

## **POLICY 1.7.2      Creation and Modification of a Parish, Quasi-parish or Mission in the Archdiocese**

Consistent with Canon 515, §2, the Archbishop alone can create, suppress or alter a parish community. He must receive the counsel of his Council of Priests before proceeding to do so.

To make this policy clear, it is necessary to share an understanding of what is meant by the terms “parish” and “parish church” (lower-case ‘c’).

A **parish** is a canonically recognized entity that is defined by territorial boundaries. A parish serves the needs of the people who reside in those boundaries. A parish has a priest who cares for the faithful of the parish and celebrates the sacraments in the parish church.

A **parish church** is a sacred place (a building) set aside for divine worship.

For the remainder of this policy the term “parish” will be used to designate a Parish, Quasi-parish or Mission, as defined in Policy 1.7.

### **The Creation of a Parish**

Consideration will be given to the creation of a parish either (a) as initiated by the Council of Priests and motivated by the pastoral needs of a specific locale, or (b) by a petition to this effect signed by at least thirty (30) adult Catholics in a specific locale, who express their commitment to such a new faith community. In either case, there must exist a plan for the following actions:

- (1) the taking of a full registration of the Catholics resident in the locale to be considered as the parish boundaries;
- (2) the physical needs of the parish community as regards church, offices, hall and priest’s residence;
- (3) a projection of the point in time when property and buildings would be acquired and built, keeping in mind the Policy 3.4.1, Guidelines for Building a Church, Rectory and/or Parish Hall; and,
- (4) a financial plan for raising capital funds for the construction of parish buildings.

### **The Modification of a Parish**

In recent decades, the Church in many Canadian dioceses has had to deal with shrinking Catholic populations in parishes, reduced vocations to the priesthood, and smaller financial means with which to continue its service to the faithful and the wider community. As noted above, it is the bishop who is responsible for determining how best to resolve the difficulties that arise from these circumstances. He can choose from among the canonical solutions for modifying a parish: extinctive unity (“merger”), extinctive union (“amalgamation”), total division (is divided and the parts merged into two other parishes), and suppression (the parish is extinguished).

When a parish is modified, its assets and liabilities have to be dealt with.

Merger and amalgamation both mean that two parishes are joined into one. The financial operations and the assets of both parishes are combined. One parish church is closed.

In a merger of parishes, a new parish is created, with a new name. The sacramental registers for each merged parish are closed and new sacramental registers are used by the new parish.

In an amalgamation of parishes, the sacramental registers of one parish are closed. That parish is then amalgamated with the second parish, continuing to use the sacramental registers and name of that parish.

Total division means that one parish is divided into two parts, each of which joins a different receiving parish. The financial operations and the assets of the divided parish are in turn divided, proportionately, between the two receiving parishes. In most cases, the parish church of the divided parish is closed.

The experience of the loss of a parish community, for any reason, is always painful, so will not be broached before there is sufficient concern about the viability of the community. Where the people (always through the parish priest and their parish pastoral council) of a parish seek to request of the Archbishop that their parish be modified, and the parish church closed, they must use form 1.7.2.a to make the request, either alone or in conjunction with other written submissions.

In every case, the Archbishop will always consult with the affected parishioners and with the Council of Priests, using the criteria below, to determine the best solution for a parish seeking suppression or other modification.

In all cases, the Archbishop will do all he can to respect the specific intention of the original donors of assets, including real property and church furnishings. This will be made easier if there is a written record of the specific intention for a gift, such as a parish register (ref. Policy 3.1.4) or archived document describing the intention.

### **Consultation on modification of a parish**

Given the wide expanse of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan and the distance between most of its Faith Communities, the closing of a parish demands careful discernment. The following criteria will be considered in making such a decision:

1. **Number of persons committed to regular Mass attendance.** This number needs to be agreed upon and realistic, and the community must realize that a certain attendance over the course of a year will be needed for viability.
2. **Distance to the nearest active Catholic parish or mission.** The distance required to travel to attend Sunday Mass in the next closest Catholic church might be too far for most parishioners to make regularly.
3. **Condition of the local church building or place of worship.** The cost of rehabilitation or maintaining the present church may make it difficult to restore/retain a ministry.
4. **Ability of members to meet financial obligations.** An annual budget needs to be drawn up so that members can assess their willingness/ability to meet the needs.

**Number of people willing and able to assume essential service roles.** Guided by the Archbishop or, at his request, the parish priest, the community draws up a list of duties, and members commit themselves to their roles.