



DECREE

IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN

An extinctive union of a public juridic person in virtue of c. 121 (CIC '83)

Considering the good of the whole Diocese of Joliet¹:

The Diocese of Joliet has been undergoing significant changes over the past years due to changing demographics which have affected the size and economics of the Diocese. The overall population of the Diocese has decreased nearly 18% since 2020, whereas its Catholic population has decreased by nearly 21% over the past twelve years. This has clearly had a negative impact on the sacramental life of the faithful in the Diocese of Joliet. Indeed, the statistics demonstrate this clearly: there are 50% fewer active diocesan priests today than there were in 1970; there are 65.4% fewer religious priests today than there were in 1970; there are 81.2% fewer seminarians today than there were in 1970; the ratio of active priests to parishioners in 2023 was 1 to 5,515, whereas in 1970 this ratio was 1 to 1,680. Additionally, there are fewer sacraments being celebrated: infant Baptisms have decreased by 50.2% since 2000; First Communions have decreased by 35.6% since 2000; Confirmations have decreased by 14.1% since 2010; and Catholic marriages have decreased by 58.2% since 1990.

In the city of Joliet, many of the parishes were initially established for national, linguistic or ethnic groups which no longer reside in the neighborhoods in which they had been founded. Today, many of these parishes are unable to financially support themselves. Overall, there is a decrease in Sunday collections and the aging buildings require tremendous financial resources to be maintained. The total cost of facility needs and all other parish expenses is unsustainable when compared with the combined funds on deposit of all parishes in the Joliet Deanery.

The city of Joliet, covering only 62 square miles of the 4,218 square miles of the entire Diocese of Joliet, contains twelve parishes and thirteen church buildings. This Decree concerns one parish located in the eastern territory of the city of Joliet, approximately 12 square miles, and an area in which four parishes are currently located. Indeed, the latter demonstrates that Christ's faithful have an ample choice of parishes in which they can receive the sacraments and journey towards holiness.

¹ *Letter from the Congregation for the Clergy and Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes and the Closure, Relegation and Alienation of Churches*, p. 215, 1h, Vatican City, 30 April 2013.

Reasons for modifying this particular parish (*ad rem*)²:

This Decree concerns **St. Bernard Parish, 1301 Sterling Ave., Joliet, IL 60432-1398**, established in 1921.

In the calendar year of 2022, the following sacramental statistics were recorded: zero baptisms; zero first communions; zero confirmations; zero marriages; nine funerals. Whereas, in the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 the average Sunday Mass attendance was 63 persons out of the 129 registered families, all within an average seating capacity of 450 persons. In this same fiscal year, the parish was operating on a financial deficit of nearly \$3,000 when considering its total expenses in relation to its Sunday offertory. Thus, it is clear that the capacity of the church to receive the faithful, as well as their ability to maintain it, far exceeds the faithful in attendance and, therefore, the sacraments being administered. Moreover, due to the continual decrease of attendance and increased death of its parishioners, the need for the sacraments has essentially disappeared.

A consultation with the parishioners and the pastor occurred according to can. 50, *CIC* '83. In this consultation, parishioners were informed that a restructuring of the parish would occur. Furthermore, possible canonical scenarios were provided to them, and they were also invited to submit alternative scenarios. Subsequently, a number of parishioners made their voices heard and submitted their opinions regarding possible canonical outcomes.

The principal motivation for modifying this parish is a concern for souls and the good of the faithful. This modification must be undertaken so as to serve the good of Christ's faithful, namely, to continue to provide them His sacraments. In order that Christ's faithful will continue to have access to the sacraments, on a regular and consistent basis, the modification of this parish will be in the form of an extinctive union (merger). Thus, St. Mary Magdalene Parish, being geographically nearby, having a steady number of administered sacraments in the deanery, being financially viable, having a similar cultural demographic, and having the capacity for the faithful to worship and receive the sacraments, the decision was made to unite St. Bernard Parish with St. Mary Magdalene Parish and St. Anthony Parish.

² Ibid.

THEREFORE, I, The Most Reverend Ronald A. Hicks, Bishop of the Diocese of Joliet-Illinois, in accord with the canons 121, 127 §1 & §3, 166, 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law (CIC '83), convened the Presbyteral Council of the Diocese of Joliet on November 20, 2024 at the Blanchette Catholic Center in Crest Hill Illinois. Having heard the Presbyteral Council at the same meeting, which voted unanimously in favor of all the points outlined in the proposal I, after invoking the Holy Spirit,

hereby decree the following:

1. Effective December 12, 2024, the abovementioned St. Bernard Parish will be extinguished as a separate juridic person and united to form one new juridic person, a territorial parish within the combined territories of St. Mary Magdalene Parish and St. Bernard parish, and called, *ad interim*, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Bernard and St. Anthony Parish;
2. Each and all the parishioners of St. Bernard Parish, along with the faithful domiciled within the new parish boundaries, will be parishioners of the new St. Mary Magdalene, St. Bernard and St. Anthony Parish;
3. The territory of the new St. Mary Magdalene, St. Bernard and St. Anthony Parish will be as depicted and described in the map and document attached to this decree;
4. Subject to the intention of the founders and donors, with due regard for acquired rights, the goods and patrimonial rights of St. Bernard Parish, together with any obligations with which they may be burdened, will be those of the new St. Mary Magdalene, St. Bernard and St. Anthony Parish;
5. The church of the extinguished St. Bernard Parish will be the church of the new St. Mary Magdalene, St. Bernard and St. Anthony Parish, and St. Mary Magdalene Church will be designated the parish church of the new parish;
6. The data compiled by the Restructuring Committee and presented to the parish and Presbyteral Council meeting of November 20, 2024 are attached to this decree;
7. The sacramental records and other materials relevant to historical research concerning the extinguished parish of St. Bernard will be collected and maintained at the St. Mary Magdalene Church campus, unless otherwise determined by the expert staff from the Archives of the Diocese of Joliet;
8. The notification of this decree shall be communicated to the pastor of St. Bernard Parish as well as to its parishioners. Notification will be given through the parish bulletin (or other suitable means) and the official website of the Diocese of Joliet.

Before hierarchical recourse may be taken against this decree, a petition to reconsider or amend the decree must be sent or delivered to me within ten (10) useful days from notification of the decree (CIC '83 cc. 1734; 1735; 1737) at the Blanchette Catholic Center, 16555 Weber Rd., Crest Hill, IL 60403.

Given on this 12th day of December 2024
Blanchette Catholic Center
Crest Hill, IL



+ Ronald A. Hicks

Most Reverend Ronald A. Hicks
Bishop of the Diocese of Joliet-in-Illinois

David Salvato

David Salvato, JCD
Chancellor