

Donaldus Iosephus
Miseratione Divina et Apostolicae Sedis Gratia
Episcopus Madisonensis

DECREE OF CANONICAL MERGER

**Uniting Corpus Christi Parish and
Queen of All Saints Parish into**

OUR LADY OF THE MOST BLESSED SACRAMENT PARISH

in Grant and Iowa Counties in the State of Wisconsin

Protocol No.: 009-2025

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 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

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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 Corpus Christi Parish serving Boscobel, Muscoda, Avoca, and Clyde, and of Queen of All Saints Parish serving Fennimore, Castle Rock, and Mount Hope, 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 with two additional parishes, namely, Saints Anthony and Philip Parish in Highland and Saint Thomas Parish in Montfort, but the feedback obtained through the process of consultation surfaced reasons to merge Saints Anthony and Philip Parish and Saint Thomas Parish with the parishes in Dodgeville and Mineral Point instead of with Corpus Christi and Queen of All Saints due to various geographical, historical, and cultural reasons; and

WHEREAS in March of 2023 the parishes of Corpus Christi Parish in Boscobel, Muscoda, Avoca, and Clyde, and Queen of All Saints Parish in Fennimore, Castle Rock, and Mount Hope were grouped together to become “Pastorate 4,” both to coordinate pastoral action in the short term and further to discern the prudence of an eventual merger, and the Reverend Father Carlos Reinoso, SJS, was retained as the Parochial Administrator for each of the respective parishes of the pastorate where he already had been serving; 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 Vicar of the parishes of Pastorate 4 on 20 October 2023 at Saint Mary’s Church in Fennimore to hear their opinions about the advisability of merging the parishes into a single parish; and

WHEREAS the Parochial Administrator and Parochial Vicar were in favor of merging the two parishes into a new parish as proposed given that there is a certain cohesion between the parishes since they have shared the same Parochial Administrator, and the same religious community has been serving both parishes for a number of years; and

WHEREAS, on the same date at the same church, a meeting of key representatives from the parishes of Pastorate 4 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 noted the sizeable distances between the churches of the proposed parish, but had no serious negative comments about or objections towards the merger of the two parishes as proposed, and a consultative vote on merging the two parishes was unanimous in recommending the merger; and

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

- 1) **Demographic changes and decline in attendance.** The rural areas served by these parishes have faced demographic challenges for some time. Unlike the large farm families of the past that drove population growth, changes in farming and attitudes towards children, combined with other economic factors, have led to smaller family units living in this area. Not only do these demographic challenges already make the current parochial structures unsuitable and untenable today, but this trend is expected to continue in the future. Demographic models predict that the population of this large territory will be stable with little to no growth in the next ten years. Thus, there will be fewer new people moving into this area. Additionally, the religious participation of those in the parish has declined steadily over the past twenty years. Average Mass attendance went from about 650 people per weekend in Fennimore in 2005 to around 200 people in 2021. This decrease in attendance was less dramatic in the other large population center of Boscobel, yet attendance went from 450 per weekend in the early 2000s to around 220 communicants per weekend in 2021 representing about a fifty percent decrease in attendance. These trends were similar, though perhaps somewhat less significant, in the smaller churches of the parishes in the same time frame. While these numbers can be explained in part by changes in parish culture when the parishes were entrusted to a religious society, they do also reflect the demographic reality that the active Catholic population is shrinking in this area.
- 2) **Insufficiency of less extreme forms of collaboration.** Both of the parishes being merged in this Decree have already undergone a merger as a result of a previous period of diocesan pastoral planning conducted in 2005. The merger of the parishes that created Corpus

Christi Parish was already suggested in that round of planning. This merger occurred in 2011. The merger resulting in the creation of Queen of All Saints Parish happened shortly after in 2012. Even though these mergers happened over ten years ago, they were not able to stem the decline in participation in the life of the Church. It is true that this new parish covers a sizeable geographic territory, but merging the two parishes now will hopefully encourage greater collaboration between the people of the parish while respecting the different communities that comprise the parish. The merger will also allow for a pooling of human and financial resources to better support the clergy, staff, and ministries present in the new parish;

- 3) **More effective outreach to youth.** The desire to better promote youth ministry within the parish can be accomplished more effectively through merging the parishes. In preparatory discussions about the potential merger of the parishes, a clear need surfaced in striving to engage children and young people in the life of the Church. While there are many public school districts that serve this wide territory that can create certain scheduling challenges, having combined resources and pastoral direction can foster a renewed emphasis on connecting with the youth to serve their catechetical, spiritual, and sacramental needs. 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) **More effective ministry to Hispanics.** While there are no large, concentrated populations of Spanish speakers in the territory, there is a significant number of Spanish speakers who work on the farms and other industries connected with the rural economy. Additionally, in the neighboring Diocese of La Crosse, which lies just across the Wisconsin River on the northern border of the parishes, there are other Hispanics who live and work in the area. The members of the religious society that was entrusted with the spiritual care of the parishes have fluency in Spanish and are thus well suited to provide Hispanic ministry in the area. The merger of the parish allows for better pastoral coordination throughout the area as well as financially supporting this ministry. It is hoped that the Hispanic community will continue to integrate and feel more at home in the new parish under the direction of a single pastor;
- 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 though they cover an extensive 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;

- 6) **More stable organizational structure in service of better evangelization.** Unifying these parishes will provide a stable organizational structure that will serve this rural 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

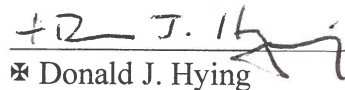
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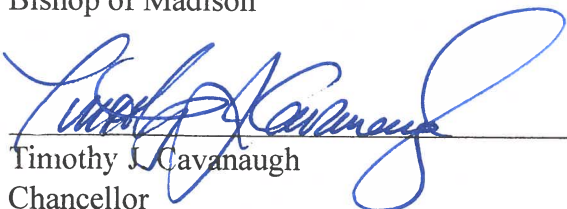
- 1) That Corpus Christi Parish in Boscobel, Muscoda, Avoca, and Clyde, located in Grant and Iowa Counties, and Queen of All Saints Parish in Fennimore, Castle Rock, and Mount Hope, located in Grant County, are hereby joined by extinctive union to form Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament Parish, a 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 Corpus Christi Parish and Queen of All Saints Parish, along with the obligations proper to each, are hereby transferred to Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament 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 Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament Parish shall be as follows:
 - a. On the North: Starting at the confluence of Millville Creek with the Wisconsin River, then continuing east along the Wisconsin River to the State Highways 130/133 bridge;
 - b. On the East: Starting at the State Highways 130/133 bridge, then continuing south on State Highway 130 to its intersection with Spring Valley Road, then continuing west along Spring Valley Road to its intersection with County Highway II, then continuing north along County Highway II to its intersection with County Highway I, then continuing west along County Highway I until it joins County Highway P, then continuing west along County Highways I and P until County Highway P splits from County Highway I, then continuing northwest along County Highway P to its intersection with State Highway 80, then continuing north along State Highway 80 to its intersection with Farmers Ridge Road, then continuing west along Farmers Ridge Road to its intersection with Hooks Road, then continuing northwest along Hooks Road until it ends and becomes Stanek Road, then continuing west along Stanek Road to its intersection with County Highway Q, then continuing southeast along County Highway Q to its intersection with Spring Valley Road, then continuing south along Spring Valley Road to its intersection with Bowers Road, then continuing northwest along Bowers Road to its intersection with County Highway G, then continuing south along County Highway G to its intersection with Cass Hallow Road, then continuing west along Cass Hallow Road to its intersection with Preston Road, then continuing southwest along Preston Road until it ends at

- U.S. Highway 18, then crossing U.S. Highway 18 and continuing south along Annaton Road to its intersection with County Highway E;
- c. On the South: Starting at the intersection of Annaton Road and County Highway E, then continuing west along County Highway E to its intersection with U.S. Highway 61, then continuing northwest along U.S. Highway 61 to its intersection with Rogers Road, then continuing west along Rogers Road to its intersection with Link Road, then continuing west along Link Road until it ends and becomes Mount Ridge Road, then continuing southwest along Mount Ridge Road to its intersection with Dyer Road, then continuing west along Dyer Road to its intersection with Borah Road, then continuing north along Borah Road to its intersection with Mount Zion Road, then continuing west along Mount Zion Road to its intersection with County Highway K, then continuing south along County Highway K to its intersection with Hilldale Road, then continuing west along Hilldale Road to its intersection with Badger Road, then continuing west along Badger Road to its intersection with South Ridge Road, then continuing north along South Ridge Road to its intersection with Wilson Hill Road, then continuing northwest along Wilson Hill Road to its intersection with County Highway J;
 - d. On the West: Starting at the intersection of Wilson Hill Road and County Highway J, then continuing north along County Highway J to its intersection with McCluskey Road, then continuing northwest along McCluskey Road to its intersection with Doc Brooks Road, then continuing north along Doc Brooks Road to its intersection with U.S. Highway 18, then continuing east along U.S. Highway 18 to its intersection with Clark Road, then continuing north along Clark Road until it ends and becomes Millville Hollow Road, then continuing northwest along Millville Hollow Road to its intersection with County Highway C, then continuing northwest along County Highway C to its intersection with Millville Creek, then continuing northwest along Millville Creek to its confluence with the Wisconsin River; and
- 4) That the patronal feast of the parish is to be observed on the Optional Memorial of Our Lady of Fatima, also celebrated by the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament as the day on which it honors Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament, which falls on May 13th, and should be celebrated in the churches of the parish with the rank of Feast in accord with number 52, c) of the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar*, ranking at number 8, e) on the *Table of Liturgical Days*; and
 - 5) That Immaculate Conception Church in Boscobel is designated as the parochial church of Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament Parish, while Saint John the Baptist Church in Muscoda, Saint Joseph Church in Avoca, Saint Malachy Church in Clyde, Saint Mary Church in Fennimore, Saint John Nepomuc Church in Castle Rock, and Saint Lawrence O'Toole Church in Mount Hope 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 Corpus Christi and Queen of All Saints shall be closed to any new entries and shall remain in the care and custody of Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament Parish to be properly preserved and safeguarded at the new main parish office. A new set of sacramental records is to be established for Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament Parish, and sacraments taking place in any of the churches of the parish are to be recorded in the new sacramental registers of Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament Parish in accord with universal and diocesan norms; and
- 8) That Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament 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 30th day of January in the Year of Our Lord 2025.


✠ Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison


Timothy J. Cavanaugh
Chancellor

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