



**Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
Blessed Sacrament Parish
St. Matthew Parish
Effective December 1, 2024**

Beginning in September of 2022, I initiated an extensive process of listening, visioning and discernment regarding the future of this parish and others in the City of Baltimore and the surrounding areas. The general public, parish leadership and individual parishioners were invited to attend a series of public meetings to advise me on the best future for these parishes. More than 6,000 persons participated in the two-year process. An initial proposal for reconfiguration that was prepared by 250 lay and clergy leaders was made public in March of 2024. Two public meetings were held after this announcement to receive feedback from individual parishes and individual parishioners regarding the initial proposal. All have also been given the opportunity to provide their views to me by mail, email or individually throughout the process.

In regard to the proposed merger of Blessed Sacrament parish and St. Matthew parish, the members of Blessed Sacrament parish have participated in the process to determine its future through completing a survey and attending an open prayerful discussions and three visioning sessions. After additional changes were made based on the feedback received from that process, the final proposal was made public on May 22, 2024.

The Presbyteral Council and Archdiocesan Finance Council (BOFA) were asked for feedback on both the initial proposal in April 2024 and the final proposal in May 2024 for the above-referenced merger before their final canonical review of the proposed plan. In accordance with canons 50, 120 §1, 121 and the requirements of canon 515 §2, the proposal to canonically merge Blessed Sacrament parish into St. Matthew parish was formally presented to the Presbyteral Council on September 3, 2024 for the required canonical consultation. After reviewing and discussing the materials related to the canonical merger, the members gave their unanimous support to the proposal.

The following facts regarding Blessed Sacrament parish constitute the reasons, in summary, for the canonical merger of Blessed Sacrament parish into St. Matthew parish (canon 51):

- The population within the boundaries of Blessed Sacrament parish has declined by 14% since 2000;
- There are 165 Catholic households in the parish boundaries and only 28 of these households are registered at Blessed Sacrament parish;
- The number of parishioners attending Mass at Blessed Sacrament parish has declined from 110 in 2004 to 56 in 2023;
- The parish has shared a pastor and parish expenses with St. Matthew parish since 2012, but the number of parishioners and funds has continued to decline;
- The parish has had a total of 19 baptisms and 11 marriages since 2014;
- As the number of parishioners has declined, the parish has had an operating deficit for 14 of the last 20 years;
- The assets are being depleted over time to cover annual deficits;
- The parish is experiencing an increase in costs of facilities with 93% of its offertory being used to maintain its building in 2024, leaving almost nothing for ministries and indicating an inability to cover future increases in expenses;
- There are 7 other parishes within a 2-mile radius of this parish;
- Blessed Sacrament parish is 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from St. Matthew parish church; and
- St. Matthew parish has the facilities to welcome the parishioners and ministries of Blessed Sacrament parish.

From these facts considered as whole, it is my opinion that left to itself, Blessed Sacrament parish is unable to provide a satisfactory level of pastoral ministry and sacramental life. Merging with St. Matthew parish will allow the greatest opportunity to continue providing necessary ministries for the parishioners of Blessed Sacrament parish.

Having heard all who have an interest in this matter, including the opinion of the members of the Presbyteral Council who were properly convened according to law and voted on this matter in my presence, I believe the reasons listed above in this decree establish a just cause for the canonical merger of the Blessed Sacrament parish into St. Matthew parish. As a result, I do hereby decree that Blessed Sacrament parish is to be canonically merged into St. Matthew parish, Baltimore effective, December 1, 2024.

Boundaries

The boundaries of St. Matthew parish shall reflect the current outside boundaries of the two parishes on the date of the canonical merger.

Assets and Liabilities

Until the issuance of a subsequent decree, the temporal goods, assets, and liabilities under civil law of the civilly incorporated Blessed Sacrament parish and the civilly incorporated St. Matthew parish, all under the canonical administration of the pastor of St. Matthew parish, shall nonetheless remain separate and distinct. Furthermore, I order the sequestration *pro tempore* of the temporal goods and assets of each civil corporation for the exclusive use of meeting the debts and liabilities of their respective civil corporations (cf. can. 1496 §1).

Status of Churches

While Blessed Sacrament Church remains a sacred edifice to which the faithful have the right of entry under canon 1214, it now becomes a subsidiary church of Saint Matthew parish, with permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament there (cf. can. 934 §1, 2^o) and with the pastor being responsible for the reserved Eucharist (cf. can. 934 §2). St. Matthew Church will remain the parish church for the canonically merged parishes.

Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records

The parish registers for Blessed Sacrament parish are to be closed as of November 30, 2024. Any entries after that date in the registries of St. Matthew parish must indicate at which church the sacramental event took place. All closed registers shall be kept and maintained by St. Matthew parish or sent to the Archdiocesan Archives in accordance with Archdiocesan policy. The parish records (financial, etc.) of Blessed Sacrament parish will become the property and responsibility of St. Matthew parish on December 1, 2024.

Parish Seal

All parish seals shall be the property of St. Matthew parish beginning December 1, 2024.

Effective Date and Publication of this Decree

This decree is effective December 1, 2024. Its official notification is its publication on the website of the Archdiocese of Baltimore on September 29, 2024.

I direct that the Pastor/ Administrator of Blessed Sacrament parish and St. Matthew parish to announce at all Masses on the weekend of September 28-29, 2024 that this Decree has been published on the website of the Archdiocese of Baltimore (archbalt.org). I ask all the faithful of the new parish to work together to build a thriving, evangelizing community centered on the Eucharist and reflective of their rich histories in the years ahead.

Any of member of Blessed Sacrament parish who claims to have been aggrieved by this Decree has the right to seek its revocation or emendation (canon 1734). This request

must be made in writing to the Most Reverend Archbishop of Baltimore, Catholic Center, 320 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, MD 21201 and postmarked no later than October 11, 2024.

Given at the Curia of the Archdiocese of Baltimore in Baltimore City on this 25th day of September, in the Year of Our Lord, 2024.



Most Reverend William E. Lori, S.T.D.
Archbishop of Baltimore



Dr. Diane L. Barr, JD, JCD, PhD
Chancellor