News



Parishes around the Archdiocese of Seattle are welcoming their new pastors and priests as 136 parishes officially became 60 parish families July 1, 2024. Pictured, clockwise, are St. John the Baptist Parish in Covington welcoming new pastor, Father Carlos Orozco, for his first Mass at the parish; Holy Family Parish in Kirkland announcing a welcome weekend for its new pastor, Father Brad Hagelin; the parish family of All Saints, Puyallup, St. Martin of Tours, Fife and Sacred Heart, Tacoma, helping parishioners get to know their new pastor and priests; and Mary, Queen of Peace Parish in Sammamish welcoming Father Matthew Oakland, pastor of the parish family that also includes St. Joseph, Issaquah and Our Lady of Sorrows, Snoqualmie. (OSV News/Northwest Catholic)

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The Archdiocese of Seattle's 136 parishes have officially become 60 parish families as part of Partners in the Gospel, the archdiocese's strategic pastoral planning initiative.

The July 1 move comes after two years of planning and consultation with clergy, parish and school staffs and the laity, the archdiocese said. Each parish family will be led by a pastor or pastoral coordinator, and many will have at least one parochial vicar.

"Together, over the next three years, the parish family will work to form one new canonical parish, while creatively re-envisioning how they will serve their community," the archdiocese said in a news release.

In a July 1 letter to Catholics in the archdiocese, Archbishop Paul D. Etienne explained that the goal of Partners in the Gospel is to reinvigorate parish life and help people draw closer to Jesus.

"Imagine full Sunday Masses, people engaged in the sacraments, growing youth and young adult groups, and people excited about their Catholic faith," Etienne wrote. "One way we hope to achieve this is by changing how we're structured to more effectively use our resources — our people, our structures and our finances — so that we can recalibrate our focus on achieving this mission," he added.

The archdiocese encompasses all of western Washington, stretching from the Canadian border to the Oregon border and from the Cascade Mountains to the

Pacific Ocean. In addition to the 60 parish families, there are 73 Catholic schools, four associated cemeteries, a retreat center and two camps.

Now that the parish families have formed, the archdiocese said, a new phase of Partners in the Gospel begins. Within each parish family, teams of staff and parishioners will start meeting to work on the process of coming together over the next three years.

"The parish family will work on a pastoral plan called the One Parish Plan, which will outline how the parish family will become one parish," the archdiocese said. "Specifically, the plan will address how the parish family will be structured, its ministry offerings, its liturgical life, its outreach to the margins, and how the parish family will use its campuses and much more."

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A first draft of the families was released in September 2023, and a three-week comment period opened for the public to offer input on the proposed groupings. More than 3,000 pages of feedback from 700 input sessions and 800 online responses were reviewed by archdiocese staff, and in November, the archbishop proposed changes based on that feedback. His new recommendations affected 78 parishes and missions in 25 parish families. A second round of consultation opened for affected parishes.

On Feb. 3, the archbishop released the final list of parish families. In a note accompanying the list, the archdiocese said, "This final list of families comes after a year of consultation with the archdiocese's Presbyteral Council, the Partners in the Gospel Oversight Committee, priests, deacons, parish and school staff, lay leaders and the public."

These families "were developed based on parishes' size, geography, cultural and ethnic makeup, financial health and school presence," the archdiocese said, adding that some parishes are not being combined because they are operated by a religious order or serve a specific cultural community.

"While we have set the process and vision for Partners in the Gospel, the future of the parish family is up to the parish family leadership and the people of God who will discern, with the help of the Holy Spirit, how to reinvigorate parish life," Etienne said

in his July 1 letter.