



## Summary

The comments from almost all sessions indicate clearly that the community is grappling with differing worship styles and an identity crisis following the merger of St. Mary and St. Nicholas. There are significant fears surrounding loss of parish identity – of being “swallowed up.” Concerns include having to adjust to unfamiliar practices and prayers that are uncomfortable for some, and a sense that certain issues are being imposed on the broader community. Some participants expressed fear of conservative vs. liberal culture clashes, especially regarding liturgical practices. The differing views on women preaching and on traditional and non-traditional Eucharistic practices exemplify the diverse theological perspectives within the merged parish.

The call is for a synodal parish that listens to diverse voices, especially those historically excluded. The many specific suggestions included building shared traditions, minimizing duplicate ministries, fostering unity through combined liturgies, and promoting open dialogue. Participants emphasized the desire to build relationships, possibly through faith-sharing groups and joint celebrations and events, and to recognize that there can be unity without uniformity in which we honor the unique identities that each of us brings.

Ultimately, the community seeks a cohesive parish with a variety of facets, embracing diversity in opinions, experiences, and culture. The comments emphasized the importance of demonstrating understanding, patience, and organic unification and of acknowledging challenges while finding common ground.

# Unification and Diversity

## Detail

### Worship Style and Practices

- Concerns about St. Mary's liturgy and music being overshadowed by St. Nicholas' practices during joint services.
- Feeling of majority rule in combined liturgies, expressing the need for a more inclusive approach.
- Struggles against perceived bullying from St. Nick's, highlighting differences in rule-following and rule-creating approaches.
- Fears of St. Mary being absorbed by St. Nick's, emphasizing the importance of preserving each church's unique identity.
- Desire to maintain individual liturgical identities, avoiding a sense of being dominated by one church's practices during combined liturgies.
- Discussion on controversial topics, such as women preaching, highlighting concerns about potential changes in practices.
- Combat division by fostering a sense of community and unity, avoiding each Mass operating as its own silo.
- Preserve the existing choir without any changes.
- Consciously prepare altar servers for both churches and promote a sense of equal comfort at both locations through combined liturgies.
- Emphasize the importance of joint Masses, events with kids, and learning from other successful parish mergers.
- Consensus on the need for evangelization to bridge gaps between traditional and non-traditional practices, addressing issues like receiving the host.

### Merger Challenges

- Acknowledge the need to grieve, grow, and find new points of joy in the merging process.
- Acknowledge tension between churches/parishioners, the personal discomfort and reluctance in the merger process, the uncertainty post-merger. Emphasize the need for trust and communication.
- Honor existing relationships, especially in Religious Education, and avoid forcing children to sacrifice their community in the name of unification.
- Question the desired structure, whether one parish with two locations or two communities with one administrative staff, avoiding homogenization.
- Recognize challenges in communication between St. Nick's and St. Mary's and promote efforts to unify activities with children.
- Address the reluctance of parishioners to visit the "other site" and maintain identification with their original church.
- Bridge divides within the parish, including those between St. Nicholas and St. Mary's, as well as among the Anglo and Hispanic communities.
- Recognition of diverse theological perspectives and practices within the merged parish.

# Unification and Diversity

## Merger Challenges, continued

- Focus on building relationships between St. Nick's and St. Mary's leadership, acknowledging unfamiliarity.
- Evaluate the unchanged operation of ministries post-unification and explore reasons for this.
- Address fears of St. Mary's closing and accommodate differences between the two churches by discussing salient issues openly.
- Different understandings of what constitutes a good Catholic, beyond mere Mass attendance.
- Emphasize commonalities and diversity, recognizing that neither legacy parish is a monolith with only one type of Catholic.
- Teach members of each legacy parish the traditions and ministries of the other through guides, staff bios, and key events.
- Recognize the unification while honoring the home Church community, avoiding forced unity during sacraments for children.
- Face the challenge of bringing the two parishes together as a single body and focus on continued cultural integration.
- Address concerns of being subsumed by St. Nicholas and work on keeping the best of both legacy parishes while building a stronger, cohesive parish.
- Address the challenge of feeling like a stranger at the other church and promote initiatives for getting to know each other.

## Building Community

- Emphasize the essence of the Synod process, which involves listening to each other and designing solutions.
- Encourage in-depth conversations across the two legacy parishes to recognize commonalities despite superficial differences.
- Host dialogue sessions to address differences, referring to the synod as a model for respectful listening and understanding among culturally/theologically different parishioners.
- Encourage better communication and participation in events on both campuses to enhance volunteer engagement.
- Promote learning from one another and bridging cultural divides within the parish.
- Consider using faith-sharing groups to build relationships and develop a strategy for dialogue between Hispanic and Anglo communities.
- Aim for better alignment of parish processes and ministries at both sites.
- Address disparities in committee/group operations and create ways to build relationships through combined ministries and outreach.
- Increase openness to change within the community and recognize the necessity of time and patience in the unification process.
- Seek more uniformity at both sites to enhance consistency within the parish.
- Differentiate unity from uniformity, preserving the unique identity and charism of each parish.
- Recognize the push for unification while addressing the continued siloing of the two churches, emphasizing honesty and respect for each church's identity.

# Unification and Diversity

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## Building Community, continued

- Ensure that unification efforts are organic, not forced, with patience being a key factor.
- Continue knitting together diverse communities, focusing on progress in integrating cultures with the Hispanic community and St. Mary's parishioners.
- Recognize that the challenges of unification may not be as difficult as perceived, given a history of collaboration.
- View the merger as an opportunity to build a unified church despite differences in culture.
- Engage with and integrate both cultures within the unified parish.
- Embrace the messiness of unification, understanding that challenges are a common aspect of any family or community.
- Recognize the need for new structures and forms, contemplating the design and models of the unified church.
- Encourage reaching out, reaching back, and reaching in to foster unity and understanding within the parish.
- Reflect on the impact of labeling as a "Comboni Missionary Parish"
- Address differences in viewpoints between order priests from various parts of the world and the local Evanston parish, recognizing potential clashes.
- Recognize the strength of lay ministry and encourage collaborative efforts in activities like singing in the choir and fundraising projects.
- Emphasize the importance of understanding the parish as a whole entity and explore the meaning of being "one parish."
- Consider consolidating ministries for familiarity and unity.
- Reduce duplicate ministries to avoid reinforcing separateness and make it easier to attract volunteers.