



# St. John Paul II Parish Family

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## Video #2 – Key Distinctions – Parishes and Churches

When communicating, it is so important that we make sure we are “speaking the same language.” We’ve all experienced the frustration and misunderstandings that can occur when we “talk past one another” in a conversation, or when we use the same words but mean different things. As we look at the process of canonical unification, it is essential that we clearly define the words “church” and “parish” so that we are all “speaking the same language” and aren’t misunderstanding each other.

So often, we can use the word “church” to refer to many different things. We could be referring to the Catholic Church as a whole, the Catholic Church in Rome, the church building where I attend Mass, or the people of God who worship together either in our local church building or throughout the world. The same is true with the word “parish” which, depending on the context, can refer to the church building where I attend Mass, the parish offices, or the group of people who are registered at a parish and worship together. With all of these different possible meanings of these two words, we can see how conversation could get very confusing if we aren’t all using these words in the same way.

Fortunately, Canon Law gives clear definitions to these terms. The Code of Canon Law says that “A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful... whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor... under the authority of the diocesan bishop” (c. 515 §1) and that a “parish possesses juridic personality” (c. 515 §3). When we say that something “possesses juridic personality,” it essentially means that it can own and sell property. So, a parish is a kind of “corporation” that is made up of parishioners and directed by a pastor. The key thing to know here is that a parish is a corporate reality. A church, on the other hand, is “a sacred building designated for divine worship” (c. 1214). In other words, the church is the building itself.

With all of this in mind, we can see that each of our parishes owns the church building. So OLGH parish owns the OLGH church building, SH parish owns the SH church building, and SM parish owns the SM church building.

This matters because when we talk about becoming one canonical parish, we are not saying anything about any of the church buildings or campuses. The biggest change that would come with the canonical unification is that, instead of three parishes (corporate entities) owning each of the church buildings and properties, there would be one parish (corporate entity) owning all of the church buildings and properties. So, after the canonical unification, St. John Paul II parish would own the OLGH church, the SH church, and the SM church.

We will later discuss the fact that the canonical unification will not lead to the closing of any of our church buildings. For now, it is enough to know that a parish is a corporate reality and a church is the building itself.