



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

## **DECREE OF CANONICAL MERGER**

**Uniting Saint Christopher Parish  
and Saint Maria Goretti Parish into**

**DIVINE MERCY PARISH**

in Dane County in the State of Wisconsin

**Protocol No.: 250429-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 Saint Christopher Parish, located in Verona and Paoli, and of Saint Maria Goretti Parish, located in Madison, 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, while the initial proposal suggested merging three parishes, namely, the aforementioned Saint Christopher and Saint Maria Goretti Parishes along with Saint Michael the Archangel Parish in Mount Horeb and Perry, the feedback obtained through the process of consultation noted that the newly proposed parish would serve a large geographical area and that the smaller, more rural congregation of Saint Michael the Archangel would not blend so well with the suburban parishes of Saint Christopher and Saint Maria Goretti; given these considerations, the strategic plan was modified to potentially merge Saint Christopher and Saint Maria Goretti Parishes and to move Saint Michael the Archangel Parish to a grouping containing more similar rural parishes; and

WHEREAS in March of 2023 the parishes of Saint Christopher and Saint Maria Goretti were grouped together to become “Pastorate 20,” 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 Monsignor Kevin Holmes 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 20 on 13 November 2023 at Saint Maria Goretti 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 two 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 20 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, recommended to the undersigned Bishop of Madison, in a unanimous consultative vote, that Saint Christopher and Saint Maria Goretti 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, Saint Christopher and Saint Maria Goretti Parishes have seen decreases in the numbers of those participating in Sunday Masses and receiving the sacraments. At Saint Maria Goretti in 2005, there were 2139 registered households in the parish and an average weekend Mass attendance of around 2500 communicants. By 2021, the number of registered households actually increased to 2247; however, the average Mass attendance declined precipitously to an average weekend Mass attendance of around 870 communicants. As for Saint Christopher Parish, statistical data dating back twenty years from the “Guided by the Spirit” planning initiative looks at numbers prior to the merger of Saint Andrew Parish in Verona with Saint William Parish in Paoli. The number of registered households at Saint Andrew in Verona in 2005 was 857. Saint William in Paoli had approximately 40 registered households in 2005, thus giving a combined number around 900 households for both parishes. When compared with this combined data, Saint Christopher Parish had 644 households in 2021, a decrease of almost one-third over a period of 16 years. The combined weekend Mass numbers in 2005 for Saint Andrew and Saint William indicate an average of 950 communicants. However, that number was cut almost in half by 2021 with an average of 494 weekend communions at the two churches of Saint Christopher Parish. This trend is also reflected in the number of baptisms and other sacraments. Saint Maria Goretti averaged around 150 infant baptisms in the years between 2000 and 2005, but by 2021, there were only 63 baptisms, around a sixty (60) percent decrease. Saint Andrew and Saint William went from a combined average of 40 infant baptisms in the period between 2000 and 2005 to only 13 baptisms in 2021. These trends

occurred despite significant population growth in the area served by the two parishes. The overall population is expected to grow in the area by about 9000 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 robust population growth;

- 2) **Insufficiency of less extreme forms of collaboration.** During a previous period of diocesan pastoral planning conducted in 2005, Saint Maria Goretti Parish was engaged in dialogue with neighboring parishes in Madison, namely, Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish and Blessed Sacrament Parish. The outcome of those discussions was to potentially partner on various pastoral initiatives. However, the parishes felt that any serious modifications of parish structures would not be feasible given the large size of each parish. As for Saint Andrew and Saint William, the parish level planning committee in 2005 suggested that each parish remain separate but become linked through a pastor with the care of multiple parish entities. Despite this recommendation from the parish level, the diocesan bishop at the time believed that a merger of Saint Andrew and Saint William was warranted, especially given the small community present at Paoli with only 40 registered households. Thus, Saint Christopher Parish was formed out of the merger of Saint Andrew and Saint William in the year 2010. Despite the large size of Saint Maria Goretti in the early 2000s, various challenges have led to a decrease in numbers as described above in the preceding paragraph. Saint Christopher has also seen a certain diminishment in numbers and participation, even despite the earlier attempts to strengthen the parish through merger. Thus, these 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 two parishes that share a similar suburban setting and have similar liturgical affinities;
- 3) **More effective outreach to young adults, families, and older adults.** In 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 the young population in the area. This population includes numerous young adults working at a local company and families with young children moving into the territory covered by the parishes. Merging parishes will offer opportunities to consider additional staff dedicated to young adult and family 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. Combined staff can also reach out in other evangelizing ways to concentrate on adult formation and ministry to the homebound;
- 4) **Promotion and strengthening of the school and other administrative or consultative bodies.** The parochial school at Saint Maria Goretti has undergone difficulties in terms of enrollment in recent years. In 2005, the student enrollment for the school was reported to be 415 students. As of this current school year, there are only 116 students. This significant decrease in enrollment is due to numerous factors, especially given changing pastoral and school leadership. However, the enrollment has begun to stabilize, and the merger of these two parishes will hopefully allow for an increased attendance at the school given the general population growth in the parochial territory. St. Christopher Parish does not have

its own Catholic school. Thus, the merger of the two parishes will allow for children from both former parishes to have the opportunity to enroll in a Catholic school within their own parish. Additionally, being able to draw upon a larger parish population could potentially increase attendance at Saint Maria Goretti School. In regard to administration and other parish bodies or groups, a larger pool of parishioners to serve will also enhance the various ministries at both churches. One of the areas that will be enhanced by the merger is making the Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils more robust;

- 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 two distinct parishes;
- 6) **More stable organizational structure in service of better evangelization.** Unifying these parishes will provide a stable organizational structure that will serve this 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 Saint Christopher Parish in Verona and Paoli, located in Dane County, and Saint Maria Goretti Parish in Madison, located in Dane County, are hereby joined by extinctive union to form Divine Mercy 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 Christopher Parish and Saint Maria Goretti Parish, along with the obligations proper to each, are hereby transferred to Divine Mercy 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 Divine Mercy Parish shall be as follows:
  - a. On the North: Starting at the intersection of North Riley Road and County Highway J, then continuing east along County Highway J to its intersection with Coray Lane, then continuing east along Coray Lane until it ends, then continuing due east in a line to the intersection of Timber Lane and Mid Town Road, then continuing east

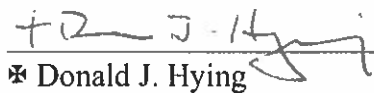
along Mid Town Road to its intersection with South Pleasant View Road, then continuing north along South Pleasant View Road to its intersection with South Junction Road, then continuing northeast along South Junction Road to its intersection with Mineral Point Road, then continuing east along Mineral Point Road to its intersection with U.S. Highways 12 and 14, then continuing southeast along U.S. Highways 12 and 14 to their intersection with U.S. Highways 18 and 151, then continuing on U.S. Highways 12, 14, 18, and 151 to their intersection with Seminole Highway;

- b. On the East: Starting at the intersection of U.S. Highways 12, 14, 18, and 151 and Seminole Highway, then continuing southwest along Seminole Highway until it ends and becomes South Seminole Highway, then continuing south along South Seminole Highway to its intersection with Lacy Road, then continuing east along Lacy Road to its intersection with South Fish Hatchery Road, then continuing south along South Fish Hatchery Road to its intersection with Lincoln Road, then continuing west along Lincoln Road to its intersection with Tipperary Road, then continuing south along Tipperary Road to its intersection with County Highway A;
  - c. On the South: Starting at the intersection of Tipperary Road and County Highway A, then continuing west along County Highway A to its intersection with State Highway 69, then continuing south along State Highway 69 to its intersection with County Highway A, then continuing west along County Highway A to its intersection with State Highway 92;
  - d. On the West: Starting at the intersection of County Highway A and State Highway 92, then continuing north along State Highway 92 to its intersection with County Highway G, then continuing northeast along County Highway G to its intersection with County Highway J, then continuing north along County Highway J to its intersection with County Highway PD, then continuing northeast along County Highway PD to its intersection with County Highway J, then continuing north along County Highway J to its intersection with North Riley Road; and
- 4) That the patronal feast of the parish is to be observed on the Second Sunday of Easter (the Octave of Easter, Low Sunday, *Dominica in albis*, *Quasimodo* Sunday), or as it is fittingly designated, the Sunday of Divine Mercy; and
  - 5) That Saint Maria Goretti Church in Madison is designated as the parochial church of Divine Mercy Parish, while Saint Andrew Church in Verona and Saint William Church in Paoli 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 Christopher and Saint Maria Goretti shall be closed to any new entries and shall remain in the care and custody of Divine Mercy Parish to be properly preserved and

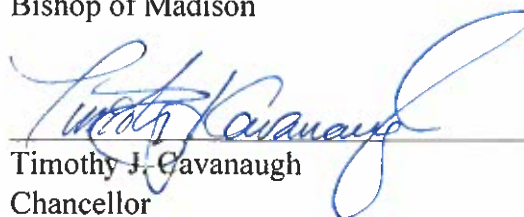
safeguarded at the new main parish office. A new set of sacramental records is to be established for Divine Mercy Parish, and sacraments taking place in any of the churches of the parish are to be recorded in the new sacramental registers of Divine Mercy Parish in accord with universal and diocesan norms; and

- 8) That Divine Mercy 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 3 May 2025, the liturgical Feast of Saints Philip and James, Apostles; and
- 12) That the decree is to be notified on 3 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 April in the Year of Our Lord 2025, the liturgical Memorial of Saint Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor of the Church.

  
✠ Donald J. Hying

Bishop of Madison

  
Timothy J. Cavanaugh  
Chancellor

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