

Why the Merger?

Our two Catholic parishes merged on July 1, 2015 to become one parish. Now we distinguish between the two *churches* and the one *parish* (we use these two words carefully). The two churches are the buildings (they keep their old names--St. Mary Magdalene *Church* in Johnson Creek and St. Francis Xavier *Church* in Lake Mills. The one parish is the community of people (St. Gabriel *Parish*).

Since 1946, the priest who lived at the rectory in Lake Mills served both parishes. They merged because of the need to use resources more efficiently in the Catholic Diocese of Madison. This includes both human and material resources. Another benefit of the merger is that it furthers the vision that the Catholic Church extends beyond the church where a person worships regularly. God wants us to recognize, appreciate, and, when possible, share life with sisters and brothers who might live beyond the borders of our own church.

The process started in 2006 when the Diocese encouraged all parishes to participate in strategic planning, acknowledging that the number of priests in the Diocese had been in decline for several years and the prediction was that it would continue declining. Each parish organized a core committee for the Guided by the Spirit process. There were four churches in our cluster that coordinated in the planning: Johnson Creek, Lake Mills, Waterloo, and Marshall. It is possible that these four churches would work together more closely in the future.

The Madison Diocese was the last of the five dioceses in the state of Wisconsin to undergo parish mergers. Our neighboring diocese in Milwaukee was the first, merging parishes back in the 1980s.

There were several mergers in Jefferson County that preceded ours: Holy Family Parish in Waterloo and Marshall (2012), and St. Francis of Assisi Parish formed by two parishes in Jefferson (2014).