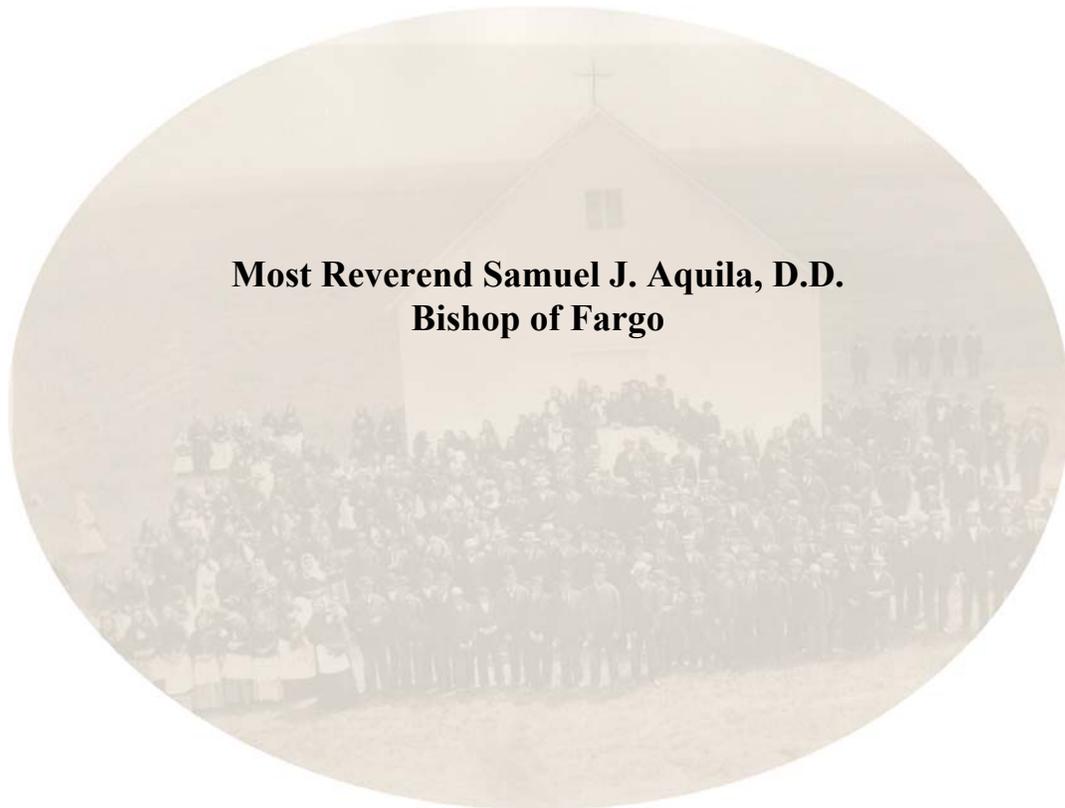


Bringing New Life to Our Faith Communities:

A Pastoral Letter on the Reorganization of Parishes in the Diocese of Fargo



**Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, D.D.
Bishop of Fargo**

**Memorial of Saint Bernard, Abbot and Doctor of the Church
August 20, 2004**



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I. Introduction

1. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as I present to you this pastoral letter on the Memorial of Saint Bernard, August 20, 2004, I reflect upon how the faithful of the Diocese of Fargo have, in many ways, followed in the footsteps of this exemplary saint. When Saint Bernard presented himself for consideration as a future member of the Cistercian Order, he did not come alone. He had evangelized his friends and family, so that 30 young men presented themselves together with him. Soon after his profession, his superior, seeing the potential of young Bernard, sent him with 12 monks to found a new monastery, which later became known as the Abbey of Clairvaux. Throughout his life, he founded several other monasteries and traveled many miles to teach others about God, to whom he had devoted his life.
2. Our ancestors, too, evangelized, drawing people into the Catholic Church through their example and their zeal to know more about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As their numbers grew, they moved into new areas and founded numerous Catholic churches across the eastern half of North Dakota. Challenge and change were parts of their every-day lives as they tackled the elements of this unpredictable climate, toiled long hours to provide for their families and joined together in work and prayer to meet the needs of their growing communities.
3. During these past 12 months, we as a Diocese have come together to determine the best way to meet the challenges presented to us today in sharing the Gospel as Catholics in eastern North Dakota. Declining and shifting population has left many of our parishes with too few members to maintain vital and viable parish communities. The population changes which have taken place during the past 50 years have not been mirrored by changes in our parish structures. Some of the parishes in their self-studies realized how dramatically their parish population has shifted over the decades and others have been surprised by the median age of their communities. This self-study has shown how we have worked to hold on to the structure of the past despite the realities of the present. This process has also shown that now is the time to act in accord with our present situation.
4. I am grateful to everyone who has participated in this year-long reflection. After consultation at the parish and Deanery levels, with the Deans, the Presbyteral

Council, the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the College of Consultors, it is now my responsibility as your bishop to make the final decisions regarding structural changes in the Diocese, including the consolidation of parishes and the change in Deanery boundaries. These changes will provide the assurance that, for the immediate future, parishes and new parish clusters will be able to provide religious education for people of all ages, actively participate in works of charity and celebrate the liturgy with sufficient numbers of the faithful participating in the celebration of the Mass.

5. The burden of structural change is not light, nor is it limited in scope. I recognize that not everyone will agree with these decisions, even with the broad consultation that occurred. Consolidation of parishes, changes in clusters, and the reorganization of structures from the parish to the diocesan level affect each one of us. We have experienced that effect in our small towns as our rural schools have consolidated and Main Street businesses have closed their doors. We have experienced that effect in our growing cities as the natural beauty of our land has been replaced with rows upon rows of homes and traffic filled roadways. For many of us, what we once knew exists no more and we mourn that loss.
6. At the same time, we remember and rejoice in the goodness of the Lord. As our ancestors struggled to build and sustain our parishes, God strengthened them. As we struggle today to depart from what is familiar and embrace the new opportunities change provides, God will strengthen us. In the second reading for Sunday, August 22, 2004, from Hebrews 12:7, we hear, “Endure your trials as ‘discipline’; God treats you as sons.” We would not be true sons and daughters of God if we did not endure the discipline of trials. We could never understand His complete and unconditional love for us if we did not experience a portion of the suffering Jesus endured for our salvation. God is good and if we turn to Him in this time of transition He will provide us the graces needed to embrace these changes.

II. Basis for structural change

7. On July 25, 2003, I issued the pastoral letter, *Communities of the Christian Faithful: A Pastoral Letter on Parish Life in the Diocese of Fargo*, asking each

parish to gather input from its members regarding the parish's "organizational effectiveness in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the living out of our Catholic faith." Through this year-long period of prayer, study and reflection on our parish structures, we have learned a great deal about the state of rural life in the Diocese of Fargo. We reviewed how we serve the faithful of the Diocese and what we can do to improve upon religious education for people of all ages, service to the poor and needy, and the involvement of the faithful in the liturgy. We took into account and verified the information shared through the pastoral letter regarding population trends and the median age of those living within our Diocese. We have also studied and made recommendations on the distribution of priests, the clustering of parishes, the arrangement of the Deaneries and the consolidation of parishes with neighboring parishes. The discussions have been thorough, at times difficult, emotional and enlightening.

8. Discussions began at the parish level. Information was gathered from parish members through surveys and parish meetings. Recommendations of the parishes came to the Deanery level through the pastors and were discussed at Deanery meetings. The Deans who represent the nine Deaneries of the Diocese of Fargo reviewed the recommendations, provided their input and presented recommendations to me. I have received and reviewed the input gathered through this process of consultation and, through this pastoral letter, announce my decisions regarding the structural changes which will be made within the Diocese of Fargo to ensure vital and vibrant parish communities and ministerial responsibilities which are reasonably sustainable by our priests.
9. In the appendices the decisions for each Deanery are stated. The decisions include the consolidation of 23 parishes by June 2005, one parish in 2006, and the review of and possible consolidation of an additional nine parishes by 2010. Some of the Church buildings will be designated as chapels for a five-year period. They may be used for the celebration of weddings, funerals, and special celebrations determined by the pastor of the parish, e.g. Mass on the feast day of the parish or on the date of the consecration of the building. The chapel will be overseen by the pastor and parish to which it is consolidated. After the five-year period, the continued use of the chapel will be reviewed. Due, too, to the ongoing changes in

- the population of our rural towns, consolidations of schools, and the closure of businesses, there will be a review of all parishes in terms of their vitality and vibrancy every five years. While some of the parishes are sustainable today, what their future will be in five, 10, or 20 years is unknown. Hence it becomes important to review on a regular basis the state of our parishes.
10. In the new parish clusters, the pastor will need to determine how best to handle religious education for the young people. In some of the clusters, it will be feasible to consolidate the religious education programs. In other parish clusters, due to distance, it may be necessary to maintain a religious education program in each parish. I do want to remind parents of their responsibility to see to the religious formation of their children. God has given to you the gift of your children and He entrusts to you their formation in our Catholic faith. As you received the faith by the word and example of your parents, so, too, will you by your word and example influence the faith of your children.
 11. In two conversations I had with parish members I was deeply edified in the sacrifices the faithful made to ensure their participation in Mass each Sunday. An older person shared with me how in the 1920s and 1930s his family would travel 10 miles on a horse-drawn sled in the winter time to attend Mass. The only time they stayed home was during blizzards. Another middle-aged man shared with me how his parents would drive their family 45 miles one way each Sunday to attend Mass at the nearest Catholic church. These examples show clearly the dedication and living out of our Catholic faith each of us is called to have today in this time of change. As Catholics we recognize the responsibility we have, out of love for God and in response to His omnipotent love for us, to actively participate each Sunday in the one Sacrifice of Christ, as we offer our lives to the Father, with, in and through Jesus Christ.

III. Conclusion

12. I am thankful to all the Catholics in the Diocese who took the time to provide input during this process, prayed that the recommendations and decisions be guided by the Holy Spirit, and trusted that God would provide for our spiritual needs through and after this time of transition. I extend my deepest gratitude to

the laity. You know your parishes and communities much better than I and you have helped me to understand them more clearly. Your objective and heartfelt counsel, provided to me through individual conversations and correspondence, as well as through the reports prepared by your parishes, have helped me to see parish life in our rural state in a new way. That broader view makes decisions of consolidation even more difficult for me as your bishop. If circumstances were different – if the population in our state had not been steadily declining these past few decades, if the main streets and schools of our small towns bustled with activity – my decisions could be different, too. We cannot continue to operate our parishes in their current structure, however, without recognizing the challenges facing our state and our communities. To be faithful stewards of the blessings God has bestowed upon us, we must use His gifts to the best of our ability. By joining together in our new, consolidated faith communities, we will bring new life to our parishes and will be presented with new opportunities to grow in our faith.

13. I am grateful to the pastors who provided leadership and guidance to the faithful, the Deans who dedicated many hours to tabulating, reporting and considering parish recommendations and to Father Joseph Goering, our Chancellor, who oversaw the process and supported the parishes throughout this past year. The time devoted by all of you helped me to see the needs of our parishes and the opportunities that change offers.

14. During this review process, one of our priests said that making decisions regarding the consolidations of parishes may be one of the more difficult things I do during my episcopacy. As I make the announcements through this pastoral letter, I find myself in agreement with him. The process has been good in that it has fostered discussion and allowed us to express our love and concern for our parishes and each other. Yet, it has been a painful process, too. We, and especially those of you whose parents and grandparents built the churches that no longer have enough members to be both vital and vibrant parishes, will mourn for the buildings in which we once worshiped. We recognize, too, that our faith is more than the buildings in which we worship. While there is real sadness in consolidation, the change also brings about new life for the parish into which

another is consolidated. I pray that those of you who will attend a new parish will bring with you the zeal of our ancestors, and the zeal of St. Bernard, to evangelize, to build upon the foundation of your new parish home, and to meet the challenges of change with faith in the goodness of God. I pray, also, that those who welcome new parishioners do so with warm hearts and Christian charity. For those affected by changes in clusters and Deanery boundaries, I pray that you will embrace the change as an opportunity to bond with one or more other parish communities. For those in our larger parishes, who are seemingly unaffected directly by these structural changes, I pray that you will strive to respond to the comments shared by your parish members and pray for your fellow Catholics throughout the Diocese.

15. With confidence in God, let us call upon Him in prayer to send the Holy Spirit to guide us through this time of transition. May we strive to mirror the faith of Saint Bernard who traveled many miles for God, bringing together people who would devote their lives to Him. Let us ask for Mary's intercession for the faithful who will move to new parish homes. May her prayers ease their sadness as they worship for the last time in their parish buildings and magnify the joy they will experience as they join with a new group of faithful Catholics, raising their voices together in praise of her Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. May we always remember the efforts of our ancestors who shared the Good News with the people of the Diocese of Fargo through our parishes, and may we follow in their footsteps as we work together to provide our children and grandchildren with an education in the faith that will sustain them for the challenges of the decades ahead.

16. Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Fargo on the Memorial of Saint Bernard, Abbot and Doctor of the Church, August 20, 2004.

†Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, D.D.
Bishop of Fargo

APPENDIX – SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Summary of Pastoral Planning Process based upon

Communities of the Christian Faithful

August 20, 2004

- All parishes within the Diocese of Fargo have completed a one-year self-study and recommendations about the faith life within their parishes. This focused primarily on the areas of liturgy, education, and charity
- Concurrent discussions took place at the level of the deanery, or geographic grouping of parishes
- Recommendations as to parish clusters, consolidation, deanery boundaries and specific parish improvements have been made by the individual parishes and have been communicated through the deans to Bishop Aquila
- Through the recommendation of the deans, in consultation with the college of consultors, and based upon the pastoral needs of the parishes and the Diocese of Fargo, decisions about consolidation and clustering have been made, and plans for future review of individual circumstances have been put in place
- Outcomes from the planning process
 - Recommendation for a new West Fargo parish
 - Elimination of parish clusters crossing deanery boundaries
 - Parish clusters arranged to more evenly serve the population of the diocese
 - 23 parishes consolidate with other parishes to form more viable parishes by the end of June 2005
 - 1 parish will consolidate in 2006
 - A plan is set in place to further review and/or consolidate 9 additional parishes by 2010.

- Statistics at the beginning of the process
 - 159 parishes were active at the beginning of the process
 - The Diocese was divided into nine deaneries
 - Of the 159 active parishes there were:
 - 21 parishes operating by themselves alone
 - 30 clusters of two parishes
 - 20 clusters of three parishes
 - 3 clusters of four parishes
 - 1 cluster of 4+ parishes with multiple priests (Belcourt)

- Statistics after implementing decisions by the end of June 2005
 - 137 parishes will be active
 - The Diocese will be divided into seven deaneries
 - Of the 137 parishes there will be:
 - 19 parishes operating by themselves alone
 - 28 clusters of two parishes
 - 16 clusters of three parishes
 - 2 clusters of four parishes
 - 1 cluster of 4+ parishes with multiple priests (Belcourt)

- Statistics after implementing decisions by the end of 2010
 - 130 parishes will be active
 - The Diocese will still have seven deaneries
 - Of the 130 parishes there will be:
 - 21 parishes operating by themselves alone
 - 26 clusters of two parishes
 - 17 clusters of three parishes
 - 1 cluster of 4+ parishes with multiple priests (Belcourt)

2005 Deanery Structure – Diocese of Fargo

August 20, 2004

Summary

The number of deaneries is reduced from nine to seven. The clusters below are ordered within their deanery by total number of reported households.

Deanery I

- Wahpeton
- Lidgerwood-Geneseo-Cayuga
- Lamoure – Verona – Dickey
- Oakes – Forman
- Lisbon – Gwinner
- Hankinson
- Wyndmere – Milnor
- Enderlin – Sheldon – Fingal
- Mooreton – Mantador
- Fairmont + Carmel of Mary

Deanery II

- Nativity
- Holy Spirit
- Holy Cross
- St. Anthony
- Sts. Anne & Joachim
- Cathedral of St. Mary – Argusville (Deanery III)
- Blessed Sacrament
- Casselton – Buffalo
- St. Paul Newman Center
- Wild Rice – Kindred

Deanery III

- St. Michael
- Holy Family – Thompson
- St. Mary

- Larimore
- Hillsboro – Reynolds
- Mayville – Hunter
- Manvel + Altru Chaplaincy
- St. Thomas Newman Center

Deanery IV

- Devils Lake
- Grafton – Oakwood + migrant ministry
- Langdon – Nekoma – (Wales – Mount Carmel alternating)
- Minto – Warsaw + Maternity Home
- Park River – Vesleyville
- Walhalla – Neche
- Drayton – Pembina – St. Thomas
- Cavalier – Crystal
- Cando – Leeds (begins October 2004)
- St. Michael Indian Mission
- Munich – Starkweather
- Lakota – Michigan – Tolna
- Pisek – Lankin – Bechyne
- Fort Totten – Crow Hill – Tokio

Deanery V

- Harvey – Selz
- Bottineau – Westhope
- Anamoose – Orrin – Drake
- Velva – Karlsruhe

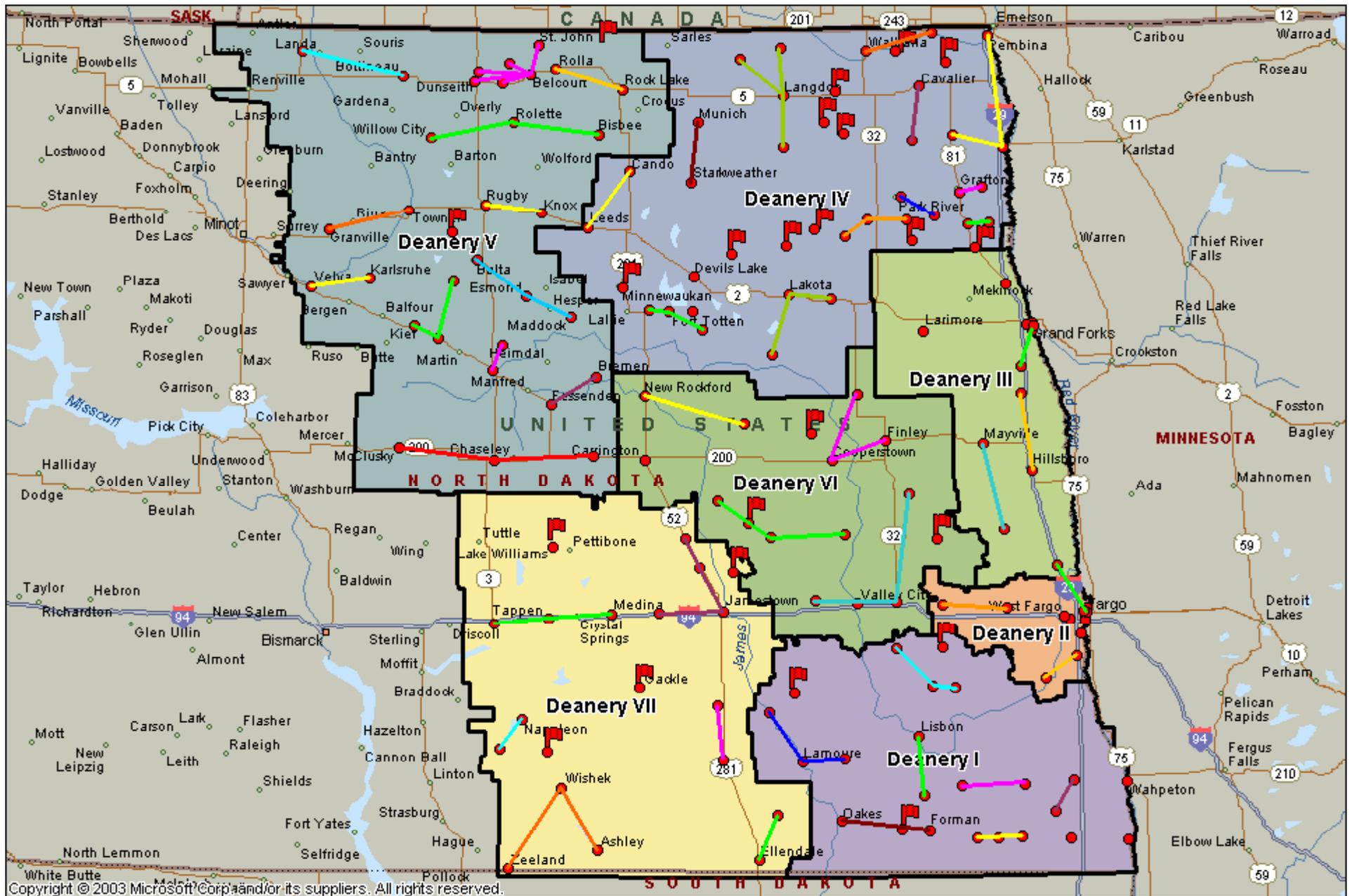
- Rolette – Willow City – Bisbee
- Towner – Granville
- Rolla – Rock Lake
- Reservation (6 parishes)
- Rugby – Knox
- Esmond – Maddock – Balta
- Sykeston – Hurdsfield – McClusky
- Fessenden – Bremen

Deanery VI

- Valley City
- Carrington
- New Rockford – McHenry
- Oriska – Hope – Sanborn
- Wimbledon – Dazey – Kensal
- Cooperstown – Aneta – Finley

Deanery VII

- Jamestown – Windsor – (Buchanan – Pingree alternating)
- Napoleon – Kintyre
- Edgeley – Nortonville
- Wishek – Zeeland – Ashley
- Steele – Tappen – Medina
- Ellendale – Fullerton



2005 Map of the Diocese of Fargo

Lines indicate the new parish clusters. Flags indicate those parishes which will consolidate with neighboring parishes by the end of June 2005.

Diocese of Fargo Consolidation Plan - by City

ParishCity	Parish Name	Parish consolidates to:	Time Frame	Available as chapel?	Reported Households	Year Established
Alice	St. Henry	Enderlin	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	29	1902
Ardoch	St. John the Baptist	Minto	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	30	1883
Bathgate	St. Anthony	Cavalier	August 2004	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	1883
Bremen	St. Joseph	Harvey	TBD (nxt 5yr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	19	1896
Brocket	St. Joseph	Lakota	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	22	1910
Buchanan	St. Margaret Mary Alacoque	Jamestown	TBD - alternate schedule review	<input type="checkbox"/>	17	1924
Burnstad	St. Clare	Napoleon	by June 2005	<input type="checkbox"/>	11	1915
Cogswell	Our Lady of Mercy	Forman	by June 2005	<input type="checkbox"/>	39	1903
Conway	St. Mark	Pisek	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	36	1884
Courtenay	St. Mary	Wimbledon	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	25	1913
Crary (rural Ruten)	St. Benedict	Devils Lake	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	26	1910
Fried	Sacred Heart	Jamestown	August 2004	<input type="checkbox"/>	37	1888
Fulda	St. Anselm	Rugby	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	19	1901
Gackle	St. Ann	Napoleon	by June 2005	<input type="checkbox"/>	19	1950
Granville	Our Lady of Perpetual Help	Towner	by 2009	<input type="checkbox"/>	25	1934
Hansboro	Sacred Heart	Rolla	June 2004*	<input type="checkbox"/>	0	1926
Hurdsfield	St. Patrick	Harvey	TBD (nxt 5yr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	18	1907
Jessie	St. Lawrence	Cooperstown	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	41	1888
Kintyre	St. Boniface	Napoleon	2006	<input type="checkbox"/>	25	1906
Lake Williams	Our Lady of the Lake	Steele	June 2004	<input type="checkbox"/>	13	1946

ParishCity	Parish Name	Parish consolidates to:	Time Frame	Available as chapel?	Reported Households	Year Established
LeRoy	St. Joseph	Walhalla	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	25	1873
Lomice	St. Catherine	Lakota	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	19	1916
Marion	St. Francis	LaMoure	by June 2005	<input type="checkbox"/>	11	1910
Milton	St. Clotilde	Langdon	June 2004	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	1893
Minnewaukan	St. James	Devils Lake	October 2004	<input type="checkbox"/>	44	1897
Mount Carmel	Our Lady of Mount Carmel	Langdon	TBD - alternate schedule review	<input type="checkbox"/>	25	1888
Olga	Our Lady of the Sacred Heart	Walhalla	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	23	1882
Orrin	Sacred Heart	Anamoose	TBD (nxt 5yr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	34	1903
Osnabrock	St. Joseph	Langdon	June 2004	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	1908
Page	St. James	Oriska	by June 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	23	1909
Pingree	St. Michael	Jamestown	TBD - alternate schedule review	<input type="checkbox"/>	21	1905
Selz	St. Anthony	Harvey	TBD (nxt 5yr)	<input type="checkbox"/>	64	1917
Wales	St. Michael	Langdon	TBD - alternate schedule review	<input type="checkbox"/>	29	1889

TBD - Timing to be determined later.

***The parish in Hansboro ceased to function in 1996. It is now formally consolidated to Rolla.**

Wales, Mt. Carmel, Buchanen and Pingree are alternating Mass schedules for the present. This arrangement will be reviewed at a later date.

Of the 28,593 households reporting in the Diocese, 798 are registered at parishes which are listed above. 521 households are involved in the consolidations ending in 2005.

Diocese of Fargo Consolidation Plan - by Date

TimeFrame	ParishCity	Parish Name	Consolidates to:	Chapel (5yr)	Reported Households	Year Established
June 2004*	Hansboro	Sacred Heart	Rolla	<input type="checkbox"/>	0	1926
June 2004	Lake Williams	Our Lady of the Lake	Steele	<input type="checkbox"/>	13	1946
June 2004	Milton	St. Clotilde	Langdon	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	1893
June 2004	Osnabrock	St. Joseph	Langdon	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	1908
August 2004	Bathgate	St. Anthony	Cavalier	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	1883
August 2004	Fried	Sacred Heart	Jamestown	<input type="checkbox"/>	37	1888
October 2004	Minnewaukan	St. James	Devils Lake	<input type="checkbox"/>	44	1897
by June 2005	Alice	St. Henry	Enderlin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	29	1902
by June 2005	Ardoch	St. John the Baptist	Minto	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	30	1883
by June 2005	Brocket	St. Joseph	Lakota	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	22	1910
by June 2005	Burnstad	St. Clare	Napoleon	<input type="checkbox"/>	11	1915
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by June 2005	Fulda	St. Anselm	Rugby	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	19	1901
by June 2005	Gackle	St. Ann	Napoleon	<input type="checkbox"/>	19	1950
by June 2005	Jessie	St. Lawrence	Cooperstown	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	41	1888
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2006	Kintyre	St. Boniface	Napoleon	<input type="checkbox"/>	25	1906
by 2009	Granville	Our Lady of Perpetual Help	Towner	<input type="checkbox"/>	25	1934
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TBD (nxt 5yr)	Hurdsfield	St. Patrick	Harvey	<input type="checkbox"/>	18	1907
TBD (nxt 5yr)	Orrin	Sacred Heart	Anamoose	<input type="checkbox"/>	34	1903
TBD (nxt 5yr)	Selz	St. Anthony	Harvey	<input type="checkbox"/>	64	1917
TBD - alternate schedule review	Buchanan	St. Margaret Mary Alacoque	Jamestown	<input type="checkbox"/>	17	1924
TBD - alternate schedule review	Mount Carmel	Our Lady of Mount Carmel	Langdon	<input type="checkbox"/>	25	1888
TBD - alternate schedule review	Pingree	St. Michael	Jamestown	<input type="checkbox"/>	21	1905
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Proposed 2010 Deanery Structure – Diocese of Fargo

August 20, 2004

Summary

The number of deaneries is reduced from nine to seven. The clusters below are ordered within their deanery by total number of reported households.

Deanery I

- Wahpeton + Carmel of Mary
- Lidgerwood-Geneseo-Cayuga
- Hankinson - Fairmont
- Lamoure – Verona – Dickey
- Oakes – Forman
- Lisbon – Gwinner
- Wyndmere – Milnor
- Enderlin – Sheldon – Fingal
- Mooreton – Mantador

Deanery II

- Nativity
- Holy Spirit
- Holy Cross
- St. Anthony
- Sts. Anne & Joachim
- Cathedral of St. Mary
- Blessed Sacrament
- Casselton – Buffalo
- St. Paul Newman Center
- Wild Rice – Kindred
- New West Fargo Parish

Deanery III

- St. Michael
- Holy Family

- St. Mary
- Larimore
- Thompson – Reynolds
- Mayville – Hunter
- Hillsboro – Argusville
- Manvel + Altru Chaplaincy
- St. Thomas Newman Center

Deanery IV

- Devils Lake
- Grafton – Oakwood + migrant ministry
- Langdon – Nekoma – (Wales/Mount Carmel)
- Minto – Warsaw + Maternity Home
- Park River – Vesleyville
- Walhalla – Neche
- Drayton – Pembina – St. Thomas
- Cavalier – Crystal
- Cando – Leeds
- St. Michael Indian Mission
- Munich – Starkweather
- Lakota – Michigan – Tolna
- Pisek – Lankin – Bechyne
- Fort Totten – Crow Hill – Tokio

Deanery V

- Anamoose – Drake - McClusky
- Harvey – Fessenden
- Bottineau – Westhope
- Velva – Karlsruhe
- Rolette – Willow City – Bisbee
- Rolla – Rock Lake
- Towner
- Reservation (6 parishes)
- Rugby – Knox
- Esmond – Maddock – Balta

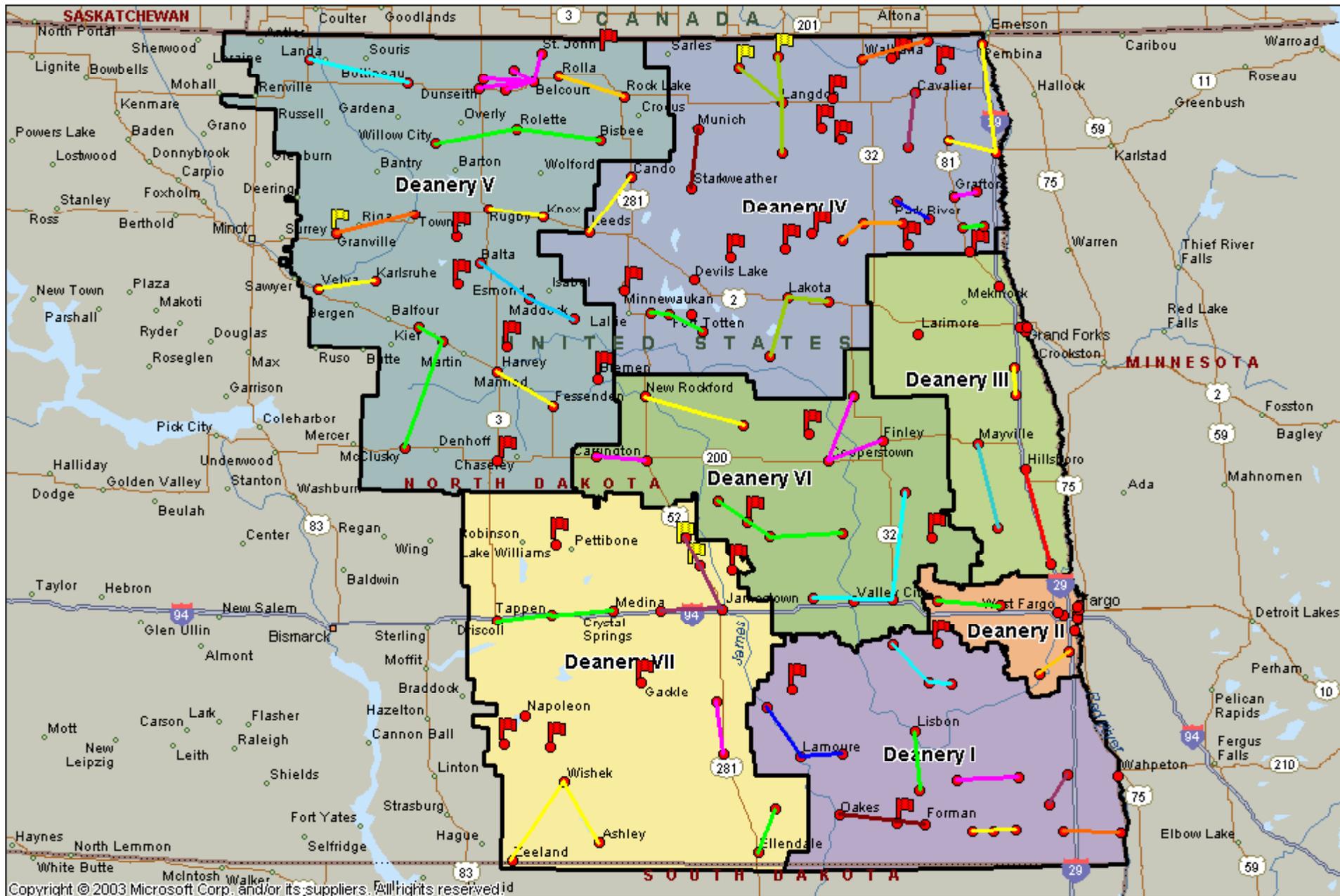
Deanery VI

- Valley City
- Carrington – Sykeston

- New Rockford – McHenry
- Oriska – Hope – Sanborn
- Wimbledon – Dazey – Kensal
- Cooperstown – Aneta – Finley

Deanery VII

- Jamestown – Windsor –
(Buchanan/Pingree)
- Napoleon
- Edgeley – Nortonville
- Wishek – Zeeland – Ashley
- Steele – Tappen – Medina
- Ellendale – Fullerton



Proposed 2010 Map of the Diocese of Fargo

Lines indicate the new parish clusters. Yellow flags are parishes specified for review and possible consolidation. Red flags are parishes which have already consolidated.