



August 11, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With this letter, I am attaching the decree that merges Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Portage, Saint Faustina Parish in Pardeeville and Buffalo, Saint Mary Help of Christians Parish in Briggsville, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Montello, and Good Shepherd Parish in Westfield into a brand-new parish, Saint John Henry Newman.

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 Saint John Henry Newman, the great convert to Catholicism and recently named Doctor of the Church. This holy Cardinal who lived in the nineteenth century gave a beautiful witness to how the Lord called him into the Catholic Church from Anglicanism by a deepening appreciation of the Church Fathers. This journey, which was costly on a human level as he had to leave many friends and his position at Oxford University, allowed him to be a great inspiration for many others to come to know the beauty of the Catholic faith. His motto, *Cor ad cor loquitur* (Heart speaks to heart), is a beautiful model of what evangelization is meant to be. As the Lord has spoken and moved in our hearts, we are invited to share this “heart knowledge” of the Lord and his salvation with others. 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 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 also happy to appoint Rev. Randy Timmerman as your pastor and to confirm Rev. Sanctus Ibe and Rev. Savio Yerasani as your parochial vicars to serve your new parish. This dedicated group of clergy, along with your parish staff, has already 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. Randy as your pastor in September. May Saint John Henry Newman inspire us to continually seek Jesus and follow Him more closely!

In Christ,

+2 J. H. N.

✠ 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 Saint Mary Help of Christians Parish, Saint John the Baptist Parish,  
Saint Faustina Parish, Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish,  
and Good Shepherd Parish into**

## **SAINT JOHN HENRY NEWMAN PARISH**

in Columbia and Marquette Counties in the State of Wisconsin

### **Protocol No.: 250811-DB02**

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

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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 sacraments, numbers of youth in Catholic schools and faith formation programs, priest resources, and financial giving; and

WHEREAS the results of the strategic study were collated and shared first with priests, deacons, religious, and key lay people from August through October 2022 and then with the entire Diocese online and in a special edition of the *Catholic Herald*, the Diocesan newspaper, dated 10 November 2022, containing information in both English and Spanish; and

WHEREAS the print and online publications of the study included a proposed map restructuring the parishes of the Diocese and invited all interested parties to offer feedback, suggested changes, or questions during a period spanning from November 2022 through December 2022; and

WHEREAS the general factors prompting the strategic planning initiative were found to be operative in the specific circumstances of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Portage, located in Columbia County, Saint Faustina Parish in Pardeeville and Buffalo, located in Columbia and Marquette Counties, Saint Mary Help of Christians Parish in Briggsville, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Montello, and Good Shepherd Parish in Westfield, all located in Marquette County, 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 the aforementioned parishes given their similar cultural and spiritual patrimony and their history of working together in various prior linkages and mergers, and the feedback obtained through the process of consultation did not surface significant reasons to alter the proposed grouping of parishes; and

WHEREAS in March of 2023 the aforementioned parishes were grouped together to become “Pastorate 9,” 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 Randy Timmerman 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 9 on 30 November 2023 at Saint Mary Church in Pardeeville,

part of Saint Faustina 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 generally in favor of merging the five parishes into a new parish as proposed, although they noted some challenges given the large territory for the proposed parish; and

WHEREAS, on the same date at Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Portage, a meeting of key representatives from various bodies (pastoral councils, finance councils, civil trustees, staff, etc.) from the parishes of Pastorate 9 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 Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Saint Faustina, Saint Mary Help of Christians, Saint John the Baptist, and Good Shepherd Parishes should be merged as proposed; and

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

- 1) **Demographic changes and decline in attendance.** As with the majority of parishes in the Diocese, the aforementioned parishes have seen steady declines in the numbers of those participating in Sunday Masses and receiving the sacraments. At Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception in 2005, there were 1125 registered households in the parish and an average weekend Mass attendance of around 675 communicants. By 2021, there were only 704 registered households in the parish with an average weekend Mass attendance of around 384 communicants. Despite Portage being the largest of the parishes in the proposed merger and being located in the largest population center of the territory, the number of households and communicants declined by approximately forty percent over those twenty years. In the previously merged parish of Saint Faustina in Pardeeville and Buffalo, the number of registered families dropped by about twenty-five percent. However, the decline in Mass attendance was more pronounced with the number of weekend communions in Pardeeville and Buffalo falling from about 400 in 2005 to slightly less than 200 in 2021, indicating a decrease of about fifty percent. In Briggsville, Montello, and Westfield, the number of registered households in the parishes has actually remained fairly stable in the period from 2005 to 2021. The number of communions received on an average weekend in that time mirrors the fifty percent decline that was noted for Saint Faustina Parish, however. While some of the decline can be accounted for by an older population and concerns about the Covid pandemic at its height in 2020-2021, the trend shows a



significant downturn in church participation. The trend is also reflected in the number of baptisms and other sacraments celebrated in the parishes. In all the parishes of the pastoralate, there were an average of 80 infant baptisms per year in the timeframe from 2000-2005. In 2021, there were a total of 27 infant baptisms in all the parishes, indicating a nearly seventy percent decrease in the number of people receiving the sacrament of baptism. While the numbers of those participating in the life of the church decreased over the last twenty years, this area is not expected to see a large increase in population in the near future to reverse these trends. The overall population growth in the area covered by these parishes will remain virtually flat through 2032. The population will remain stable as this area is a popular vacation and retirement area with the number of natural and man-made lakes that dot the territory. 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 see a stable population for the next decade;

- 2) **Insufficiency of less extreme forms of collaboration.** During a previous period of diocesan pastoral planning conducted in 2005, there were many recommendations for the parishes being combined in this extinctive union. The parishes in Portage and Briggsville had a long history of shared ministry, and that round of planning continued the linkage of the parishes, but it also suggested that the two parishes look to work with neighboring parishes and expand the church in Portage to accommodate more people at liturgies. The parishes in Montello and Westfield also have a history of being linked and sharing a priest. That situation was recommended to continue in the 2005 planning, but it also suggested that those parishes connect with neighboring parishes in Princeton and Neshkoro. Finally, the parishes of Saint Mary of the Most Holy Rosary in Pardeeville and Saint Andrew in Buffalo merged to become Saint Faustina Parish in 2015. This merger was already envisioned in the 2005 planning process, and Saint Faustina Parish was to be linked with Saint Mary Parish in Kingston and Saint Joseph Parish in Markesan, which were merged in 2009 to become Holy Family Parish. Thus, the Guided by the Spirit planning process from 2005 sought to have the parishes either merge or work together with neighboring parishes. Though many of the recommendations from that process were implemented, such as the merger of Saint Faustina Parish and the expansion of the church in Portage, there were still challenges and administrative burdens in operating so many distinct parishes with shared clergy. Additionally, the desired collaboration and staffing were difficult to achieve given the separation of finances and different pastoral leadership. Thus, while mergers, linkages, and other collaborative measures were taken, these efforts were not sufficient to alleviate the challenges without unified vision and leadership;
- 3) **Promotion and strengthening of the school and other administrative or consultative bodies.** While the parochial school at Portage has a stable student body that has grown over the years to have an enrollment of around 197 students as of the 2024-2025 school year, the other parishes do not have their own Catholic schools. While some of the current parish communities have a higher percentage of older parishioners, the merger of the parishes will allow for children from all the former parishes to have the opportunity to enroll in a Catholic school and that being able to draw upon a larger parish population could potentially increase attendance at the school, recognizing, however, that the large distances

that the parish covers could deter some potential students from attending. In regard to administration and other parish bodies or groups, a larger pool of parishioners to serve will also enhance the various ministries at the churches. One of the areas that will be enhanced by the merger is making the Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils more robust and focusing on the needs of all the people of the new parish;

- 4) **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, while they cover a large 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;
- 5) **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 Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Portage, located in Columbia County, Saint Faustina Parish in Pardeeville and Buffalo, located in Columbia and Marquette Counties, Saint Mary Help of Christians Parish in Briggsville, Saint John the Baptist Parish in Montello, and Good Shepherd Parish in Westfield, all located in Marquette County, are hereby joined by extinctive union to form Saint John Henry Newman Parish, a new parish having juridic personality in accord with canons 121 and 515 §3 *CIC*; and
- 2) That all of the goods and patrimonial rights of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish, Saint Faustina Parish, Saint Mary Help of Christians Parish, Saint John the Baptist Parish, and Good Shepherd Parish, along with the obligations proper to each, are hereby transferred to Saint John Henry Newman 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 John Henry Newman Parish shall be as follows:

- a. On the North: Starting at the Marquette/Waushara/Adams County border, then continuing east along the Marquette/Waushara County border to its intersection with County Highway Y;
- b. On the East: Starting at the intersection of the Marquette/Waushara County border and County Highway Y, then continuing south along County Highway Y to its intersection with County Highway J, then continuing east along County Highway J to its intersection with County Highway N, then continuing southeast along County Highway N to its intersection with State Highway 23, then continuing east along State Highway 23 to its intersection with the Marquette/Green Lake County border, then continuing south along the Marquette/Green Lake County border to the Marquette/Green Lake/Columbia County border, then continuing east along the Green Lake/Columbia County border to the Green Lake/Columbia/Dodge County border, then continuing south along the Columbia/Dodge County border to its intersection with County Highway G;
- c. On the South: Starting at the intersection of the Columbia/Dodge County border and County Highway G, then continuing southwest along County Highway G to its intersection with County Highway B, then continuing north along County Highway B to its intersection with Middle Branch Duck Creek, then continuing west along Middle Branch Duck Creek to its intersection with Old B Road, then continuing north along Old B Road to its intersection with County Highway G, then continuing west along County Highway G to its intersection with State Highway 22, then continuing southwest along State Highway 22 to its intersection with State Highway 16, then continuing west along State Highway 16 to its intersection with U.S. Highway 51, then continuing due west in a line to the western shoreline of the Wisconsin River, then continuing southwest along the western shoreline of the Wisconsin River to the confluence of Prentice Creek and the Wisconsin River;
- d. On the West: Starting at the western shoreline of the Wisconsin River and the confluence of Prentice Creek, then continuing northwest along Prentice Creek to its intersection with County Highway U, then continuing north along County Highway U to its intersection with the eastern end of Circle Bluff Road, then continuing northwest along the eastern part of Circle Bluff Road to its intersection with Indian Farm Road, then continuing north along Indian Farm Road until its intersection with State Highway 78, then crossing State Highway 78 and continuing northwest along Durwards Glen Road to its intersection with the Columbia/Sauk County border, then continuing north along the Columbia/Sauk County border to its intersection with the Wisconsin River, then continuing in a line due north to the intersection of County Highway O and Jenicek Road, then continuing north along County Highway O to its intersection with Weyh Road, then continuing north along Weyh Road to its intersection with Wolfram Road, then continuing north along Wolfram Road to its intersection with the southern section line of Section 18 of the Town of Lewiston (Columbia County – S18, T13N, R8E), then continuing northeast in a direct line to the intersection of State Highway 127 and County Highway AA, then continuing north along County Highway AA to the



Columbia/Marquette County border, then continuing west along the Columbia/Marquette County border to the Columbia/Marquette/Adams County border, then continuing north along the Marquette/Adams County border to the Marquette/Waushara/Adams County border; and

- 4) That the patronal feast of the parish is to be observed on the Optional Memorial of Saint John Henry Newman, which falls on October 9, 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 Mary of the Immaculate Conception Church in Portage is designated as the parochial church of Saint John Henry Newman Parish, while Saint Mary Help of Christians Church in Briggsville, Saint Andrew Church in Buffalo, Saint John the Baptist Church in Montello, Saint Mary of the Most Holy Rosary Church in Pardeeville, and Good Shepherd Church in Westfield shall serve as subsidiary churches where divine worship may take place to serve the spiritual needs of the faithful, retaining, however, the baptismal font, the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, and other such rights and uses as are proper to a parish church, insofar as the law allows and the pastor sees fit; and
- 6) That provision for the office of pastor, along with instructions about his taking possession of the new parish, as well as the assignment of other clergy to serve the parish, will be effected in separate decrees; and
- 7) That, in accord with canon 535 *CIC*, the sacramental registers of the former parishes of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Saint Faustina, Saint Mary Help of Christians, Saint John the Baptist, and Good Shepherd shall be closed to any new entries and shall remain in the care and custody of Saint John Henry Newman 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 John Henry Newman Parish, and sacraments taking place in any of the churches of the parish are to be recorded in the new sacramental registers of Saint John Henry Newman Parish in accord with universal and diocesan norms; and
- 8) That Saint John Henry Newman 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 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 11<sup>th</sup> day of August in the Year of Our Lord 2025, the liturgical Memorial of Saint Clare, Virgin, and the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Saint John Henry Newman.

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✠ Donald J. Hying  
Bishop of Madison

Timothy J. Cavanaugh

Timothy J. Cavanaugh  
Chancellor

SEAL