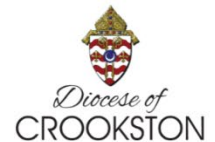




New Life

Through the Tender Compassion of Our God



OPTIONS FOR PARISH STRUCTURAL CHANGES

As part of our **Planning for Mission** efforts, the Diocese of Crookston, along with pastors and parish leadership, continually seeks to discern how best to serve the faithful and renew parish life. This process calls for prayerful reflection, consultation, and careful planning to ensure that every parish can live out its mission faithfully, even amid changing demographics, priestly availability, and resources. Sometimes this discernment leads to new pastoral arrangements, which may take several forms: **re-clustering**, **merging**, or **designation as an oratory**. The following descriptions explain what each of these changes means for parishes, parishioners, and church buildings.

OPTIONS FOR THE PARISH

1. Parish Re-Clustering (Pastoral arrangement – not a canonical act)

Re-clustering occurs when two or more existing parishes remain canonically distinct but begin to share a pastor and pastoral staff. Each parish keeps its own name, finances, sacramental records, and councils, but they collaborate closely in ministry, scheduling, and mission planning. The intent of re-clustering is to strengthen pastoral care and ensure priestly presence across several parishes while maintaining each parish's identity and heritage.

Example: St. Francis, St. Agnes, and St. Anthony Parishes form a cluster served by one pastor and a shared staff team.

2. Parish Merger (Canonical union of parishes – canons 121–122, 515 §2)

A parish merger takes place when two or more parishes are united to form a single parish. The newly formed parish has one pastor, one finance council, one set of sacramental records, and unified administration.

While the former parish churches may remain open as active worship sites, they now belong to the same, larger parish family (i.e. the remaining parish owns and is responsible for the old churches/buildings). Mergers are typically undertaken to strengthen community life, simplify administration, and build a sustainable future for ministry.

Example: St. Peter Parish merges into St. Paul Parish and forms one parish.

OPTIONS FOR THE BUILDINGS

1. Becoming an Oratory (Designation as an oratory – canons 1223–1225)

When parishes are merged, the “old” parish church may be designated as an oratory. An oratory is a sacred place designated by the bishop for worship by a particular community. The oratory may host occasional Masses or devotions, but are no longer the center of parish life. Unless other arrangements are made, the remaining parish owns and is responsible for the oratory.

Example: After merging into Holy Family Parish, the former St. Peter Parish Church becomes *St. Peter Oratory*, used for special liturgies and personal devotion. Holy Family Parish is responsible for the upkeep of St. Peter Oratory.

2. Alienation (cc. 1222, 1293)

A building may be sold or given to a worthy organization. Sacred spaces, such as churches, can never be sold to anyone who would use it for sordid or unworthy purposes. For example, a Church cannot be sold to a non-Christian religion, or be used as a barn. Any income from a sold building goes to the remaining parish.

Example: After merging into St. Thomas Parish, the former St. Andrew church is sold to nuns. The proceeds go to St. Thomas Parish and used to care for perpetual care of the cemeteries.

3. Pious Destruction (c. 1222)

If serious reasons prevent a parish from suitably caring for a building, and/or an appropriate buyer cannot be found, the building may be destroyed with the Bishop’s permission.

Example: After a merger, St. Catherine’s parish lacks the funds or personnel to care for the former St. Benedict’s church. Although an offer has been made for the property, they wish to use it as a mosque. St. Catherine’s requests permission to destroy the building rather than see it fall into disrepair. St. Catherine’s is responsible for the costs.

4. Cemeteries (c. 2143)

The Church cares for cemeteries. Cemeteries are never sold and are cared for perpetually.