



**Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
Most Precious Blood 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. The 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 Most Precious Blood parish and St. Matthew parish, the members of Most Precious Blood parish participated in three visioning sessions and two prayerful discussions. 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 prior to 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 Most Precious Blood 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 Most Precious Blood parish constitute reasons, in summary, for the canonical merger of Most Precious Blood parish into St. Matthew parish (canon 51):

- The number of persons residing in the boundaries of Most Precious Blood parish has declined by 11% since 2000;
- The number of Catholic households registered in the parish boundaries has declined from 96 in 2004 to 35 in 2023, with only 3 of these households registered at Most Precious Blood parish;
- The number of persons attending Mass at Most Precious Blood parish has declined from 83 in 2004 to 50 in 2023;
- The parish has shared expenses for a pastor and religious formation with St. Anthony of Padua parish since 1995 and St. Dominic parish since 2010, but the number of parishioners and the amount of parish income has continued to decline;
- There were 22 baptisms, 9 confirmations and 3 weddings at this parish between 2014 and 2023;
- The parish has sold its assets and currently has less than \$22,216 in unrestricted assets to pay its bills;
- The parish has had an operating deficit for 11 of the last 20 years and assets are no longer adequate to pay future deficits;
- The parish is experiencing an increase in both costs of facilities and unpaid bills indicating an inability to cover all expenses, with no funds available for ministry;
- Rental income is 33% of total parish income;
- The parish would need over 6.6 times its current offertory to meet the cost of buildings operations and annual recommended facilities reserve;
- There are 3 other parishes within 2 miles of this parish;
- Most Precious Blood parish church is 4 miles (6.4 kilometers) from St. Matthew parish church; and
- St. Matthew parish has the facilities to welcome the parishioners from Most Precious Blood parish and its ministries.

From these facts, considered as whole, it is my opinion that left to itself, Most Precious Blood parish does not have sufficient funds or parishioners and will only continue to decline with the resultant diminishing of pastoral ministry and sacramental life. Merging with St. Matthew parish will allow the greatest opportunity to continue and even strengthen the ministries which are presently offered for the parishioners of Most Precious Blood 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 Most Precious Blood parish into St. Matthew parish. As a result, I do hereby decree that Most Precious Blood 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 Most Precious Blood 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 Most Precious Blood Church remains a sacred edifice to which the faithful have the right of entry under canon 1214, it now becomes a subsidiary church of St. 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 Most Precious Blood 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 Most Precious Blood 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 Most Precious Blood 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 member of Most Precious Blood 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

