

Dear Friends:

Praised be Jesus Christ! We are writing this letter to you with important updates about potential changes in the parish structures in Racine County that are east of Interstate 94.

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 territory of Racine County that is east of Interstate 94 is currently organized into 12 separate parishes, all of which are only a few miles from each other. Weekend and weekday Mass attendance is low compared to the total capacities of the worship spaces in each of the parishes. The limited financial and staff resources of the Catholic population of the area are currently segmented inefficiently into the many separate parish structures, with the exception of the collaborative sharing among the parishes that makes the Siena Catholic School System successful.

In light of these realities, parish reorganization discussions had been taking place in the City of Racine area for several years. In early 2023, unexpected clergy transfers left even more parishes under the care of fewer pastors in the area. This led the Vicar for Clergy of the Archdiocese to ask for a renewed consultation of the remaining pastors of Racine during the Summer and Fall of 2023 led by the Office for Missionary Planning and Leadership. The pastors were asked to consider how the 12 parishes east of Interstate 94 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 mid-December of 2023 and early January of 2024. The proposed new pastoral territories are:

- Northwest of the Downtown: Parishes of Saint Louis, Saint Mary, Saint Paul the Apostle, Saint Rita.
- Greater Downtown: Parishes of Sacred Heart, Saint Edward, Saint Joseph, Saint Lucy, Saint John Nepomuk, Saint Patrick, Saint Richard, Saint Sebastian.

Between now and November 30th, 2025, these two proposed new pastoral territories will each study how to realign its operations for maximum sharing of resources around these specifics:

- Each new pastoral territory is proposed to have one pastor.
- The Northwest of the Downtown pastoral territory is proposed to have one associate pastor: the Greater Downtown pastoral territory two associate pastors, with possible additional associate pastors depending upon need and availability of priests.
- The finance councils of each parish in the new 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

To truly succeed, this new model calls for a significant shift in how we think about what a parish is in the greater Racine area. A parish would no longer be thought of as a community linked to one church building. Rather, a parish becomes a larger territory under one pastor that can include several church sites with varying degrees of activity at each of them. Each new, larger 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 new territory into one, new parish would offer the simplest and most efficient structure to manage its 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 will still have to operate within the specifics of the newly created pastoral territories listed above.

Next Steps

The pastors are asked to 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 allocations and 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 Yamid Blanco, Father Juan Camacho, Father Jose Mario Nieto, Father Patrick O'Loughlin, Father Michael Petersen, Father Steve Varghese, Father Thomas Vathappallil

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