capital improvements
- Overseeing employee policies and practices
- Overseeing purchasing contracts
- Ordering supplies
- Overseeing Communication, including parish committees, web site, bulletin, emails, etc.

As part of the hiring process, a prospective Parish Business Manager must meet with representatives of the Diocesan Finance office, to assure familiarity with all diocesan policies concerning parish finances and record keeping.

Since a Parish Business Manager will be working for two or more parishes, The Diocesan Finance Office should be consulted with any questions concerning salary and/or benefits.

The specifics of the job description for a Parish Business Manager for yoked parishes must ultimately be determined by the pastor, parish staffs already in place and the prospective business manager. In all circumstances, the Parish Business Manager's role is to support and assist the pastor and staff in fulfilling the mission and ministry of each parish involved.

## **IV. Developing a Sense of Community**

When parishes are united under the leadership of one pastor, there has usually been a period of time when the parishes worked together as a cluster. The pastor then builds upon the sense of community already established, and working with parish staffs and Parish Pastoral Councils, he determines other unifying actions to be undertaken.

### **1. Collaboration in Parish Programs and Activities**

In addition to what was already put into place when the parishes were clustered, it is recommended that all the parishes united under the leadership of one pastor share the following activities and ministries:

Liturgy Committee	RCIA and Evangelization
Social Justice Outreach	Bereavement Ministries
Youth Ministry	Music Ministry
Adult Faith Formation	Sacramental Preparation
Parish Missions/Retreats	Penance/Prayer Services
Social Gatherings	Respect Life Committee

### **2. Parish Schools**

Because Catholic Education should be the concern of all parishes, if one of the parishes under the leadership of one pastor has a parish school, all those parishes should support the school in some way. Efforts should be made in all the parishes under the leadership of one pastor to foster the growth of the parish school and to become involved in its activities.

### **3. Community Names**

If no community name was adopted when a group of parishes was a cluster, all the parishes now united under the leadership of one pastor will find it beneficial to adopt a name and/or a logo which gives them identity as a group. The Office for Pastoral Planning keeps a listing of those names which have already been chosen and approved by the Bishop. This list is available upon request. Community names are approved by the diocesan bishop before they are used. In any logo or heading for the group of parishes, the names of the individual parishes of the community must also appear.

#### **4. Consolidating Mass Schedules**

On the practical level, the consolidation of Mass schedules is one of the major difficulties encountered in fostering a sense of community among parishes. The topic must be approached with sensitivity, and discussions must focus on the importance of the Eucharistic celebration for priests and people alike, and not on convenience or long-standing personal customs.

Ideally, the community of parishes has already seen some adjustment of weekday and/or weekend Mass schedules during the period of time the parishes were clustered. Now, because the parishes are under the leadership of one pastor, further adjustments are usually required.

Especially in consideration of the weekend Mass schedule, parishioners should be involved in the decision-making process, either through a survey, presentation of options or some other method through which their preferences can be expressed.

Weekday Mass schedules, which might involve the parishes under the leadership of one pastor and some surrounding parishes, must be clear and well publicized so that parishioners know when and where weekday Mass is available, or if other prayer options are available.

The consolidation of Mass schedules is guided by two basic principles:

First, the people must be made aware that no priest is permitted to celebrate more than three Masses on any given Sunday, or four in the weekend. (This does not include weddings and funerals.) In fact, priests must receive permission from the diocesan bishop if the limit of three Sunday Masses or four on a weekend is exceeded (see Canon 905). Even though an individual priest might be willing to do more on a given weekend, this cannot be expected or required on a regular basis.

Second, consideration must be given to the best use of the seating capacity of the parish church. This is made clear in the liturgical instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium*, issued by the Vatican in 1967.

*The Apostolic See discourages the multiplication of Masses when a church is large enough to accommodate the faithful at a smaller number of Masses. Multiple Masses attended by a few, and small group Masses on the Lord's Day tend to detract from the value of the Eucharist as a sign and source of ecclesial unity.*

The weekend Mass schedule for a community of parishes must be consolidated according to these principles. Ideally, at the end of this process, the weekend Mass schedule for the community of parishes can be easily covered by the pastor of the parishes, or by two priests should the pastor have a parochial vicar.

## **5. Communion Services**

**In keeping with Diocesan Policies, Communion Services are not allowed in place of weekday Masses.** On weekdays, when Mass is not available in a particular parish, the people are directed to neighboring parishes where Mass will be celebrated.

As an alternative to directing parishioners to a neighboring parish, if weekday Mass is not available in a particular parish, the use of other prayer forms can be encouraged: praying the psalms, Liturgy of the Hours, Liturgy of the Word, etc.

**The geography and circumstances of the Diocese neither require nor permit the use of the ritual “Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest.”**

## **6. Communication**

**Parish Bulletin:** If a common bulletin was not adopted when the parishes were clustered, the practice should be adopted now that the parishes are a community under the leadership of one pastor. The weekly bulletin for the parishes is to have a common cover, list all contact information for the parishes under the leadership of the single pastor, and the Mass times for each parish. Inside the bulletin there should be space for notices from each of the parishes, notices on shared activities and space for diocesan information.

**Use of Technology:** Parishes under the leadership of one pastor are more easily administered if phone and computer systems for the parishes are linked. This allows the pastor to be accessible equally to all his parishioners. Also, all computer files should be accessible from each parish office.

Assistance in setting up these linkages is usually available from the companies which provide the parishes with phone and internet services.

**Parish Web sites:** Parishes under the leadership of one pastor are encouraged to establish a common website. If each parish chooses to maintain its own web site, each one should provide a link to all the parishes under the leadership of the one pastor.

## **V. Finances**

Each parish under the leadership of one pastor maintains its own financial records, its own Finance Council and its own accounts, all according to Diocesan Policy in these matters.

As should have been done when the parishes were clustered, emphasis must be given to the importance of parishioners using weekly collection envelopes, so that the finances of the individual parishes can be accurately recorded. As is the usual practice, donations not specified for a particular parish remain with the parish in which the donation was made.

Every parish under the leadership of one pastor shares equally in the support of the pastor and any parochial vicars. One designated parish of the cluster issues the needed checks, and the other parishes reimburse that parish for their share of the expenses.

## **VI. Determining Parish Population**

Even though it has limitations, the annual October Count is a consistent sampling, and is the most direct method of determining trends in Mass attendance.

Parish population, which goes beyond Mass attendance, has been traditionally tracked through regular parish censuses. However, if conducting a parish census is not feasible, each parish under the leadership of the same pastor should maintain a computerized mailing list which is consistently updated and corrected after each parish mailing.

### **Other Assistance**

Resources concerning collaborative ministry and the pastoring of multiple parishes are available from the Continuing Education of the Clergy Commission or from the Office of Pastoral Planning. Sample job descriptions for Parish Business Manager are also available.

Priests who are entrusted with the leadership of two or more parishes are encouraged to contact the Office of Pastoral Planning for assistance in organizing information meetings, or days of retreat/reflection to assist parishioners in making the transition from clustered parishes to yoked parishes that share the ministry of one pastor.

Office of Pastoral Planning  
Sr. Elissa Rinere, C.P.  
Bishop Flanagan Ministry Center  
199 Broadway  
Norwich, CT 06360  
860-848-2237x203  
Rinere@norwichdiocese.net

