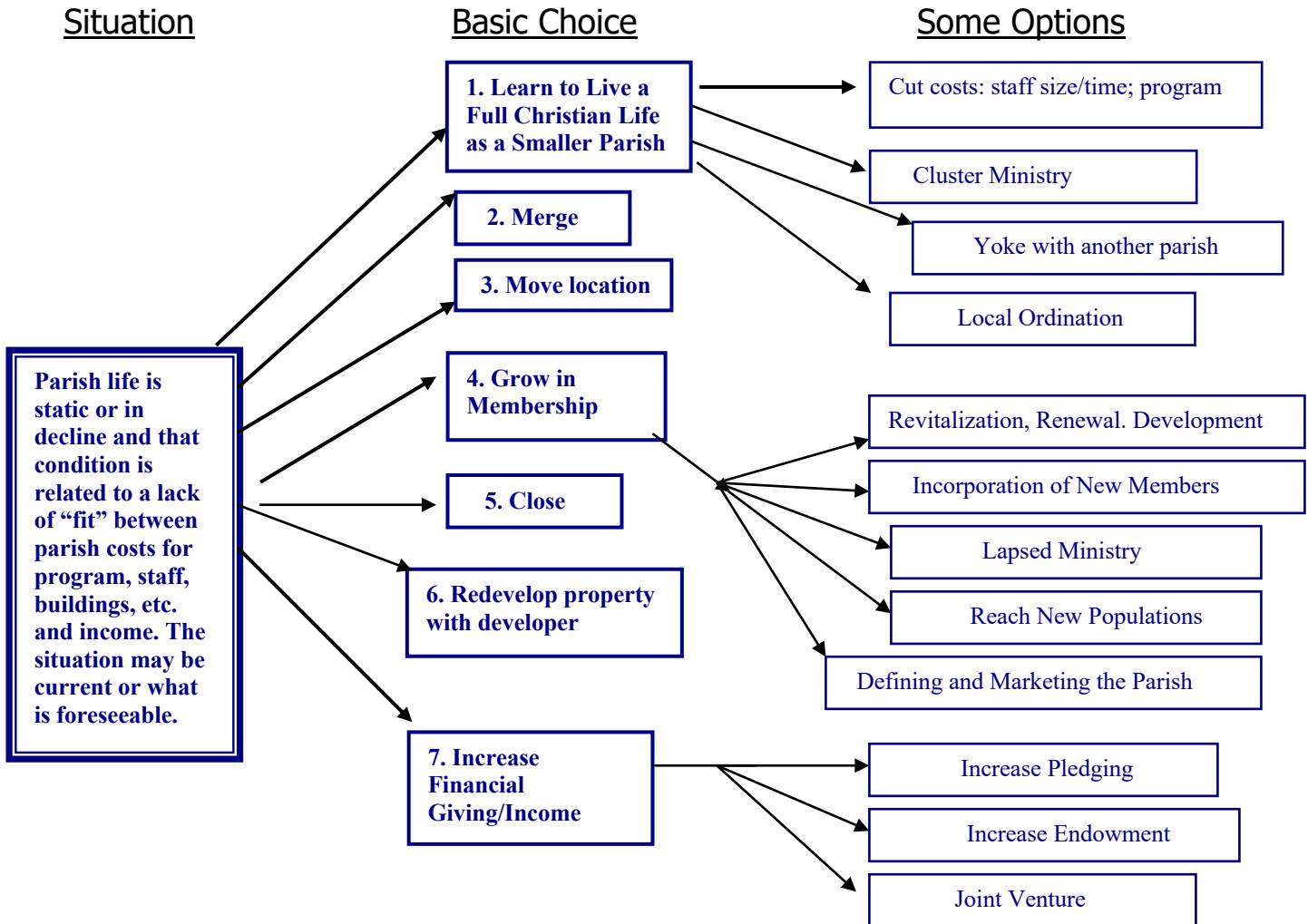


Parish Options

With notes on the Basic Choice

When parishes are static or in decline (see Parish Life Cycle) they may face choices about whether to “downsize” structures and programs or to attempt to increase in size. This diagram offers the standard options available in such a situation. Parish leaders can use the diagram to explore the choices before them and add, revise and drop options. The task is to adapt in a way where you maintain the parish’s identity and integrity. You create a new arrangement that allows you to be viable and vital for a number of years.



In exploring options the parish may want to consider:

1. What are our strengths? How might they serve us in pursuing selected options?
2. What new strengths do we need to develop?
3. How do we usually undermine ourselves; shoot ourselves in the foot? How might that impact this?
4. Are we prepared to act on some options more than others? Which ones? What can we do to expand our options – deal with anxieties, get information, etc.?
5. What is the level of internal commitment among leaders to the option we select? How to build commitment and ability to collaborate around the option – (develop inclusion/participation/acceptance of people and parish culture; increase participation in information flow; make decisions based on free choice and looking at alternatives rather than habit or pressure).

Parish Options Model: The Basic Choice

A parish in decline, or that may be moving toward decline, has seven basic possibilities for addressing the situation.

1. Learn to live a full Christian life as a smaller parish
The starting place is “to live a full Christian life.” So, the three purposes of a parish are appropriately engaged. The options available are usually: 1) cut costs, 2) create a cluster - three or more churches agree to share staff and program while maintaining their existing buildings and autonomy, 3) yoke – two parishes share a priest, 4) local ordination – a parishioner is ordained to preside at the Eucharist and other acts of worship, the person usually receives no financial compensation
2. Merge
An agreement to unite two parish churches into one parish church.
3. Move location
Sometimes done when a significant portion of the existing membership has moved into a different neighborhood.
4. Grow in membership
Usually, several strategies are engaged at the same time. Increasing those who visit and stay. Nurturing a life of prayer and worship that attracts people. Having a true way of saying who we are that also attracts others.
5. Close
Close in humility and dignity
6. Redevelop property with a developer
Shaping an agreement with a property developer that serves the long term survival and health of the parish. Using all of our property and having a new church building within a new housing/commercial building. Or using part of our property to build our endowment and secure our future.
7. Increase financial giving/income
A strategy to improve the parish’s financial security by building the endowment, increasing pledging and other income sources, or developing a venture with another organization that serves the parish and that business or nonprofit group.