

Donaldus Iosephus
Miseratione Divina et Apostolicae Sedis Gratia
Episcopus Madisonensis

DECREE OF CANONICAL MERGER

**Uniting Saint Bernard Parish, Saint Francis Xavier Parish,
Saint Martin of Tours Parish, Saint Mary Parish,
and Saint Peter Parish into**

HOLY CROSS PARISH

in Dane County in the State of Wisconsin

Protocol No.: 004-2025

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

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

Diocese of Madison • 702 S. High Point Road • Suite 225 • Madison, WI 53719
Phone: 608-821-3002 • Fax: 608-440-2809 • Email: officeofbishop@madisondiocese.org

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 Saint Bernard Parish in Middleton, of Saint Francis Xavier Parish in Cross Plains, of Saint Martin of Tours Parish in Martinsville, of Saint Mary Parish in Pine Bluff, and of Saint Peter Parish in Ashton, 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 with neighboring parishes; and

WHEREAS the initial proposal suggested merging the aforementioned parishes, and the feedback obtained through the process of consultation did not lead to any modifications; and

WHEREAS in March of 2023 the parishes of Saint Bernard Parish in Middleton, Saint Francis Xavier Parish in Cross Plains, Saint Martin of Tours Parish in Martinsville, Saint Mary Parish in Pine Bluff, and Saint Peter Parish in Ashton were grouped together to become “Pastorate 19,” 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 Scott Jablonski 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 two Parochial Vicars of the parishes of Pastorate 19 on 16 November 2023 at Saint Francis Xavier Parish 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 given the relative geographical proximity of the churches and the possibility of working together more effectively in the future; and

WHEREAS, on the same date at the same parish church, a meeting of key representatives from the parishes of Pastorate 19 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 members of the Presbyteral Council had no negative comments about or objections towards the merger of the five parishes as proposed, and a consultative vote on merging the five parishes was unanimous in recommending the merger; and

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

- 1) **Demographic changes and decline in attendance.** Despite much of the territory of the new parish being rural farmland, there has been and will continue to be significant population growth on the west side of Madison, Middleton, and Cross Plains. The total population in the parish territory is expected to grow by nearly 12,000 people by the year 2032. Even with the increased population growth of the area, the number of those participating in the sacraments has dropped steadily over the last two decades. This decrease is seen most dramatically in the largest parishes. In 2005, Saint Bernard Parish had an average of 1500 communions per weekend. By 2021, that number was closer to 600 per weekend, a decline of approximately 60 percent. The numbers were similar in Cross Plains where 2005 weekend attendance hovered around 825 people, but the number in 2021 was cut by slightly more than 50 percent to around 400 people per weekend. While some of these declines can be attributed to the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic, they do show a sizeable decline in participation over a 20-year period in areas that are growing in total population. This decline in attendance is also mirrored in the reception of other sacraments. For example, Saint Bernard Parish went from an average of 55 baptisms per year in the early 2000s to just 16 in 2021. 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 has good potential for growth and connection with those who are not yet Catholic or have left the practice of the faith;
- 2) **Ineffective forms of prior collaboration.** During a previous period of diocesan pastoral planning conducted in 2005, teams from Saint Bernard Parish, Saint Francis Xavier Parish, Saint Martin of Tours Parish, and Saint Peter Parish recommended working more closely together on liturgical, sacramental, and catechetical efforts since they are in close physical

proximity and share a common public school district. There was discussion to potentially link or even merge some of the parishes within that cluster to deal with priest and personnel shortages. Despite these plans, all of the parishes remain separate to this day, although Saint Martin and Saint Peter have shared a pastor for many years. Without the impetus of unified leadership, the efforts to work together and collaborate on ministerial goals did not fully materialize. Similarly, representative members of Saint Mary in Pine Bluff considered working with another parish, Saint Ignatius in Mount Horeb, in the 2005 planning. Despite those plans, this linkage did not work well given some of the differences in culture between the two parishes. Thus, these plans to collaborate were not able to be realized given the lack of unified leadership under a single pastor, and desired staffing goals to have more effective outreach and catechesis did not happen on a wide scale;

- 3) **More effective outreach to youth.** The desire to better promote youth ministry within the territory can be accomplished more effectively through merging the parishes. As mentioned above, the majority of the territory is served primarily by a single public school district, although certain areas fall within other districts. Since the area is expected to continue to have an increasing youth population over the next ten years, allowing a single parish to serve the catechetical, spiritual, and sacramental needs of youth will be a great asset. Merging the parishes allows for combined resources to support priest and staff positions that are too difficult financially for any single parish to take on individually to provide for youth ministry;
- 4) **Providing access to Catholic school education.** While the public school system in the parish territory is robust, there is also a desire and need to provide for Catholic school education. Saint Bernard, Saint Martin of Tours, and Saint Mary have not had a Catholic parochial school for many decades. Merging into the new parish will provide access to a Catholic school for all of the people of the new parish. This option would be especially important since the Catholic school that was at Saint Peter in Ashton was closed at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year. While the school had fairly strong enrollment from many families living outside the parish boundaries, there were serious issues in the funding for the school as well as in recruiting and retaining school administration and teachers. Given the school's closure, having an option for a Catholic parochial school within the parish can now occur through the merger since Saint Francis Xavier has a strong, thriving school. Given a significant donation of land to the church in Cross Plains in the past, there would even be space to grow in the future should the school desire to expand or improve facilities. Thus, with this merger, all of the former parishes will have greater access to Catholic education;
- 5) **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, even beyond their geographical proximity,

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 five distinct parishes;

- 6) **More stable organizational structure in service of better evangelization.** Unifying these parishes will provide a stable organizational structure that will serve this growing 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 Saint Bernard Parish in Middleton, Saint Francis Xavier Parish in Cross Plains, Saint Martin of Tours Parish in Martinsville, Saint Mary Parish in Pine Bluff, and Saint Peter Parish in Ashton, all located in Dane County, are hereby joined by extinctive union to form Holy Cross 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 Saint Bernard Parish, Saint Francis Xavier Parish, Saint Martin of Tours Parish, Saint Mary Parish, and Saint Peter Parish, along with the obligations proper to each, are hereby transferred to Holy Cross 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 Holy Cross Parish shall be as follows:
 - a. On the North: Starting at the intersection of State Highway 19 and County Highway KP, then continuing east along State Highway 19 to its intersection with County Highway KP, then continuing north along County Highway KP to its intersection with Breunig Road, then continuing northeast along Breunig Road to its intersection with County Highway V, then continuing east along County Highway V to its intersection with Lodi Springfield Road, then continuing southeast along Lodi Springfield Road to its intersection with Woodland Drive, then continuing east along Woodland Drive to its intersection with Kingsley Road;
 - b. On the East: Starting at the intersection of Kingsley Road and Woodland Drive, then continuing south along Kingsley Road to its intersection with Meffert Road,

then continuing east along Meffert Road to its intersection with Pheasant Branch Road, then continuing south along Pheasant Branch Road to its intersection with Balzer Road, then continuing east along Balzer Road to its intersection with County Highway Q, then continuing north along County Highway Q to its intersection with Oncken Road, then continuing east along Oncken Road to its intersection with County Highway M, then continuing south along County Highway M to its intersection with Morris Court, then continuing east along Morris Court to its intersection with Batz Road, then continuing south in a line along Batz Road until reaching the Lake Mendota shoreline, then continuing southwest along the Lake Mendota shoreline to the northeastern edge of the McKenna Park Boathouse property, then continuing southeast in a straight line to the intersection of Lake Mendota Drive and Edgehill Drive, then continuing southeast along Edgehill Drive to its intersection with Topping Road, then continuing southeast along Topping Road to its intersection with Shorewood Boulevard, then continuing south along Shorewood Boulevard to its intersection with University Avenue;

- c. On the South: Starting at the intersection of University Avenue and Shorewood Boulevard, then continuing west along University Avenue to its intersection with Old Middleton Road, then continuing west along Old Middleton Road to its intersection with Old Sauk Road, then continuing west along Old Sauk Road to its intersection with U.S. Highway 12, then continuing south along U.S. Highway 12 to its intersection with Mineral Point Road, then continuing west along Mineral Point Road to its intersection with South Junction Road, then continuing south along South Junction Road to its intersection with South Pleasant View Road, then continuing south along South Pleasant View Road to its intersection with Mid Town Road, then continuing west along Mid Town Road to its intersection with Timber Lane, then continuing due west in a line to Coray Lane, then continuing northwest along Coray Lane to its intersection with County Highway J, then continuing south along County Highway J to its intersection with Klevenville-Riley Road, then continuing northwest along Klevenville-Riley Road to its intersection with County Highway P, then continuing north along County Highway P to its intersection with County Highway S, then continuing west along County Highway S to its intersection with Domini Road, then continuing west along Domini Road to its intersection with Sugar Valley Road, then continuing north to the end of Sugar Valley Road, then continuing in a straight northwesterly line to Red Hawk Lane, then continuing north along Red Hawk Lane to its intersection with County Highway J, then continuing west along County Highway J to its intersection with State Highway 78, then continuing south along State Highway 78 to its intersection with County Highway J, then continuing northwest along County Highway J to its intersection with County Highway JJ;
- d. On the West: Starting at the intersection of County Highway J and County Highway JJ, then continuing northeast along County Highway JJ to its intersection

with State Highway 78, then continuing north along State Highway 78 until it becomes Mills Street, then continuing north along Mills Street to its intersection with U.S. Highway 14, then continuing southeast along U.S. Highway 14 to its intersection with County Highway F, then continuing north along County Highway F to its intersection with Turkey Road, then continuing northeast along Turkey Road to its intersection with Spring Valley Road, then continuing east along Spring Valley Road to its intersection with County Highway KP, then continuing north along County Highway KP to its intersection with State Highway 19; and

- 4) That the patronal feast of the parish is to be observed on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which falls on September 14th; and
- 5) That Saint Francis Xavier Church in Cross Plains is designated as the parochial church of Holy Cross Parish, while Saint Bernard Church in Middleton, Saint Martin of Tours Church in Martinsville, Saint Mary Church in Pine Bluff, and Saint Peter Church in Ashton 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 Saint Bernard, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Martin of Tours, Saint Mary, and Saint Peter shall be closed to any new entries and shall remain in the care and custody of Holy Cross Parish to be properly preserved and safeguarded at the new main parish office. A new set of sacramental records is to be established for Holy Cross Parish, and sacraments taking place in any of the churches of the parish are to be recorded in the new sacramental registers of Holy Cross Parish in accord with universal and diocesan norms; and
- 8) That Holy Cross 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, as well as relevant documents pertaining to the civil incorporation of the new parish with the

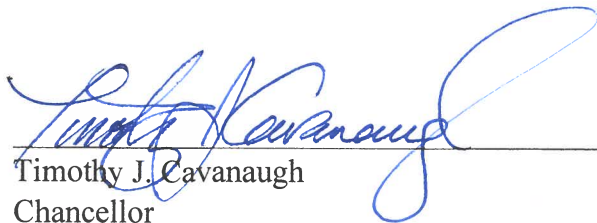
State of Wisconsin are carefully preserved in the Diocesan archive in accord with the norm of canons 486 and 491 §1 *CIC*, without prejudice to the norm of canon 535 §4 *CIC*; and

- 11) That this decree takes effect 1 February 2025; and
- 12) That the decree is to be notified on 1 February 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 28th day of January in the Year of Our Lord 2025, the liturgical Memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas.



✠ Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison



Timothy J. Cavanaugh
Chancellor

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