



# Questions & Answers

(updated 2/2/2026)

This updated Q&A is a comprehensive list of questions that have been asked about Partners in the Gospel. To make it easier to navigate, please click on the section you'd like to explore

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## One Parish Planning Q&A

**Q: Why One Parish Planning?**

A: The One Parish Planning process will help parish families develop their vision and plan for how to re-envision parish life as they become one new canonical parish. All parish families in the archdiocese will be working to develop their new strategic pastoral plans to renew parish life so that we can better carry out our mission. All parishioners will have the opportunity to participate along the way.

**Q: What is the timing for One Parish Planning?**

A: The planning process is outlined for approximately a two-year period, which provides time for parish families to engage in getting to know each other and then setting the vision and plan for achieving it. This One Parish Plan will outline activities and goals that can be achieved over the following five years once the strategic pastoral plan is approved.

**Q: How will this happen?**

A: There are the five stages of One Parish Planning:

***Stage 1 is Organizing and Kick off***

In this stage, parish leadership determines roles, responsibilities and timelines. Most parish families have formed their Parish Family Advisory Councils (made up of lay volunteers) and their Parish Family Leadership Teams (made up of staff). Together, these teams are responsible for leading the parish family

through the following stages of the One Parish Planning process.

### **Stage 2 is Who are we?**

This stage started for most families in spring/summer 2025 and is expected to last ~3-6 months. During this stage, parish families will develop a shared understanding and appreciation of the history, the people, the gifts, and the ministries that have been central to each parish. This question will also help the community explore the opportunities and challenges present today – as they prepare to set the vision for the new parish.

### **Stage 3 is Who do we want to become?**

This stage asks parish families to reflect on the opportunities and challenges present in their community as they develop a vision for the new parish and identify potential initiatives to help them achieve their vision. Most importantly, this stage ensures that the planning aligns with what *the Holy Spirit* is calling us to be. This stage is expected to last 6-9 months.

### **Stage 4 is How do we get there?**

Building on the work in the earlier stages, this stage is focused on developing a concrete plan for parish life that achieves the vision and goals outlined by the parish family community. Parish families will set priorities, determine the best use of resources and map out the work expected to take place in the subsequent 5 years.

### **Stage 5 is What should we be called?**

In this stage, the parish family will select several potential names from an approved list that reflects the charism and vision for the new parish.

These names will be submitted in the One Parish Plan for Archbishop's discernment and final selection.

### **Q: What does the final plan look like?**

A: Parish leadership will be given guidance for the specific activities in each stage, including the written materials and summaries that will emerge from the community consultation sessions. These summaries along with an outline of the vision, specific initiatives, plan for achieving them, viability metrics and more, will be compiled into one packet. The final plan will include a summary overview of the process as well as the 5-year workplan to fulfill their recommended initiatives, which will be shared with the entire parish family community.

### **Q: What happens once the One Parish Plan is turned in?**

A: The parish family submits the plan to the One Parish Plan Review Committee who ensures the plan is complete and may request adjustments. (For example, if a parish family submits a plan to build a new parish hall but does not include the fundraising strategy to support the project, the plan would be sent back for more information.)

After the Review Committee has approved the One Parish Plan, it will go to the archbishop. The archbishop will consult with the Presbyteral Council, after which he will either approve the plan or request further revisions.

**Q: How will decisions be communicated to the parish family?**

A: Throughout the process, the leadership of the parish family will be sharing their progress. For each of the parish family listening sessions, there will be an official synthesis of the feedback that was collected during the consultation that will be shared with the parish family community. Additionally, as draft plans are created, they will be shared with the parish family community for feedback. Be sure to read your parish family bulletin for these progress updates.

**Q: What if our community cannot agree when working together? What will we do?**

A: Some of the conversations about the future will be challenging and will require much prayer and discernment. The process of working together is consultative and involves different ways to gather input from everyone in the community, including listening sessions using the conversations in the spirit model. This consultative model is not a “voting” model, nor will it always reach consensus- but rather it is intended to pull in all the input and feedback from the community. This input and feedback are then taken to prayer for direction from the Holy Spirit.

**Q: Who makes the final decisions?**

A: The Parish Family Advisory Council and Parish Family Leadership Team will use the community input from the parishioners to begin a prayerful discernment process after which they will make recommendations to the pastor. The pastor will engage his own discernment before making a final call on any topic that may not have clear consensus.

## **General Q&A**

**Q: What is Partners in the Gospel?**

A: Partners in Gospel is a strategic pastoral planning effort for the Archdiocese of Seattle to re-invigorate and renew our local Catholic Church. The mission of the Catholic Church – which is to encounter Jesus, accompany others and live the joy of the Gospel – is at the heart of this effort.

We must re-invigorate and transform our parish communities, which includes adapting to the needs of the faithful and our current reality. This strategic pastoral planning effort also examines how we can best use our resources to support vibrant, sustainable, mission-focused parish communities across the entire Archdiocese of Seattle.

**Q: Why now?**

A: Today we face many realities that impact parish life and make it difficult to fully live out our mission. We face an urgent – yet exciting – opportunity to transform parish life.

Over the past few decades our local Catholic Church has experienced a decrease of engaged parishioners, fewer priests, dwindling finances, deteriorating campus conditions and more. Here are just a few statistics:

- Today the archdiocese has 80 diocesan pastors for 174 locations; by 2036, we estimate we will only have 66 diocesan pastors, an 18% decrease. (We also have fewer seminarians and fewer lay ministry leaders.)
- While the overall population in the Archdiocese of Seattle is growing, registered households are declining, along with Mass attendance, baptisms, first communions, marriages in the Church and parish giving:
  - From 2010 to 2019, Mass attendance declined 11%.
  - Between 2019 and 2025, Mass attendance declined by a further 6%.
  - Between 2010 and 2019, baptisms declined 32% and Catholic weddings declined nearly 19%.
  - Between 2019 and 2024, Catholic weddings declined by a further 12%.

**Q: What will be the outcome with Partners in the Gospel?**

A: There is no predetermined outcome, but the hope is that we will transform our parish communities so that they effectively share the love of Jesus Christ while serving people in their communities, providing rich liturgical experiences, effective ministries, engaging formation opportunities and a vibrant growing community. In July 2024, Partners in the Gospel brought most parishes and schools together into a new parish family structure with two or more other parishes under the leadership of one pastor and one or more parochial vicars. Parish families will have about three years from their formation to become one canonical parish. The pastor, parish and school leaders and parishioners will determine how this new family will join together. Joining together does not necessarily mean any church building or schools will close.

**Q: Are other dioceses doing this?**

A: Yes. Dioceses across the United States have implemented similar initiatives. The Partners in the Gospel Core Team connected with many of them to hear their stories and learn from their experience. Using these insights, our archdiocesan team developed a planning and consultation model that reflects the uniqueness of the Archdiocese of Seattle. Our model is consultative, embraces our cultural diversity and history, and reflects our large geography that includes concentrated city centers, suburban and rural communities.

While we appreciate the guidance and insights from other dioceses, success in the Archdiocese of Seattle will come from the creativity and collaboration of each parish family, led by the Holy Spirit.

**Q: Can you define what you mean by “parish” and “parish family”?**

A: A **parish** is defined as a certain community of the faithful stably constituted within the archdiocese, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a priest as its proper pastor under the authority of the Archbishop of Seattle. (c. 515§1)

Note that the term *parish* refers to the *community of people* and not the sacred building designated for divine worship – the church (with a lowercase “c”).

A **parish family** is a group of two or more neighboring parishes (sharing boundary lines) under the leadership of one pastor and one or more parochial vicars. Over time, the parish family will determine its own consultative leadership team(s) and how they may share resources such as staff, ministries and outreach.

**Q: Why are we doing it this way?**

A: Partners in the Gospel is a highly consultative approach that gives parishioners the ability to provide input and take an active role in building and renewing their local Church to better carry out our Catholic evangelizing mission. The process allows communities time to truly journey together and accompany one another, while forming one new vibrant parish community. Ultimately, Partners in the Gospel is intended to give priests more time for pastoral care – while also ensuring no parish community is left out.

Parish families benefit from the shared gifts, talents, finances, resources and more from each of the joining parishes. This consolidation means that parish families – and the forthcoming new canonical parishes – should have more resources to carry out the mission. It really comes down to the creativity and vision of the parishioners and parish leaders to determine how the parish family will collaborate. The archdiocese is committing significant resources to support parishes throughout this multi-year journey.

**Q: Does this mean churches/parishes are closing?**

A: Yes and no. First, it is important to note the parish is not the church building. The parish is the community of the faithful and all that comes with it.

- The parishes in a family – community of faithful – will not close but will join together to form one new community of faith.
- Churches do not close at the time that parish families become one new canonical parish.
- It is likely that over time local parish discernment will determine that some buildings, including church buildings, will close as part of this process.

A parish family is comprised of different parish communities that will eventually become one canonical parish. Decisions will be made at the local level to

reflect the needs of each parish community. The parish leadership, with input from parishioners and guidance from the Holy Spirit through a synodal listening process, will make decisions about how to best carry out the mission locally.

This means that the new parish will determine many things, such as what ministries to provide, what outreach to the community is possible, what Mass times to offer and what and how properties and buildings will be used.

**Q: Is this simply expanded clustering?**

A: No. To enable and support parishes in this renewal effort, Partners in the Gospel uses a fundamentally different approach to the historical clustering model where multiple parishes, operating independently, remained separate entities overseen by one pastor. The *parish family* is a temporary step on the way to becoming one *parish*. Each parish family is receiving direct support from a liaison staff member employed and funded by the Chancery to accompany parish families, and many tools and resources to help parishes every step of the way, including detailed handbooks for navigating prayer and worship, community, discipleship, governance and leadership, and much more.

Unlike the clustering model, which is simply an operational model, Partners in the Gospel, places parishes in a parish family to specifically work together to develop a 5-year strategic pastoral plan for a new parish.

**Q: How were the parish families formed?**

A: In the first phase, the archdiocese requested input on draft parish families from priests and parish leaders, school principals and leadership, archdiocesan employees and all Catholics across the archdiocese in the Fall 2023. The public input phase, with more than 3,000 reports, led to recommended changes in 25 parish families. The 78 parishes in these families held a second round of input.

In December 2023, the Oversight Committee and the Presbyteral Council finalized a recommendation for Archbishop Etienne, who promulgated the new parish family structure in early 2024. The new parish families went into effect with their new pastor on July 1, 2024.

Once the parish families were in place, they were assigned a parish liaison to support them as they began the One Parish Planning process, which is expected to last two to three years. During this process the parish family will develop a 5-year strategic pastoral plan for a new parish,

**Q: How long does it last?**

A: There is no finite time limit for Partners in the Gospel. The first archdiocesan phase was focused on widespread consultation around the parish families, which took place in 2023. Once new parish families were officially formed in

July 2024, the next phase focused on One Parish Planning began. During this phase, parish families will have about three years to become one parish with a new 5-year strategic pastoral plan. While this is the target date, each parish family is unique: some parish families may wish to become one canonical parish sooner, while others may need a bit more time.

**Q: When will this happen?**

A: Here is a timeline of the key milestones for Partners in the Gospel:

- January 2023: Public launch
- Feb-July 2023: Leadership consultation on parish families
- Aug/Sept 2023: Parish and school staff provided input on parish families
- Fall 2023: Two rounds of parishioner input on parish families
- Early 2024: Final parish families announced
- July 2024: Parish families went into effect with one pastor and parochial vicar(s)
- 2024-2027: Parish families journey together with One Parish Planning
- 2027: Parish families submit their One Parish Plans
- 2027+: Parish families become one new canonical parish

**Q: What does consultation involve?**

A: The consultation process was built intentionally to ensure everyone can offer input. Consultation is a core part of Partners in the Gospel and takes place at both the archdiocesan-wide level, as well as the parish family level.

The consultation started with priests, parish and school staff and then the people of God to discern the initial drafts of parish families. Consultation using a synodal listening model gave everyone a chance to review the potential family structure, pray to the Holy Spirit about and provide their input.

In the One Parish Planning process, similar consultation will take place in a variety of forms in each parish family to help lay the foundation for the future of the parish family.

**Q: What changed at parishes when parish families formed?**

A: Several things changed immediately when families formed and many more will continue to evolve with input from the community. Immediate changes included:

- One pastor and one or more parochial vicars were assigned to families – many or all of whom were new to that parish (but not new to ministry).
- Mass times changed at some locations.
- Parish leadership structures changed, including the formation of Parish Family Advisory Councils and schedule adjustments for existing meetings occurred, recognizing that it is impossible for the pastor to attend finance council meetings or school commission meetings that occur on the same night in different locations.



While the new parish families all have more collective resources (people and finances) to carry out the mission of the Church, what this looks like for each parish family will be determined by the creativity of that community. Decisions for how the parish family comes together are intended to be made by the local community to ensure what emerges reflects the gifts and needs of their specific communities. Keep in mind that these changes are taking place to help achieve the larger goal of renewing parish life so that we can help others encounter Jesus.

**Q: How will parishes integrate different nationalities or charisms?**

A: We will continue to pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance. We are one universal Catholic Church and we honor the rich diversity, which brings fullness and joy to our faith communities.

Partners in the Gospel requires all of us to be welcoming. It requires all of us to take time to learn about each other and about our larger community and the community we serve. Partners in the Gospel requires everyone to shift their thinking and move from “us” vs. “them” to the new reality of “we.”

The archdiocese will provide more tangible guidance on how to bring people and leadership teams together – but at its heart, this process requires us all to build a faith community that reflects the love of Jesus so that we can effectively be his living body.

**Q: How will naming work?**

A: Each parish retains its parish name until the parish family becomes one new canonical parish. It is also important to note that the name of a parish is different than the name of a church building.

As the parish family works together, it will develop a One Parish Plan, focused on how it will become one canonical parish. In the last phase of the planning process, the parish family will propose a list of name choices based on a list of approved names from the archdiocese.

The list will contain more recent saint names along with more traditional names. The parish family will submit their top five choices, which should not be the same name as any existing church names in their deanery or adjacent deaneries. There is also an opportunity to write in a suggested name as well. Ultimately, the archbishop will select the new parish name based on the top five names submitted by the parish family from the approved list.

During this process, the name of the actual church building will not change.



## Questions about People

### Q: Who has led this effort?

A: Many different groups have been involved in the research, planning and execution of this strategic pastoral planning effort:

- **Partners in the Gospel Core Team** was comprised of co-leads Father Gary Lazzeroni, Vicar General and Caitlin Moulding, Chief Operations Officer, and 10 other lay leaders.
- **Oversight Committee** was a diverse group of priests, lay leaders, a religious sister, a deacon, and superintendent of Catholic Schools responsible for providing guidance during the parish family formation stage. This group was sunset in July 2024 and replaced with the **Steering Committee**, responsible for providing guidance during the 3-year implementation of Partners in the Gospel.
- **Presbyteral Council** is made up of priests, including those elected by each of the 10 deaneries, who advise and consult with Archbishop Etienne.
- **Parish family liaisons**, hired and trained by the Archdiocese of Seattle, support parish families throughout the process of becoming one parish.
- **You** – play a significant role in this effort with your input and prayers.

### Q: What does this mean for priests?

A: Today, priests across the archdiocese are spread thin and spend significant time on administrative activities instead of pastoral care. With the implementation of Partners in the Gospel, over time, priests will be able to focus more of their efforts on the pastoral care and relationships with members of their parish community.

Partners in the Gospel will also require the support, the expertise and the gifts of our extern priests from other dioceses who will be assigned to support parish families and our retired priests who often fill in for priests who are sick or traveling.

Here are a few other changes:

- With the new parish family structure, some priests became pastors, while others became parochial vicars to ensure the best possible pastoral care for the community.
- Canon law assumes a priest will celebrate no more than one regularly scheduled Mass per day. The law allows a priest, with permission from the bishop, to celebrate up to three Masses on a Sunday as well as one

Saturday vigil. We know that many priests are celebrating more than that today, and as part of our planning for the future, we need to adjust this practice to reduce the strain on priests and ensure they are able to effectively focus on the pastoral care of their community.

- Priests will need more lay leadership support than ever before, which presents a great opportunity for Catholics to bring their professional experiences to parish life.

**Q: What does this mean for parishioners?**

A: Overall, parishioners should experience a more vibrant and engaged Catholic community. Ultimately, the goal is that they will have more opportunities for personal faith growth and the opportunity for a closer relationship with their parish leaders.

Practically, it also means that parishes have experienced administrative changes. Some changes have included a new pastor and parochial vicar, changes to Mass times and locations, changes to parish leadership teams and new outreach ministry opportunities.

Parishioners also play a very important role throughout this process and are highly encouraged to engage in it. Parishioners will have multiple opportunities to participate in consultation sessions to discern and provide feedback on questions, plans, ideas and more.

**Q: What does this mean for deacons?**

A: Deacons play a vital role in the life of the Church. They are gifted at accompaniment and bringing Jesus to the margins. This work must continue and will hopefully grow exponentially through Partners in the Gospel. Potential roles include supporting people as they process grief associated with the potential changes or leading the synodal discernment process at their parish for the parish family input.

**Q: What does this mean for lay leaders?**

A: As the Church lives out Partners in the Gospel, the work of lay leaders will become even more important. Lay leaders are needed at all levels of parish life from leading ministries and liturgy planning to accounting and marketing expertise.

Partners in the Gospel provides a great opportunity for lay people to become even more involved in parish life.

To help train lay leaders, the Archdiocese of Seattle relaunched the Lay Ecclesial Ministry formation program to strengthen and support our existing Lay Ecclesial Ministers while we train new ones. Read more about it [here](#).

**Q: What does this mean for staff?**

A: As parishes form into parish families there will inevitably be staff changes. How Partners in the Gospel will impact a specific staff role will depend on the makeup and needs of the new parish family.

It is important to remember that the goal of this effort is to renew parish life and doing so *will require many people*. There are many open positions across the archdiocese and many new positions will be created that will provide opportunities for staff to bring their gifts and talents to a new community.

**Q: What is the role of the parish family liaison?**

A: The liaison is a professional hired and trained by the Archdiocese of Seattle to support parish families as they journey to become one parish. They will use the tools, resources and other guidance created to help the parish family navigate how to approach prayer and worship, evangelization, administration, governance and more in their new configuration – accounting for the gifts and needs of its community. They will also support the parish in the creation of the One Parish Plan, which will be developed as the parish family is working through the 5 stages of planning.

## Questions about other topics

**Q: How will Partners in the Gospel help us better cultivate priestly vocations?**

A: Studies show the most effective way to cultivate priestly vocations is through an invitation by a parish priest. The journey from hearing the Lord's call to discernment to formation is a long process, which takes years and patient accompaniment. The new parish family structure should allow priests additional time to be more present to youth and young adults, to invite them toward a priestly vocation and to accompany them in their discernment.

One hope for parish families, in partnership with the vocations team, is to develop and support parishioners in encouraging young men to consider a vocation of service for the Church. In January 2026, the vocations team launched the new Called by Name program to help identify those who may have a potential call to religious life. To learn more please visit: [Called By Name - Archdiocese of Seattle](#)

**Q: How are we cultivating priestly vocations today?**

A: The Archdiocesan vocations team has expanded to include a full-time vocation director and three associate vocation directors. This has led to more opportunities to accompany young men discerning and invite others to

consider the priesthood. Specifically, our vocations team focuses on prayer, education and encouragement.

- Prayer: Following our Lord Jesus' invitation to ask for laborers to serve in the harvest, parishes around the archdiocese regularly host holy hours dedicated to praying for vocations, as well as Serra Club chapters and other lay groups.
- Education: The vocations team is present at parishes, schools, diocesan events and retreats to teach people about vocations and how to discern them. This message is echoed through several communication efforts including the annual seminarian poster, Vocations website and social media channels.
- Encouragement: Through events like discernment retreats and Quo Vadis Days, young men are encouraged to consider priesthood and to discern their vocation.

The team also launched the new Called by Name program to form teams who may be able to help identify and encourage people who may be called to a religious vocation. Learn more: [Called By Name - Archdiocese of Seattle](#)

**Q: What can we do now?**

A: We ask everyone to pray for this renewal effort. Each parish received prayer cards to give people to pray during Mass or on their own.

Additionally, we ask people to review the [Partners in the Gospel](#) materials online to become more familiar with the overall mission of the Church, the goals of this effort and the process we are undertaking. People may also wish to read through Archbishop Etienne's pastoral letter, review the Current Reality reports or watch video presentations to understand why there is an urgent need to make changes now.