



February 27, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With this letter, I am attaching the decree that merges All Saints Parish in Berlin, Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Green Lake, Holy Family Parish in Kingston and Markesan, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Princeton, and Saint James Parish in Neshkoro into a brand-new parish, Mater Dei.

This moment comes for your new parish following years of consultation and preparation with our Into the Deep Strategic Plan, begun back in the spring of 2022. It brings me great joy that your new parish is dedicated to Mary under her title as *Mater Dei*, the Holy Mother of God. This title reveals an amazing mystery of our faith, namely, that God was made flesh in the womb of a humble young woman from Nazareth. As Mary brought Jesus into the world so that He could carry out his mission of salvation and redemption, we too are called to bring Jesus into the world by our faithful witness. Giving witness to Christ in the world is one of my most sincere prayers for you and all the people of our Diocese that you can become faithful evangelists spreading the Good News of God's love. Making Christ known and loved by all people is at the root of why we undertook Into the Deep in the first place – it was so we could more effectively “make disciples” of Jesus Christ. This has been one of the most important parts of my episcopal ministry in the Diocese of Madison, and I pray that your new parish will truly serve as a center of holiness and missionary zeal leading people to Christ and His Church.

I am also happy to appoint Rev. Msgr. James Gunn as your pastor and to confirm Rev. Eric Nielsen and Rev. Anthony Thirumalareddy as your parochial vicars and Deacon Terry Larbes as parish deacon assigned to serve your new parish. This dedicated group of clergy, along with your parish staff, has already worked hard to prepare for this moment, and I fully trust that the Lord will guide their ministry in the weeks, months, and years to come.

Please know of my prayers for all of you, and I will look forward to celebrating this milestone when I come to install Msgr. Gunn as your pastor in the near future. May Mary, the Holy Mother of God, inspire us to continually seek Jesus and follow Him more closely!

In Christ,

✠ Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison

Enclosure

O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P

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Donaldus Iosephus
Miseratione Divina et Apostolicae Sedis Gratia
Episcopus Madisonensis

DECREE OF CANONICAL MERGER

**Uniting All Saints Parish, Our Lady of the Lake Parish,
Holy Family Parish, Saint John the Baptist Parish,
and Saint James Parish into**

MATER DEI PARISH

in Green Lake and Marquette Counties in the State of Wisconsin

Protocol No.: 025-2025

WHEREAS “the diocesan Bishop should be concerned to organize the arrangement of parishes in ways adapted to the care of souls, according to an inclusive and organic vision with wide pastoral outreach,” and “If the good of the faithful so requires, the Bishop should proceed, after consulting the diocesan presbyteral council, to alter territorial boundaries, to divide parishes that are too large, to merge small parishes, to establish new parishes or non-territorial centers for pastoral service in the community, or even to reorganize completely the arrangement of parishes within a particular city” (Directory *Apostolorum successores*, 214); and

WHEREAS “specific attention should be given to the following aspects, all of which form part of the model of parish life, thereby increasing pastoral effectiveness: Priestly collaboration...; Participation of the faithful (clerics, religious and laity)...; Parish associations...; [and] Centers of formation” (Ibid., 211); and

WHEREAS, however, the aforementioned aspects have suffered in the current general situation of the Diocese of Madison due to a shortage of clergy, difficulties in recruiting competent staff and volunteers to conduct necessary pastoral programming, and declining participation of the faithful in the sacramental and charitable activities of the Church for various reasons (e.g., increasing secularization, decreasing population in certain rural areas of the Diocese, the aftereffects of the Covid pandemic, etc.), prompting a comprehensive Diocesan strategic planning initiative

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undertaken in the spring of 2022, in consultation with a number of priests and competent lay faithful, to consider statistical data regarding demographics, Mass attendance, reception of the sacraments, numbers of youth in Catholic schools and faith formation programs, priest resources, and financial giving; and

WHEREAS the results of the strategic study were collated and shared first with priests, deacons, religious, and key lay people from August through October 2022 and then with the entire Diocese online and in a special edition of the *Catholic Herald*, the Diocesan newspaper, dated 10 November 2022, containing information in both English and Spanish; and

WHEREAS the print and online publications of the study included a proposed map restructuring the parishes of the Diocese and invited all interested parties to offer feedback, suggested changes, or questions during a period spanning from November 2022 through December 2022; and

WHEREAS the general factors prompting the strategic planning initiative were found to be operative in the specific circumstances of All Saints Parish in Berlin, Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Green Lake, Holy Family Parish in Kingston and Markesan, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Princeton, all located in Green Lake County, and Saint James Parish in Neshkoro, located in Marquette County, in a manner and degree suggesting that the pastoral care of the faithful within those parishes would be much more effectively and expediently achieved through the union of the respective parishes; and

WHEREAS the initial proposal suggested merging the aforementioned parishes given their similar cultural and spiritual patrimony and their history of working together in various prior linkages and mergers, and the feedback obtained through the process of consultation did not surface significant reasons to alter the proposed grouping of parishes; and

WHEREAS in March of 2023 the aforementioned parishes were grouped together to become “Pastorate 10,” both to coordinate pastoral action in the short term and further to discern the prudence of an eventual merger, and on 1 July 2023 the Reverend John Silva was named Parochial Administrator for each of the respective parishes of the pastorate; and

WHEREAS, in order to gather the necessary information and proofs concerning each proposed alteration of parish structures in the Into the Deep Strategic Plan in accord with canons 515 §2 and 50 *CIC*, the Reverend Tait Schroeder was mandated by the undersigned Bishop of Madison in a Decree dated 29 September 2023 (Prot. No. 127-2023) to collect and prepare information for the Presbyteral Council’s consultation; and

WHEREAS the Reverend Tait Schroeder met with the Parochial Administrator and the Parochial Vicars of the parishes of Pastorate 10 on 27 November 2023 at Saint John the Baptist Parish in Princeton to hear their opinions about the advisability of merging the parishes into a single parish; and

WHEREAS the Parochial Administrator and Parochial Vicars were in favor of merging the five parishes into a new parish as proposed; and

WHEREAS, on the same date at the same parish church, a meeting of key representatives from various bodies (pastoral councils, finance councils, civil trustees, school staff, etc.) from the parishes of Pastorate 10 was held to hear comments, concerns, and opinions pertaining to the potential merger of the parishes; and

WHEREAS the findings from these meetings were presented by the Reverend Tait Schroeder to the undersigned Bishop in consultation with the Presbyteral Council at a special session held on 14 December 2023; and

WHEREAS the Presbyteral Council recommended to the undersigned Bishop of Madison, in a unanimous consultative vote, that All Saints, Our Lady of the Lake, Holy Family, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint James Parishes should be merged as proposed; and

CONSIDERING the following specific reasons providing the required just cause for merging the two parishes into a new parish:

- 1) **Demographic changes and decline in attendance.** As with the majority of parishes in the Diocese, the aforementioned parishes have seen steady declines in the numbers of those participating in Sunday Masses and receiving the sacraments. At All Saints in 2005, there were 944 registered households in the parish and an average weekend Mass attendance of around 880 communicants. By 2021, there were only 694 registered households in the parish with an average weekend Mass attendance of around 550 communicants. Despite All Saints Parish being the largest of the parishes in the proposed merger and being located in the largest population center of the territory, the number of households and communicants declined by approximately one-third over those twenty years. In the other parishes in the larger population centers, namely Our Lady of the Lake in Green Lake and Saint John the Baptist in Princeton, the declines were more pronounced with the number of registered households in the parishes falling by about fifty (50) percent with Mass attendance decreasing by two-thirds or more in the period from 2005 to 2021. While some of the decline can be accounted for by an older population and concerns about the Covid pandemic, the trend shows a significant downturn in church membership and participation. As for Holy Family Parish in Kingston and Markesan and Saint James Parish in Neshkoro, the numbers of registered households in those parishes did not see such a steep decline in the past twenty years, but weekend Mass attendance has decreased by about half from an average of 235 communicants in 2005 to about 107 in 2021 at Holy Family Parish, and from around 400 weekend communicants in 2005 to approximately 265 in 2021 at Saint James in Neshkoro. This trend is also reflected in the number of baptisms and other sacraments celebrated in the parishes. In all the parishes of the pastorate, there were an average of 65 baptisms per year in the timeframe from 2000-2005. In 2021, there were a total of 24 baptisms in all the parishes, indicating a two-thirds decrease in the number of

people receiving the sacrament of baptism. While the numbers of those participating in the life of the church decreased over the last twenty years, this area is not expected to see a large increase in population in the near future to reverse these trends. The overall population growth in the area covered by these parishes will remain virtually flat through 2032. The population will remain stable as this area is a popular vacation and retirement area with the number of natural and man-made lakes that dot the territory. Thus, a merger of the parishes will allow for more focused efforts at evangelization with a single pastor and combined pastoral staff to reverse those trends in an area that will see a stable population for the next decade;

- 2) **Insufficiency of less extreme forms of collaboration.** During a previous period of diocesan pastoral planning conducted in 2005, Saint Mary Parish in Kingston and Saint Joseph Parish in Markesan were merged to become Holy Family Parish. While this merger brought together two parishes that had worked and collaborated together over the years, there was still a decrease in active participation in the life of the church over the last twenty years. All Saints Parish was itself the product of a 2001 merger that united Saint Stanislaus, Saint Michael, and Saint Joseph Parishes in the City of Berlin. This merger led to some positive efforts at uniting the community, especially through the construction of a new church for the parish, and more recently, a parish school. While this merger assisted the community, it still could not stem the greater cultural shifts that led to declines in participation. While the parishes of Saint John the Baptist and Saint James remained separate, they shared clergy and other resources for many years. However, this collaboration did not diminish the necessary administrative burdens required for running multiple parishes with a single pastor. Thus, while mergers, linkages, and other collaborative measures were taken, these efforts were not sufficient to stem the decline mentioned above without unified vision and leadership;
- 3) **Promotion and strengthening of the school and other administrative or consultative bodies.** While the parochial school at All Saints has a stable student body and draws from a wide area, especially given excitement over the completion of a new school building, the other parishes do not have their own Catholic schools. Saint John the Baptist in Princeton used to have a school; however, due to small enrollment and difficulties finding adequate staff, the school was closed. While some of the current parish communities have a higher percentage of older parishioners, the merger of the parishes will allow for children from all the former parishes to have the opportunity to enroll in a Catholic school. Additionally, being able to draw upon a larger parish population could potentially increase attendance at All Saints School, recognizing, however, that the large distances that the parish covers could deter some potential students from attending. In regards to administration and other parish bodies or groups, a larger pool of parishioners to serve will also enhance the various ministries at the churches. One of the areas that will be enhanced by the merger is making the Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils more robust and focusing on the needs of all the people of the new parish;
- 4) **More effective distribution of clergy to achieve better pastoral care.** Merging the parishes allows for the pastor to have the parochial care of a single parish as described in canon 526 §1 *CIC*, since the Diocese of Madison is currently experiencing an insufficient

number of priests fulfilling all of the requisites of canon 521 *CIC* required for being appointed as pastor. The parishes in question, while they cover a large geographical territory, have affinities and complementarities in their culture, demographics, spiritual patrimony, and other areas, such that their pastoral care could be more effectively provided within a single parish by a single pastor, assisted by one or more parochial vicars, than separately by one or more pastors who are overburdened with the care of several parishes or who perhaps fall short of the qualities that characterize a suitable pastor. Additionally, merging the parishes in question will reduce the administrative burdens on clergy and staff members that come with having two distinct parishes;

- 5) **More stable organizational structure in service of better evangelization.** Unifying these parishes will provide a stable organizational structure that will serve this area, ultimately fostering the good of souls by realigning resources for the sake of the essential mission of the Church to “go make disciples,” a central theme and desire of the undersigned’s episcopal ministry in the Diocese of Madison; and

OBSERVING the precepts of canons 515 §2 and 50 *CIC*, the undersigned Bishop of Madison hereby

DECREES


- 1) That All Saints Parish in Berlin, Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Green Lake, Holy Family Parish in Kingston and Markesan, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Princeton, all located in Green Lake County, and Saint James Parish in Neshkoro, located in Marquette County, are hereby joined by extinctive union to form Mater Dei Parish, a new parish having juridic personality in accord with canons 121 and 515 §3 *CIC*; and
- 2) That all of the goods and patrimonial rights of All Saints Parish, Our Lady of the Lake Parish, Holy Family Parish, Saint John the Baptist Parish, and Saint James Parish, along with the obligations proper to each, are hereby transferred to Mater Dei Parish, respecting the intention of donors and acquired rights for specific funds transferred to the new parish in accord with canon 121 *CIC*; and
- 3) That the territorial boundaries of Mater Dei Parish shall be as follows:
 - a. On the North: Starting at the intersection of County Highway Y and the Marquette/Waushara County border and then continuing east along the Marquette/Waushara County border to the Marquette/Green Lake/Waushara County border, then continuing east along the Green Lake/Waushara County border to the Green Lake/Waushara/Winnebago County border;
 - b. On the East: Starting at the Green Lake/Waushara/Winnebago County border and then continuing south along the Green Lake/Winnebago County border to the Green Lake/Winnebago/Fond du Lac County border, then continuing south along the Green Lake/Fond du Lac County border to the Green Lake/Fond du Lac/Dodge County border;
 - c. On the South: Starting at the Green Lake/Fond du Lac/Dodge County border and then continuing west along the Green Lake/Dodge County border to the Green

Lake/Dodge/Columbia County border, then continuing west along the Green Lake/Columbia County border to the Green Lake/Columbia/Marquette County border;

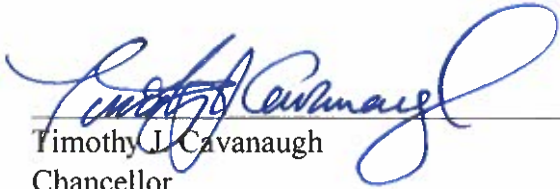
- d. On the West: Starting at the Green Lake/Columbia/Marquette County border and then continuing north along the Green Lake/Marquette County border to its intersection with State Highway 23, then continuing west along State Highway 23 to its intersection with County Highway N, then continuing north along County Highway N to its intersection with County Highway J, then continuing west along County Highway J to its intersection with County Highway Y, then continuing north along County Highway Y to its intersection with the Marquette/Waushara County border; and
- 4) That the patronal feast of the parish is to be observed on the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, which falls on January 1; and
- 5) That All Saints Church in Berlin is designated as the parochial church of Mater Dei Parish, while Our Lady of the Lake Church in Green Lake, Saint Mary Church in Kingston, Saint Joseph Church in Markesan, Saint John the Baptist Church in Princeton, and Saint James Church in Neshkoro shall serve as subsidiary churches where divine worship may take place to serve the spiritual needs of the faithful, retaining, however, the baptismal font, the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, and other such rights and uses as are proper to a parish church, insofar as the law allows and the pastor sees fit; and
- 6) That provision for the office of pastor, along with instructions about his taking possession of the new parish, as well as the assignment of other clergy to serve the parish, will be effected in separate decrees; and
- 7) That, in accord with canon 535 *CIC*, the sacramental registers of the former parishes of All Saints, Our Lady of the Lake, Holy Family, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint James shall be closed to any new entries and shall remain in the care and custody of Mater Dei Parish to be properly preserved and safeguarded at the new main parish office. A new set of sacramental records is to be established for Mater Dei Parish, and sacraments taking place in any of the churches of the parish are to be recorded in the new sacramental registers of Mater Dei Parish in accord with universal and diocesan norms; and
- 8) That Mater Dei Parish is to obtain its own ecclesiastical seal in accord with canon 535 §3 *CIC*; and
- 9) That a pastoral council and finance council are to be established within the new parish in accord with universal and diocesan norms as soon as possible following the effective date of this decree; and
- 10) That the Chancellor is to ensure that this decree, along with other ecclesiastical documents, information, and minutes of the Presbyteral Council concerning this extinctive union and modification of parish boundaries, as well as relevant documents pertaining to the civil incorporation of the new parish with the State of Wisconsin are carefully preserved in the Diocesan archive in accord with the norm of canons 486 and 491 §1 *CIC*, without prejudice to the norm of canon 535 §4 *CIC*; and
- 11) That this decree takes effect 1 March 2025; and

- 12) That the decree is to be notified on 1 March 2025 by its publication on the Vicar General's page of the Diocesan website and by posting a print copy or copies in each of the churches of the new parish, with reference made to the decree by an announcement at Masses held at the respective churches, in the bulletins, or by other suitable means; and
- 13) That any eventual recourse against this decree can be taken in accord with the norms of canons 1734 *CIC* and following.

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Madison on the 27th day of February in the Year of Our Lord 2025.



✠ Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison



Timothy J. Cavanaugh
Chancellor

SEAL