



August 12, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

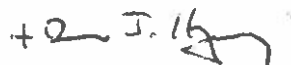
With this letter, I am attaching the decree that merges Nativity of Mary Parish, Saint John Vianney Parish, Saint Patrick Parish, and Saint William Parish, all in Janesville, into a brand-new parish, Saint Jane Frances de Chantal.

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 to issue the decree that creates your new parish on the feast day of your new patroness, Saint Jane Frances de Chantal. The Church, in the opening prayer for Mass on the feast day of Saint Jane Frances, states that God made her “radiant with outstanding merits in different walks of life.” She was both a wife and mother as well as a religious sister, who, along with Saint Francis de Sales, founded the Order of the Visitation. Her path to holiness came about through knowing personal loss, especially when her husband was killed in a hunting accident, and in leaving her children and family to follow the call to religious life. Yet, despite the difficulties and loss she experienced, she had a great trust in the love and care of God for her. She was able to share her faith and trust in God with many people, not only in her family, but also in her religious community. This call to share our faith in Christ is at the root of why we undertook Into the Deep in the first place – it was so we could more effectively “make disciples” of Jesus Christ. This has been one of the most important parts of my episcopal ministry in the Diocese of Madison, and I pray that your new parish will truly serve as a center of holiness and missionary zeal leading people to Christ and His Church.

I am also happy to appoint Rev. Chad Droessler as your pastor and to confirm Rev. Vincent Racanelli and Rev. Christopher Gernetzke as your parochial vicars to serve your new parish. This dedicated group of clergy, along with your parish staff, has worked hard to prepare for this moment, and I fully trust that the Lord will guide their ministry in the weeks, months, and years to come.

Please know of my prayers for all of you, and I will look forward to celebrating this milestone when I come to install Fr. Chad as your pastor in September. May Saint Jane Frances de Chantal inspire us to seek Jesus continually and follow Him more closely!

In Christ,

+ 
✠ Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison

Enclosure

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

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Donaldus Iosephus
Miseratione Divina et Apostolicae Sedis Gratia
Episcopus Madisonensis

DECREE OF CANONICAL MERGER

**Uniting Nativity of Mary Parish, Saint John Vianney Parish,
Saint Patrick Parish, and Saint William Parish into**

SAINT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL PARISH

in Rock County in the State of Wisconsin

Protocol No.: 250812-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

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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 Nativity of Mary Parish, Saint John Vianney Parish, Saint Patrick Parish, and Saint William Parish, all in Janesville, 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 not only the four above-mentioned parishes in the City of Janesville but also two additional outlying parishes, namely, Saint Mary in Milton and Saint Augustine in Footville, the feedback obtained through the process of consultation indicated that the addition of the parishes in Milton and Footville would make the proposed parish too large numerically and would split existing parish linkages that would cause certain difficulties such that only the four parishes of Janesville should be considered for an extinctive union; and

WHEREAS in March of 2023 the parishes of Nativity of Mary, Saint John Vianney, Saint Patrick, and Saint William were grouped together to become “Pastorate 13,” 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 Eric Nielsen 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 13 on 20 November 2023 at Nativity of Mary 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 four parishes into a new parish as proposed; and

WHEREAS, on the same date at the same parish church, a meeting of key representatives and staff members from the parishes of Pastorate 13 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 statistical data and the various consultations made, engaged in discussion about what church should be designated as the parish church in the grouping and ultimately recommended to the undersigned Bishop of Madison, in a unanimous consultative vote, with one member abstaining, that Nativity of Mary, Saint John Vianney, Saint Patrick, and Saint William Parishes should be merged as proposed; and

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

- 1) **Demographic trends and decline in attendance.** As with the majority of parishes in the Diocese, Nativity of Mary, Saint John Vianney, Saint Patrick, and Saint William Parishes have seen decreases in the numbers of those participating in Sunday Masses and receiving the sacraments. During a previous round of pastoral planning that occurred almost twenty years ago, the combined statistics of these four parishes indicated that there were around 4,053 registered households in all four parishes. That number did not show a severe drop when looking at the combined statistics from the four parishes collected in 2021. That year, there were 3,369 registered households at the parishes, a decline of around seventeen percent. While the parish registrations declined slightly over the past sixteen years, Mass attendance at the four parishes has been reduced by more than fifty percent in that same time period. From 2000 to 2005, the four parishes averaged around 3,690 Communion per weekend. However in 2021, all four parishes averaged around 1,753 Communion per weekend. While that number was affected by the Covid pandemic, it still represents a significant decline in participation at Sunday Mass for the registered Catholics in the four parishes. This decline in participation is also reflected in the other sacraments celebrated at the four parishes. The combined number of infant baptisms celebrated in 2005 was approximately 150. The combined number for all four parishes in 2021 had declined by two-thirds to only 53 baptisms. First Communion also declined between more than fifty percent over that same period from an average of around 174 per year from 2000 to 2005 but only 74 in 2021. These declining trends of participation occurred despite a relatively stable population in the area served by the four parishes. While the Janesville area has suffered from economic challenges, there has been a resurgence of the community in recent years. This resurgence will lead to a projected increase in population over the period from 2022 to 2032 by about 2000 people. 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 moderate population growth over the next decade;

- 2) **Insufficiency of less extreme forms of collaboration.** During the previously mentioned “Guided by the Spirit” pastoral planning conducted in 2005, this grouping of four parishes, along with Saint Mary Parish in Milton, was tasked with suggesting ways of collaborating and working together, especially given the projected declining number of priests in the Diocese of Madison. The proposed solutions for a reduction of priests serving those parishes had three main areas of focus. The first area was a plan for a team of priests to work *in solidum* to serve the individual parishes. Secondly, new staff would be needed to attend to many of the day-to-day administrative duties involved with running the five parishes. Finally, the parishes would need to work together to provide and coordinate programming and events to serve the spiritual needs of the faithful. While this model was proposed, it apparently proved too cumbersome to take root. Instead, each parish ended up maintaining its proper pastor along with its staff, both for the parish and school. Thus, the *in solidum* model of priestly ministry did not come into being. It is true that the parishes did collaborate on certain apostolic endeavors, but there was no single pastor or even team of priests to coordinate the pastoral action and collaboration between the various parish communities. This lack of coordination shows that without a more fundamental restructuring of the parishes in Janesville, it would be hard to stem the tide of declining participation in the sacramental life of the Church in that community. Thus, the minimal attempts at collaborative efforts and organizational changes over the past nineteen years were not sufficient to stem the decline mentioned above without unified vision and leadership in these four parishes that share a close geographical territory and other familial and cultural links;
- 3) **More effective outreach to young adults and Spanish speaking Catholics.** In the recent listening session held to hear people’s thoughts about a potential merger, a major area for growth was to engage more effectively with the young population in the area. Merging parishes will offer opportunities to consider hiring additional staff dedicated to youth and young adult ministry and outreach. Having a greater number of young people to engage in formation events, small groups, retreats, mission trips, etc., also draws others from that age group to the Church. Another area that was highlighted in the current listening sessions was the need for increased outreach with Hispanic ministry. While the overall population is projected to increase by about 2,000 inhabitants over the next seven years, a large percentage of that growth will be in the Hispanic population. Spanish speakers comprised about 7.3 percent of the total population as of 2022 (4,740 out of 64,497). By 2032, the percentage of people who speak Spanish will grow to almost 10 percent of the overall populace (6,558 out of 66,109). Given that many Spanish speakers are Catholics or come from a Catholic culture, additional staff supported by a combined parish could more effectively reach this community. Combined financial and human resources in a merged parish will be more effective than if any one of the four individual parishes would support specialized ministers who have the requisite language and evangelical skills for this important ministry;
- 4) **Promotion and coordination between the schools and other administrative or consultative bodies.** At the time of the previous pastoral planning initiative, Janesville had

four grade schools, one at each parish. In the “Guided by the Spirit” planning in 2005, it was already suggested that the parishes coordinate to possibly reduce or consolidate schools as enrollment was declining significantly at one or more of the schools. Due to small enrollment, the school at Saint Patrick Parish was closed at the end of the 2017-2018 academic year since the school only had 11 students in kindergarten through eighth grade with another 11 students in a public partnership preschool program for four-year-olds. The school at Nativity of Mary Parish has also seen large decreases in enrollment over the years. From 2000 to 2005, the student body shrank from 243 students to 156 students. That decline has continued even more drastically as the school only had 41 students during the 2024-2025 school year. The enrollment of Saint John Vianney School and Saint William School has remained fairly stable over the last twenty years. Given the challenges with enrollment and financing the operations of three independent schools, the merger of the parishes will allow for coordinated leadership in how best to utilize the staff and facilities of the parish to ensure that many are able to receive a Catholic elementary education. 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. One of the areas that will be enhanced by the merger is making the Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils more robust by including qualified persons from the entire parish population;

- 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 four 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 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 Nativity of Mary Parish, Saint John Vianney Parish, Saint Patrick Parish, and Saint William Parish, all located in Janesville in Rock County, are hereby joined by extinctive

union to form Saint Jane Frances de Chantal Parish, a new parish having juridic personality in accord with canons 121 and 515 §3 *CIC*; and

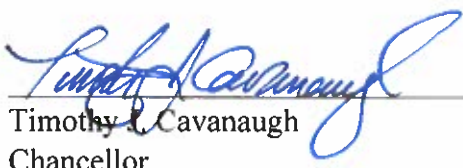
- 2) That all of the goods and patrimonial rights of Nativity of Mary Parish, Saint John Vianney Parish, Saint Patrick Parish, and Saint William Parish, along with the obligations proper to each, are hereby transferred to Saint Jane Frances de Chantal Parish, respecting the intention of donors and acquired rights for specific funds transferred to the new parish in accord with canon 121 *CIC*; and
- 3) That the territorial boundaries of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal Parish shall be as follows:
 - a. On the North: Starting at the intersection of County Highway H and U.S. Highway 14, then continuing east along U.S. Highway 14 to its intersection with Kennedy Road, then continuing north along Kennedy Road to its intersection with Interstate 90, then continuing southeast along Interstate 90 to its intersection with U.S. Highway 14;
 - b. On the East: Starting at the intersection of Interstate 90 and U.S. Highway 14, then continuing southeast along U.S. Highway 14 to its intersection with East County Road O, then continuing west along East County Road O to its intersection with South La Prairie Town Hall Road, then continuing south along South La Prairie Town Hall Road to its intersection with East Avalon Road, then continuing west along East Avalon Road to its intersection with Interstate 90, then continuing south along Interstate 90 to its intersection with the La Prairie/Turtle Township border;
 - c. On the South: Starting at the intersection of Interstate 90 and the La Prairie/Turtle Township Border, then continuing due west along the La Prairie/Turtle Township Border to the Rock/Beloit Township Border, then continuing due west along the Rock/Beloit Township Border to the Plymouth/Newark Township Border, then continuing due west along the Plymouth/Newark Township Border to its intersection with County Highway H;
 - d. On the West: Starting at the intersection of the Plymouth/Newark Township Border and County Highway H, then continuing north along County Highway H to its intersection with U.S. Highway 14; and
- 4) That the patronal feast of the parish is to be observed on the Optional Memorial of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, which falls on August 12, 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 Vianney Church in Janesville is designated as the parochial church of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal Parish, while Nativity of Mary Church, Saint Patrick Church, and Saint William Church, all located in the City of Janesville, 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 Nativity of Mary, Saint John Vianney, Saint Patrick, and Saint William shall be closed to any new entries and shall remain in the care and custody of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal 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 Jane Frances de Chantal Parish, and sacraments taking place in any of the churches of the parish are to be recorded in the new sacramental registers of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal Parish in accord with universal and diocesan norms; and
- 8) That Saint Jane Frances de Chantal 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 16 August 2025, the liturgical Optional Memorial of Saint Stephen of Hungary; and
- 12) That the decree is to be notified on 16 August 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 12th day of August in the Year of Our Lord 2025, the liturgical Optional Memorial of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, Religious.

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✠ Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison


Timothy J. Cavanaugh
Chancellor

