

July 14, 2025

Memorial of St. Kateri Tekakwitha, Lily of the Mohawks

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,


With this letter, I am attaching the decree that merges Blessed Trinity Parish in Lodi and Dane, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Waunakee, and Saint Mary of the Lake Parish in Westport into a brand-new parish, Saint Maximilian Kolbe.

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 St. Maximilian Kolbe. This saint had a great zeal for the Lord and a deep love for the Blessed Virgin Mary. He had a missionary spirit, striving to bring the message of the Gospel to many people in his native Poland, through his publishing, and even his time spent in Japan. Yet, all of this zeal is crowned by his martyrdom of charity, taking the place of a condemned man in the horrors of the concentration camp at Auschwitz. This saint wanted to bring all people to Christ through the intercession of the Blessed Mother, proving his faith by laying down his life for a friend, just like Jesus did for all of us. Making the love of Christ known 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 here 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. Joseph Baker as pastor of your new parish. I am also appointing Rev. Simon Tipps and Rev. Anthony Kersting to continue as parochial vicars of your parish. I am grateful to the priests and staff of St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish for all of the work that has been done behind the scenes to bring about this parish merger.

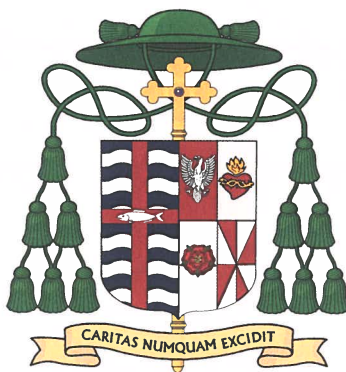
Please know of my prayers for all of you, and I will look forward to celebrating this milestone when I come to install Rev. Baker as your pastor on August 17. May St. Maximilian Kolbe inspire us to seek Jesus continually and follow Him more closely!

In Christ,

  
✠ Donald J. Hying  
Bishop of Madison

Enclosure

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*Donaldus Iosephus*  
*Miseratione Divina et Apostolicae Sedis Gratia*  
*Episcopus Madisonensis*

## **DECREE OF CANONICAL MERGER**

**Uniting Blessed Trinity Parish, Saint John the Baptist Parish,  
and Saint Mary of the Lake Parish into**

**SAINT MAXIMILIAN KOLBE PARISH**

in Dane and Columbia Counties in the State of Wisconsin

**Protocol No.: 250714-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

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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 Blessed Trinity Parish in Lodi and Dane, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Waunakee, and Saint Mary of the Lake Parish in Westport 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 Blessed Trinity, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Mary of the Lake Parishes given their relative geographic proximity, affinities in liturgical and pastoral outreach, and previous collaboration between the parishes, 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 Blessed Trinity, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Mary of the Lake were grouped together to become “Pastorate 18,” 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 Joseph Baker 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 18 on 8 November 2023 at Saint Mary of the Lake 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 three parishes into a new parish as proposed; and

WHEREAS, on the same date at Saint Michael Church of Blessed Trinity Parish in Dane, a meeting of key representatives from various bodies (pastoral councils, finance councils, civil trustees, school families, etc.) from the parishes of Pastorate 18 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, having heard the results of the consultation with the priests and people of the parishes, recommended to the undersigned Bishop of Madison, in a unanimous consultative vote, that Blessed Trinity Parish in Lodi and Dane, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Waunakee, and Saint Mary of the Lake Parish in Westport 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 sacramental participation.** The parishes of this pastorate present different realities concerning attendance and sacramental participation. Unlike many parishes in the Diocese of Madison, Saint John the Baptist has not seen steep declines in Mass attendance or frequenting of the sacraments. In 2005, the parish had 1,833 registered households with an average weekend having around 1,550 communions. By 2021, the parish had grown in numbers with 1,967 registered households. The number of communions had dropped slightly, especially due to the Covid 19 pandemic. However, the decline was not dramatic. The parish also reported similar numbers of baptisms, first communions, and confirmations compared to the years between 2000 and 2005. However, considering that the population of Waunakee has almost doubled over the same time period, even stable participation by absolute numbers represents a sharp decline in proportional participation.. Despite the stable numbers in Waunakee at Saint John the Baptist Parish, the other two parishes have seen the declines in Mass attendance and sacramental participation that have been observed throughout the wider diocese. In 2005, Saint Patrick Parish in Lodi and Saint Michael Parish in Dane (which would later merge to become Blessed Trinity Parish) had a combined total of 828 registered families with around 775 communions per weekend. By 2021, the merged parish had only 618 registered households. Weekend communions dropped to around 570, indicating a decrease in both categories of around 33%. Baptisms in the two parishes in 2005 were reported at 25, but in 2021, there were only 8 baptisms. Similar decreases can be seen with Saint Mary of the Lake Parish. Registered households dropped from 237 in 2005 to 192 in 2021. The reported average weekend communions dropped over 50% in the period between 2005 to 2021 from an average of 350 communicants to around 145. These trends indicate various challenges in this area. Even though the numbers are steady in Waunakee, the area has grown significantly and could have even more impact with the people moving to the community. In the other parishes, evangelization efforts will need to increase to engage with the



populations in those areas. There is expected to be an overall population increase in the territory of about 4,000 more people by 2031. 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 continued population growth;

- 2) **Insufficiency of less extreme forms of collaboration.** During a previous period of diocesan pastoral planning conducted in 2005, Saint John the Baptist Parish and Saint Mary of the Lake Parish discussed sharing programs and preparing to link by sharing a pastor, especially if fewer priests were available to serve the parishes. This call for greater collaboration was also supported by Saint John the Baptist Parish building a large new church that could seat 1,000 people. This collaboration was eventually brought about when the priests from Saint John the Baptist served Saint Mary of the Lake Parish and utilized that parish's rectory. As for Blessed Trinity Parish, it was created by the merger of Saint Michael Parish in Dane and Saint Patrick Parish in Lodi in 2012 as a result of recommendations made during the 2005 round of pastoral planning. That planning also included Saint Thomas Parish in Poynette, but that parish was not merged with Blessed Trinity and is part of another pastorate. Despite the plans to collaborate more effectively among the various parishes and even merging two parishes, those efforts did not bear as much fruit as was desired. This was due to each parish maintaining separate programming and staffing. Thus, these attempts at collaborative efforts over the past nineteen years were not sufficient to stem the declines mentioned above without unified vision and leadership;
- 3) **More effective outreach to youth.** 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 for growth was to more effectively engage with young people, especially in middle and high school. Combining parishes will offer opportunities to consider additional staff dedicated to youth ministry and outreach. Having a greater number of young people to engage in formation events, small groups, retreats, mission trips, etc., also fosters better participation, since young people can engage with other members of their peer group that may have been less prevalent at an individual parish;
- 4) **Promotion and strengthening of the schools and other administrative or consultative bodies.** This pastorate has two parochial schools, one at the Saint Michael site in Dane, and the other at the Saint John the Baptist site in Waunakee. The enrollment at the school in Waunakee has decreased somewhat from its student body in the early 2000s. Despite the decrease, the school is fairly stable and can draw from a large number of parishioners. For Saint Michael School, the enrollment has doubled since 2005 from 31 to 62 students. Despite this growth, the small size of the school makes it difficult to recruit and maintain adequate staff and meet financial responsibilities. Despite these challenges, the merged parish will be able to offer good opportunities for Catholic education. The staffs can support one another, efficiencies in administration can help economically, and the smaller school setting in Dane might afford opportunities for different styles of education or an environment more conducive to more intense focus between teachers and students. 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 the churches. Combining resources and

encouraging group activities or common speakers will be a clear benefit of the merger of these three parishes who share many things in common;

- 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 rural and 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 Blessed Trinity Parish in Lodi and Dane, located in Dane and Columbia Counties, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Waunakee, located in Dane County, and Saint Mary of the Lake Parish in Westport, located in Dane County, are hereby joined by extinctive union to form Saint Maximilian Kolbe 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 Blessed Trinity Parish, Saint John the Baptist Parish, and Saint Mary of the Lake Parish, along with the obligations proper to each, are hereby transferred to Saint Maximilian Kolbe 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 Saint Maximilian Kolbe Parish shall be as follows:
  - a. On the North: Starting at the intersection of State Highway 60 and the eastern shoreline of the Wisconsin River, then continuing north along the eastern shoreline of the Wisconsin River to the Lake Wisconsin Dam, then continuing northeast from the Lake Wisconsin Dam along the southeastern shoreline of Lake Wisconsin, including any inhabited islands in Lake Wisconsin, to the confluence with the Wisconsin River, then continuing northeast along the eastern shoreline of the Wisconsin River to its intersection with Interstate 90;

- b. On the East: Starting at the intersection of the eastern shoreline of the Wisconsin River and Interstate 90, then continuing southeast along Interstate 90 to its intersection with Patton Road, then continuing south along Patton Road to its intersection with Daley Road, then continuing east along Daley Road to its intersection with Interstate 90, then continuing southeast along Interstate 90 to its intersection with State Highway 19;
- c. On the South: Starting at the intersection of Interstate 90 and State Highway 19, then continuing west along State Highway 19 to its intersection with the western bank of the Yahara River, then continuing southwest along the western bank of the Yahara River to its intersection with the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad tracks, then continuing southeast along the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad tracks to their intersection with Troy Drive, then continuing west along Troy Drive to its intersection with Harper Road, then continuing due south in a line along Harper Road until reaching the Lake Mendota shoreline, then continuing northwest along the Lake Mendota shoreline to the confluence with the eastern bank of the Yahara River, then continuing northeast along the eastern bank of the Yahara River to its intersection with Westport Road, then continuing north along Westport Road to its intersection with western bank of the Yahara River, then continuing southwest along the western bank of the Yahara River to the confluence with the Lake Mendota shoreline, then continuing southwest along the Lake Mendota shoreline until reaching Batz Road, then continuing due north in a line from the Lake Mendota shoreline along Batz Road to its intersection with Morris Court, then continuing west along Morris Court to its intersection with County Highway M, then continuing north along County Highway M to its intersection with Oncken Road, then continuing west along Oncken Road to its intersection with County Highway Q, then continuing south along County Highway Q to its intersection with Balzer Road, then continuing west along Balzer Road to its intersection with Pheasant Branch Road;
- d. On the West: Starting at the intersection of Balzer Road and Pheasant Branch Road, then continuing north along Pheasant Branch Road to its intersection with Meffert Road, then continuing west along Meffert Road to its intersection with Kingsley Road, then continuing north along Kingsley Road to its intersection with Woodland Drive, then continuing west along Woodland Drive to its intersection with Lodi Springfield Road, then continuing northwest along Lodi Springfield Road to its intersection with Latham Road, then continuing north along Latham Road to its intersection with Lee Road, then continuing west along Lee Road to its intersection with County Highway Y, then continuing north along County Highway Y to its intersection with Gluth Road, then continuing north along Gluth Road to its intersection with Crystal Lake Road, then continuing west along Crystal Lake Road to its intersection with Mussen Road, then continuing northwest along Mussen Road to its intersection with Schoepp Road, then continuing west along Schoepp Road until it ends and becomes Barta road, then continuing north along Barta Road to its intersection with State Highway 60, then continuing west along State



Highway 60 to its intersection with the eastern shoreline of the Wisconsin River;  
and

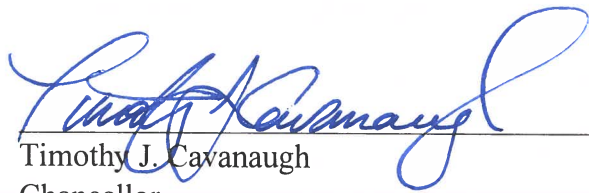
- 4) That the patronal feast of the parish is to be observed on the Memorial of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, which falls on August 14, and should be celebrated in the churches of the parish with the rank of Feast in accord with number 52, c) of the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar*, ranking at number 8, e) on the *Table of Liturgical Days*; and
- 5) That Saint John the Baptist Church in Waunakee is designated as the parochial church of Saint Maximilian Kolbe Parish, while Saint Mary of the Lake Church in Westport, Saint Michael Church in Dane, and Saint Patrick Church in Lodi 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 Blessed Trinity, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Mary of the Lake shall be closed to any new entries and shall remain in the care and custody of Saint Maximilian Kolbe Parish to be properly preserved and safeguarded at the new main parish office. A new set of sacramental records is to be established for Saint Maximilian Kolbe Parish, and sacraments taking place in any of the churches of the parish are to be recorded in the new sacramental registers of Saint Maximilian Kolbe Parish in accord with universal and diocesan norms; and
- 8) That Saint Maximilian Kolbe 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 19 July 2025; and
- 12) That the decree is to be notified on 19 July 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 14<sup>th</sup> day of July in the Year of Our Lord 2025, the liturgical Memorial of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha observed in the United States of America.

7-12-25

✠ Donald J. Hying  
Bishop of Madison



Timothy J. Cavanaugh  
Chancellor

SEAL