

From the desk of
MONSIGNOR ZENZ



June 22, 2020

FAMILIES OF PARISHES

My brothers and sisters in the Lord,

Archbishop Vigneron has recently announced that he is asking every parish of the Archdiocese to become part of a “family” which will include other nearby parishes. Our parish will not make the choice independently; the Archdiocese has a process of consultation and dialogue which will include input from laity as well as clergy in determining the actual “shape” of each “family.” The time-line goal is for some implementation by June 2021. Typically a family of parishes would be three to five parishes that have similar geographic and demographic concerns and challenges.

Parishes were never intended to be separate islands; the very nature of our faith calls us to be a “communion” of people of God - that is, people sharing gifts and resources with each other and with God. We do so in the same way that a family gives and receives. Some members of our human families have more challenges and others have extra resources; as families of parishes, we would hopefully share, in a balanced way, our gifts and needs.

In the past two decades, as the Archdiocese has faced diminishing numbers of priests and economic challenges, we have “clustered” parishes. The problem with clustering has to do with the extra work load it places on the priest; it is taxing for the priest to keep up with two or three Parish Councils, liturgy schedules etc. We have learned from other dioceses such as London, Ontario that the “Family of Parishes” model works quite well.

In this model, there can be different variations. For instance, a “family” might have several quasi-independent parishes functioning with their own particular pastor but there would be a “lead pastor” or moderator for the family. A second model would be one pastor for several sites and though the other parishes would retain their name, they would no longer function as independent parishes. The one pastor would have one or more associates “under” his leadership; priests would be available to all three or four sites for liturgies. There would be one Parish Council and each site would have its own Finance Council. There are many different ways this model could evolve.

It is important to emphasize that this is a process, just a beginning. You will be hearing more about it in the future. We also need to think of this as a positive step rather than an attempt to shore things up. This vision of sharing of resources is for the sake of the mission of evangelization. We want to use our priest personnel, financial resources and pastoral staff in the best way possible. For instance, it could be that a family of parishes

might want to have one director of Faith Formation or Christian Service director for three sites or one RCIA Process. There could be more efficiency if the family of parishes decided to have masses at staggered times so that there would be more options for members of the family.

Every parish of the Archdiocese will have to be part of a family, even very large parishes. No one of us can stand in isolation!

One of the motives behind this approach is also to build up priest spirituality and priestly support for each other. When each of us lives alone within our particular parish, we can often lose our sense of connection to the rest of the Archdiocese and we do not experience the "give and take" of camaraderie; in the family model we would pray together, share meals together and perhaps even live in one rectory. All of these things will be evolving in the months ahead. Please do not be overly anxious about it. We'll see how things emerge. I wanted to give you my perspective about it and from time to time I will keep you updated. I happen to be on the Governance Committee. There are two other committees: "Mission Direct" and "Mission Support."

I thank you again for your cooperation and your support and pray that this process and the end result will be something very positive for all of us. When each parish influences and supports the other parishes, it will make for a healthy family!

Your brother in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Msgr. John P. Zeng". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.