

A Merger is Like a Marriage

The merger of parishes can be likened to a marriage.

The goal of a marriage is NOT a marriage certificate or a nice wedding day. The goal is a life- long communion, joyfully helping each other pursue the reason for our existence – knowing, loving and serving God. A married couple should concentrate on loving and caring for each other, praising and worshiping God, raising and forming children, helping those in need, etc. Marriage certificates, blood tests, bank accounts, and tax returns are simply necessary tasks. Likewise, merging parishes should focus first on their “end”, their reason for existence – creating opportunities for every person to meet Jesus Christ in a life changing way. The legal, financial and administrative details of a merger – like the blood test or marriage license – are simply necessary tasks that must be handled along the way.

When parishes merge, the old entities, both civil and ecclesial, cease to exist, and a new entity, both civil and ecclesial, comes into existence. This parish has a new name, new ecclesial boundaries, new nonprofit articles of incorporation, etc. It “inherits” all the resources of the old parishes – land, buildings, money, and debt. While some of these things can be a source of conflict – just like two spouses deciding how to combine finances – we hope and pray that the love between the merging parties enables them to place the common good ahead of personal interests.

While the legalities of the actual merger process are related to the things mentioned above, there are some other things implicit in the merger. For example, the new parish needs to keep a single set of financial records, so these are combined as part of the merger. Likewise, parish life will be far simpler if a single system of policies, procedures, and applications is used for parish administration, so these too are combined as part of the merger. (In fact, the Diocese of Madison is methodically moving ALL parishes, including those not involved in a merger, to a common, consistent system of policies, procedures, and software platforms. This should provide many benefits to the entire diocese over time, helping us to be ever more effective and prudent stewards of our human and material resources – our time, talent and treasure.)