



May 31, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With this letter, I am attaching the decree that merges Christ the King Parish in McFarland, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Monona, and Saint Patrick Parish in Cottage Grove into a brand-new parish, Stella Maris.

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 the title Stella Maris, Star of the Sea, and that it becomes a reality on the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary is a guiding light that leads all of us to her Son, Jesus, especially during difficult or trying moments. She also inspires us to bring the presence of Christ to others in the world just as she brought the infant Jesus in her womb into the home of her cousin Elizabeth. Being led to the Lord ourselves and helping other people to meet, know, and love Jesus is at the heart of the Church's mission. As your new parish is created, my prayer is that you can all 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 appointing Rev. Chad Droessler as parochial administrator of your new parish until Rev. Eric Sternberg is appointed as pastor beginning July 1. I want to thank Fr. Chad for all of his dedicated service and ministry to Stella Maris Pastorate, especially bringing the parish to the point of merger. While I know there is sadness in losing a beloved priest, I am grateful to Fr. Chad for his willingness to take on a new ministry. I know that you will welcome Fr. Eric as he moves into his new role as your pastor beginning in July.

I am also appointing Rev. Mark Foley and Rev. William Van Wagner as parochial vicars of your new parish. While Fr. Bill also will be moving into new ministry in St. John Paul II Pastorate, Rev. Matthew Pearson will be assigned as a new parochial vicar beginning July 1. Deacon Jeffrey Bond is assigned to the new parish as a permanent deacon.

Please know of my prayers for all of you, and I will look forward to celebrating this milestone when I come to install Rev. Sternberg as your pastor on July 13. May Mary, Star of the Sea, inspire us to continually seek Jesus and follow Him more closely!

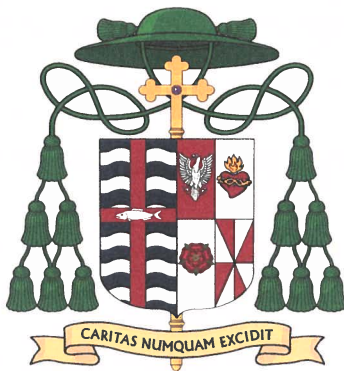
In Christ,

+2 J. 16  
✠ 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 Christ the King Parish, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish,  
and Saint Patrick Parish into**

**STELLA MARIS PARISH**

in Dane County in the State of Wisconsin

**Protocol No.: 250529-DB01**

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

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

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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 Christ the King Parish in McFarland, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Monona, and Saint Patrick Parish in Cottage Grove, 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 Christ the King, Immaculate Heart of Mary, and Saint Patrick Parishes given their relative geographic proximity, similar demographic compositions, and affinities in liturgical and pastoral outreach, and the feedback obtained through the process of consultation did not raise any serious objections or propose other alternatives to the initial proposal; and

WHEREAS in March of 2023 the parishes of Christ the King in McFarland, Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monona, and Saint Patrick in Cottage Grove were grouped together to become “Pastorate 26,” 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 Chad Droessler 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, the Parochial Vicars, and a Permanent Deacon assigned to the parishes of Pastorate 26 on 5 October 2023 at Christ the King Parish to hear their opinions about the advisability of merging the parishes into a single parish; and

WHEREAS the clergy of the Pastorate were in favor of merging the three 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 families, etc.) from the parishes of Pastorate 26 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 Christ the King Parish in McFarland, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Monona, and Saint Patrick Parish in Cottage Grove should be merged as proposed; and

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

- 1) **Demographic changes and decline in attendance.** As with the majority of parishes in the Diocese, Christ the King, Immaculate Heart of Mary, and Saint Patrick have seen declines in the numbers of those participating in Sunday Masses and receiving the sacraments. At the largest of the three parishes, Immaculate Heart of Mary, there were around 1100 registered households in the parish and an average weekend Mass attendance of around 950 communicants in the years between 2000 and 2005. By 2021, the number of registered households declined by more than thirty percent to 773 registered households in the parish with an average weekend Mass attendance of around 450 communicants. As for Christ the King and Saint Patrick, the number of registered households decreased by a smaller percentage, but there were still fewer registered families in both of those parishes. This decline is especially troubling given the growth rate in the communities of McFarland and Cottage Grove. Christ the King in McFarland averaged around 575 weekend communions in 2005; however, Mass participation was cut in half by 2021 to around 271 Communions per weekend. The decrease in Mass attendance was even more pronounced at Cottage Grove where there were approximately 530 people at weekend Masses in the years from 2000 to 2005, but there were only about 177 weekend communicants in 2021. The number of infant baptisms in Monona at Immaculate Heart of Mary remained fairly consistent over the years. In McFarland and Cottage Grove, however, the number of infant baptisms decreased significantly from an average of 22 at Christ the King and 31 at Saint Patrick between 2000 and 2005 to around 10 in 2021 at both parishes. It is true that the Covid pandemic did significantly affect the numbers of those participating in the sacraments, but the growing communities that these parishes serve should indicate higher numbers. The overall population is expected to grow in the area by about 7000 people by 2032. 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 experience fairly robust population growth;

- 2) **Insufficiency of less extreme forms of collaboration.** During a previous period of diocesan pastoral planning conducted in 2005, all three parishes were working on planning with different groups of parishes. Immaculate Heart of Mary worked more with the urban parishes on the east side of Madison, Christ the King worked with two larger suburban parishes southeast of Madison, and Saint Patrick was partnered with three other rural parishes. The outcome of that planning was that it was more sensible to link Christ the King and Saint Patrick given their proximity to Madison as well as their growing community demographics. Despite this recommendation, the two parishes did little together since they did not share a pastor or pastoral staff. Additionally, Immaculate Heart of Mary was encouraged to work more closely with its neighboring Madison parishes to have more shared staffing resources, especially to help with catechetical and youth ministry efforts. Despite the plans to collaborate more effectively, those efforts did not bear significant fruit as each parish maintained its separate programming with the associated burdens of staffing and programming. Thus, while there were occasional attempts at collaboration, the lack of unified leadership and coordinated planning did not truly engage and evangelize the growing communities as effectively as possible, thus leading to some of the decline mentioned above;
- 3) **More effective outreach to youth and young families.** In the previous planning efforts of 2005 as well as during the recent listening session held to hear people's thoughts about a potential merger, a major area of focus was to provide good opportunities for youth formation and programming. While some did note that there are some challenges given distances for those living on the far eastern end of Saint Patrick Parish to participate and that there are two different school districts covering the territory of the parishes, the desire to provide a good core group for youth ministry would be enhanced by combined efforts. Additionally, young families are moving into the area. Thus, having a merged parish that can consolidate resources and plan for staffing or coordinating events for these families would be a major benefit of a merged parish;
- 4) **Promotion and strengthening of the school and other administrative or consultative bodies.** While the parochial school at Immaculate Heart of Mary has seen growth over the past twenty years, moving from a low of only 105 students in 2005 to a current enrollment of 198 for the 2024-2025 school year, increased enrollment would still be a benefit to the school. Merging Christ the King and Saint Patrick Parishes with Immaculate Heart of Mary could aid that push for higher enrollment since McFarland and Cottage Grove do not have their own Catholic schools. Sharing the benefits of Catholic education with growing communities could certainly help to ensure a viable option for a Catholic school into the future. Not only is there a larger parish population to potentially increase school attendance, but the merger will also make attendance easier administratively since the parishes will share common funds and administration. In regard to administration and other parish bodies or groups, a larger pool of parishioners to serve will also enhance the various ministries at all three churches. One of the areas that will be enhanced by the merger is making the Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils more robust. It was noted that some of

- the bodies and committees at the individual parishes had fallen into more inactive states, however, a merger will allow for a renewed energy for those important consultative groups;
- 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 three 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 suburban 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 Christ the King Parish in McFarland, located in Dane County, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Monona, located in Dane County, and Saint Patrick Parish in Cottage Grove, located in Dane County, are hereby joined by extinctive union to form Stella Maris 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 Christ the King Parish, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, and Saint Patrick Parish, along with the obligations proper to each, are hereby transferred to Stella Maris 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 Stella Maris Parish shall be as follows:
  - a. On the North: Starting at the intersection of Reiner Road and Burke Road, then continuing east along Burke Road to its intersection with the southwestern corner of Section 20 of the Town of Sun Prairie (Dane County – S20, T8N, R11E), then continuing east along the southern section lines of Sections 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24 to the southeastern corner of Section 24 of the Town of Sun Prairie (Dane County – S24, T8N, R11E) and its intersection with Ridge Road;
  - b. On the East: Starting at the intersection of the southeastern corner of Section 24 of the Town of Sun Prairie (Dane County – S24, T8N, R11E) and Ridge Road, then

continuing southwest along Ridge Road to its intersection with Interstate 94, then continuing east along Interstate 94 to its intersection with Oak Park Road, then continuing south along Oak Park Road to its intersection with U.S. Highways 12 and 18, then continuing southwest along U.S. Highways 12 and 18 to their intersection with County Highway BN, then continuing south along County Highway BN to its intersection with Koshkonong Road, then continuing south along Koshkonong Road to its intersection with Tower Drive, then continuing south along Tower Drive to its intersection with County Highway B;


- c. On the South: Starting at the intersection of Tower Drive and County Highway B, then continuing west along County Highway B to its intersection with Pleasant Street, then continuing west along Pleasant Street to its intersection with River Estate Lane, then continuing due west from the intersection of Pleasant Street and River Estate Lane to the eastern shore of the Yahara River, then continuing northwest along the eastern shore of the Yahara River to its confluence with Lake Kegonsa, then continuing west along the northern shoreline of Lake Kegonsa until reaching the end of Scovill Court, then continuing west along Scovill Court to its intersection with Barber Drive, then continuing south on Barber Drive to its intersection with Schneider Drive, then continuing west along Schneider Drive to its intersection with Hawkinson Road;
- d. On the West: Starting at the intersection of Schneider Drive and Hawkinson Road, then continuing north along Hawkinson Road to its intersection with County Highway B, then continuing west along County Highway B to its intersection with Mahoney Road, then continuing north along Mahoney Road to its intersection with Stace Road, then continuing in a north-northwesterly line to the westernmost point of Jordan Drive, then continuing from the westernmost point of Jordan Drive to the Lake Waubesa shoreline, then continuing north along the eastern shoreline of Lake Waubesa until reaching its confluence with Upper Mud Lake, then continuing north along the eastern shoreline of Upper Mud Lake to its confluence with the Yahara River, then continuing north along the eastern shoreline of the Yahara River to its intersection with U.S. Highways 12 and 18, then continuing west along U.S. Highways 12 and 18 to their intersection with the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad tracks, then continuing northwest along the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad tracks to their intersection with the Lake Monona shoreline at the southernmost end of Turville Bay, then continuing northeast along the eastern shoreline of Lake Monona to its confluence with Starkweather Creek, then continuing northeast along Starkweather Creek to its intersection with Atwood Avenue, then continuing southeast along Atwood Avenue until it ends and becomes Monona Drive, then continuing southeast along Monona Drive to its intersection with Buckeye Road, then continuing southeast along Buckeye Road until it ends and becomes East Buckeye Road, then continuing east along East Buckeye Road to its intersection with Sprecher Road, then continuing north along Sprecher Road until its intersection with County Highway T, then crossing County Highway T and continuing north along Reiner Road to its intersection with Burke Road; and

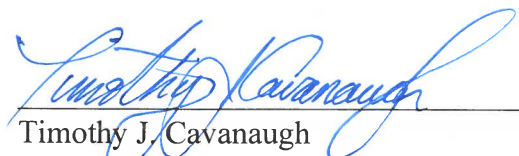
- 4) That the patronal feast of the parish is to be observed on the day commemorating Our Lady, Star of the Sea, which falls on September 27, and should be celebrated in the churches of the parish with the rank of Feast in accord with number 52, c) of the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar*, ranking at number 8, e) on the *Table of Liturgical Days*, fittingly using the prayers and readings from the Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of the Sea, which was approved by the then Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments and is found in Appendix II of the *Manual for Chaplains and Pastoral Agents of the Apostleship of the Sea* published by the Vatican in 2007 ([www.usccb.org/resources/AOS-Manual-for-Chaplains-and-Pastoral-Agents.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/resources/AOS-Manual-for-Chaplains-and-Pastoral-Agents.pdf)); and
- 5) That Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Monona is designated as the parochial church of Stella Maris Parish, while Christ the King Church in McFarland and Saint Patrick Church in Cottage Grove 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 Christ the King, Immaculate Heart of Mary, and Saint Patrick shall be closed to any new entries and shall remain in the care and custody of Stella Maris Parish to be properly preserved and safeguarded at the new main parish office. A new set of sacramental records is to be established for Stella Maris Parish, and sacraments taking place in any of the churches of the parish are to be recorded in the new sacramental registers of Stella Maris Parish in accord with universal and diocesan norms; and
- 8) That Stella Maris 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 on 31 May 2025, the liturgical Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and
- 12) That the decree is to be notified on 31 May 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 29<sup>th</sup> day of May in the Year of Our Lord 2025, the day that would traditionally observe the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord and the current liturgical Optional Memorial of Saint Paul VI, Pope.

  
✠ Donald J. Hying  
Bishop of Madison

  
Timothy J. Cavanaugh  
Chancellor

SEAL