

Helpful Ministry Hints on Multi-Parish/Site Work

Summarized from the Multi-Parish/Multi-Site Gathering held May 4, 2005

1. **Time Management is Crucial** – managing several sites/parishes requires excellent time management and planning skills. If you do not naturally possess these gifts, enroll in a program such as Stephen Covey’s “7 Habits of Highly Effective Leaders” (or try a book or CD series) to learn them, because you’ll have lots of chances to practice it! Remember to pace yourself and take your regular day off to keep your life in balance.
2. **Listen Twice as Much as You Speak** – One of the most common complaints by people (whether volunteer or staff) is that they have not been heard. Spend time, especially in the beginning, visiting with and getting to know the people and their needs. Build in feedback mechanisms through regular program evaluations that help you solicit important feedback, which also helps others know that you are interested in their thoughts and ideas. When you manage multiple sites, it’s even more important that others know they have a voice *and* that it will be heard.
3. **Walk with the Community Through the Change** – Change is hard and slow, and is never an easy process to navigate. It will likely take three years for several communities to own a shared sense of their collective identity. Speak often and openly about the joys and struggles of change, listen to the concerns that are raised, sponsor retreats and facilitated dialogues that help the leadership, as well as the people in the pews, effectively manage the changes they are experiencing.
4. **Get Training and Support in Conflict Management** – Conflict is inevitable, especially during merging of parishes and clustering. Find the name of a good counselor or consultant in conflict management who can help individuals and groups manage and cope with conflict and change issues. Consider having him/her lead the staff through a retreat day to begin naming some of the issues and concerns as well as how to effectively address them.
5. **Collaborate with Others** – “My ministry is important”, and so says each staff and volunteer. But we must look beyond the world of our own ministry area and work toward collaborative efforts to get over the turf issues and divisions that naturally spring forth when a multi-site system becomes large and anonymous. The more the staff model a collaborative spirit, the more the rest of the community will follow that lead, which will eventually lead the whole parish to a larger vision of Church.
6. **Let Yourself Be Known** – Having multiple sites requires you to be known at more places than before. Arrange to have your picture and a brief bio displayed at all the parishes (in the bulletin, if possible) soon after starting and get introduced at mass at each of the sites within the first month of your arrival. Begin meeting with staff members, parish committees and leadership teams from all ministry areas of each parish as soon as possible. Attend daily masses when you are able and visit the Catholic schools.

7. **Know Your Sites** – Have a staff orientation at each site so that the history, helpful hints, AV and printed resources and official and unofficial “house rules” that accompany each site can be understood by all. Be sure any new hires are also oriented to the history, logistics and mechanics of each site as well as who to call for help. One of the best ways to connect with “founding families” of a parish is to know the history of the community.
8. **Insist on a Clear, Well-Defined Job Description** – that *clearly* spells out expectations for the collective multi-parish setting (not for individual parishes). It should also include one and only *one supervisor* that the minister is responsible to and that the other parishes agree and defer to as well as the provisions for one central office space.
9. **Pray, Pray, Pray** – All work and no prayer makes for ineffective ministry. Spend time both personally and as a staff or team in prayer. Take time to step back (or away) every so often to embrace what’s at the center of the shared mission you are all working toward. Allow Christ, and not conflict, to be at the reason of all that has been, is and will be.
10. **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate** – you must use every form of communication that is available to you and your multi-parish system. One thing to AVOID communicating is the “we/they/us/them” language that underscores division and separateness. Some helpful forms of communication include:
 - Bulletins - use the same announcements for each site and make sure something is in every week. Create a template for the front or inside cover of the bulletin with the names, e-mails and numbers of who is in charge of which ministry area.
 - Web page – create and maintain one for the cluster, single parish with multiple sites or planning group with helpful downloads such as registration and permission forms and info flyers.
 - Pictures – hang them on bulletin boards and web sites to let folks know that good things are happening.
 - Mass Announcements – Use the same ones for each site.
 - Newsletters – Whether electronic or bulletin inserts, use these to keep others updated on what’s happening (this could be part of the web-based ministry).
 - Staff/Pastoral Council Updates – do monthly updates that are sent to all staff at each parish as well as pastoral and planning group wide leadership. Clear communication of what has, is and will be happening is essential to keeping everyone “in the loop”
11. **Don’t Get Boxed In** – Change by the community requires a change in our own patterns of ministry and management. Don’t assume anything. Think outside the box when seeking new ways of doing old things, especially established programs. The best way to do this is to broaden the base of those who are planning programs. If you bring in new faces, they will bring with them new ideas.

12. **Respect the Individuality of Each Site** – Even though many are becoming one, that does not take away the unique gifts, history, culture and identity of each site. Get to know and respect these unique aspects of the larger body and don't be afraid to acknowledge them. Instead of being stuck, you'll find that it actually helps the community move forward.
13. **Focus on Relationship Building** – it's good to gain a sense of what the needs and hopes are, but don't over-survey and over-meet. Focus on relationships at all times and let meetings be quick and brief. Work out logistics with small core teams or through individual meetings, calls or e-mails rather than at large (and looong) meetings.
14. **Record Keeping is Critical** – With so many sites and staff, developing a good record keeping system is critical. If this is not your gift, find someone who can help establish a good pattern for record keeping, including a filing system that allows for others to be able to find information when you are not around.
15. **Empower Parents and Other Parishioners** – No one person can do this alone. Get help as soon as possible. Invite and engage parents and others in developing a shared ministry from the very beginning. Let it be known that it is not only your hope, but also your expectation that this ministry is shared among the faithful that make up the community. Then proceed to train them and walk with them as they discover the joys and challenges of this shared team style of ministry.
16. **Seek Out the Wisdom of the Past** - Identify quickly those at each site who have previously been involved in this particular ministry and seek ways to engage them in its continuation, even though the committee structure or components of the ministry may look different.
17. **Share the Good, the Bad and the Ugly** – Vital and honest communication is critical. Have a regular way of updating sites as to the progress of the transition as well as obstacles and roadblocks that arise. Keep the community informed of all progress and what the current needs are at this particular stage of growth. The more information that's given publicly will help keep the grapevine of gossip trimmed to a manageable size.
18. **Take Advantage of Regional and Diocesan Resources, Programs and Support** – there is plenty of help and networking available, don't go it alone (you'll never make it!). In addition, diocesan and regional programs offer an easy "plug n' play" option for some ministry areas where the work of planning an event is already done so you can begin to involve youth and adults as soon as possible, with little effort. In addition, seek out other multi-parish groups and see what has and has not worked with them.

Helpful Administrative Hints on Multi-Parish/Site Work

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1. **Preservation of Self:** This can be a two-edged sword, as you need to be responsible and accountable for the leadership of the parish(es), however, do it in a way that will keep you energized and focused. Prayer, both private and communal is essential in building the groundwork for a balanced lifestyle. Join a support group with colleagues and make this time with them not only social and prayerful, but one that is challenging for one another. Listen with your heart and head as you manage a multitude of issues, and don't assume that you must live up to your predecessor's successes. Be yourself, and make sure you are taking care of yourself mentally, physically (exercise is crucial) and spiritually.
2. **Time Management:** Learning, utilizing and development of the technology available to us is vital for managing the multiple tasks. Use of e-mail, voice mail, cell phones, pagers, etc. may seem like this is in conflict with the self preservation piece, but will ultimately keep you organized and enable you to communicate with more people in a timely manner. Don't forget that each of these items do have "shut off" buttons – they are not meant to be tools in order to work twenty-four hours a day, rather they are tools to help you manage. If you need help in learning computer skills contact the Diocese ITT Department.
3. **Discernment for Change Takes Time:** Learn about the culture of each community and from other Pastoral Leaders who have experienced the multi-parish issues and processes. Take time before instituting changes, and involve the community as much as possible in discerning decisions. However, do not let pockets of competing agendas get in the way of responsible decision-making. It is best to take the time to observe before jumping into personal agendas.
4. **Staffing:** Staff issues can be a curse or a blessing depending on expectations and clear communications. Observe how the staff interacts with each other – sometimes leadership changes affect the staff's positions of authority and job descriptions. Some staff members may have been in place for years but with new multi-parish job descriptions, others may have worked outside of their job descriptions and have to find their way, just like you. Meet with the staff on a regular basis and empower them to do their job as outlined in their job description (which should be accurate and up to date). Build into the workweek a time to socialize and pray together. Find out very early the duties each staff person has been doing and the hours they work. Affirm the staff for the good work they do, and encourage/challenge them to develop and grow. Include the support staff in decisions and activities, including staff meetings. Poor work performance that is not addressed can cause low morale and lower productivity on the part of others. Work with the Human Resources office to work out discipline, personality or performance issues with any individual staff person.

5. **Staff Changes:** Any changes to staffing for multi-parishes needs to be well thought out and communicated clearly and often. Depending on the community, this can be done in a variety of ways, but ultimately the needs of the community need to drive the staff positions and duties. Transitions to a different ministry can be effective and productive if communication is constant and input from staff requested. Bring in a consultant to assist with this dialog.

6. **Communication:** Communication to the community is essential for changes, with the goal to work as one entity. Effective tools for good communication are the use of one bulletin, establishing vision, which includes realistic financial resources, honesty with positive messages. Listening sessions give the community an opportunity to hear each other and to be heard by you. Show enthusiasm, stability in terms of leadership and continuity and respect for the culture and make-up of the individual community. Preserving a parish identity while building a new identity can be exciting and life giving, if it is done with a positive attitude.

7. **Develop Community:** Welcoming and evangelizing all who gather to worship together and share in common values is essential as the communities build a future together. Establish celebrations or social events that will encourage communities to share their individualism and cultures.

8. **Planning for the Future:** This is a process, not something that can be done overnight or in a few weeks. You need to recognize and respect the different stages of transition and how people react to change. Find a common ground to begin with through dialog and build consensus and change from there. Set a pastoral plan process in terms of the life cycle of the Church and organizations. Pastoral care needs to be highly visible throughout the process. Understand that you will not meet everyone's expectations, nor will everyone be happy initially or when decisions are made. Staying in touch with these people, encouraging them along the way will eventually bring a positive outcome.