



**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 Joliet<sup>1</sup>:

1. Due to changing demographics in the geographic region of the Diocese of Joliet, the Catholic population has been undergoing significant changes over the past years. Consequently, this has had a negative impact on the sacramental life of the faithful in the Diocese. The statistics demonstrate the large decrease in priests: 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. The statistics also demonstrate that there are fewer sacraments being celebrated: infant Baptisms have decreased by 50.2% since 2000; First Communion 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.
2. The significant demographic shifts over the past years have also impacted the economics of the Diocese. Today, many parishes in the Diocese are unable to financially support themselves. Their aging church buildings require tremendous financial resources to be maintained, and in the United States there is no government assistance provided to help maintain them. For many parishes, the total cost to maintain their buildings together with all other parish expenses are impossible to sustain.
3. According to 2023 data, the region of South Will County and Grundy County consists of a total population of 37,489 persons, only a small portion of which are Catholics, and its overall projected growth is only 0.6% by the year 2028. This geographic region makes up approximately 675 square miles of the 4,218 square miles of the entire Diocese of Joliet, and there are currently nineteen (19) parishes serving Christ's faithful.

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<sup>1</sup> *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 juridic person (*ad rem*)<sup>2</sup>:

1. This Decree concerns **St. Lawrence O'Toole, 200 N. East Street, Essex, IL 60935**, established in 1880.
2. From its inception, St. Lawrence O'Toole was established as a Mission of St. Lawrence Parish in South Wilmington, having been allotted its own boundaries, and it effectively operated as a territorial parish through the twentieth century. On January 5, 1998, in order to provide for the spiritual welfare of the people living in Essex, Most Rev. Joseph L. Imesch decreed that St. Lawrence O'Toole be committed to the pastoral care of Immaculate Conception Parish in Braidwood. Whereas, on May 9, 2017, deemed "the best use of available priest personnel", Most Rev. R. Daniel Conlon decreed that St. Lawrence O'Toole be suppressed as a Mission of St. Lawrence Parish and thereby become a Chapel under the pastor of St. Lawrence Parish.
3. In the time that St. Lawrence O'Toole has been under the care of St. Lawrence Parish, the overall combined Mass attendance has decreased by 34%. In the calendar year of 2024, the combined sacramental statistics demonstrated the following: six (6) baptisms; eight (8) first communions; twenty-one (21) confirmations; zero (0) marriages and five (5) funerals.
4. According to can. 50, *CIC* '83, two consultations with the parishioners and the pastor of St. Lawrence Parish and St. Lawrence O'Toole occurred on October 12, 2024 and November 9, 2024. In these consultations, parishioners were informed that a restructuring of this juridic person could occur. Furthermore, possible canonical scenarios were provided to them, and they were invited to submit alternative scenarios. They were asked to provide feedback which was subsequently submitted to the committee who reviewed and discussed it.
5. The principal motivation for modifying this juridic person 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 juridic person will be in the form of an extinctive union (amalgamation). Thus, St. Lawrence Parish, South Wilmington, IL, being geographically nearby (4.8 miles), 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. Lawrence O'Toole with St. Lawrence Parish.

THEREFORE, I, The Most Reverend Ronald A. Hicks, Bishop of the Diocese of Joliet-in-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 February 13, 2025 at the Blanchette Catholic Center in Crest Hill Illinois. Having heard the Presbyteral Council at the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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 July 1, 2025, the abovementioned St. Lawrence O'Toole will be extinguished as a separate juridic person and united with St. Lawrence Parish, 135 Rice Street, South Wilmington, IL 60474, whereby the juridic person of St. Lawrence O'Toole will be extinguished and only the juridic person of St. Lawrence Parish will remain;
2. The territorial boundaries of the extinguished St. Lawrence O'Toole juridic person will be subsumed into the territorial boundaries of St. Lawrence Parish. The territory of St. Lawrence Parish will be as depicted in the map and written description;
3. Each and all the parishioners of St. Lawrence O'Toole, along with the faithful domiciled within the new parish boundaries, will be parishioners of St. Lawrence Parish;
4. Subject to the intention of the founders and donors, with due regard for acquired rights, the goods and patrimonial rights of St. Lawrence O'Toole, together with any obligations with which they may be burdened, will be those of the remaining parish, of St. Lawrence;
5. The church of the extinguished St. Lawrence O'Toole will be the church of St. Lawrence Parish, and St. Lawrence Parish Church will be designated the parish church of the parish;
6. The sacramental records and other materials relevant to historical research concerning the extinguished juridic person of St. Lawrence O'Toole will be collected and maintained at the St. Lawrence Parish church campus, unless otherwise determined by the expert staff from the Archives of the Diocese of Joliet;
7. The notification of this decree shall be communicated to the pastor of St. Lawrence O'Toole and St. Lawrence Parish as well as to their 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 14<sup>th</sup> day of February 2025  
Blanchette Catholic Center  
Crest Hill, IL



*+ Ronald A. Hicks*

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

*David Salvato*

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David Salvato, JCD  
Chancellor