



Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
Sacred Heart of Mary Parish
Our Lady of Hope 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 Sacred Heart of Mary parish and Our Lady of Hope parish, the members of Sacred Heart of Mary parish participated in the discernment of its future through completing a survey, holding listening sessions on the parish campus, attending open, prayerful discussions and participating in three visioning sessions. Meetings were also held with parish leadership from both parishes before a final decision was made. 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 for the above-mentioned merger on the initial plan in April 2024 and prior to their final review of the proposed plan in May 2024. In accordance with canons 50, 120 §1, 121 and the requirements of canon 515 §2, the proposal to canonically merge Sacred Heart of Mary parish into Our Lady of Hope 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 Sacred Heart of Mary parish constitute the reasons, in summary, for the canonical merger of Sacred Heart of Mary parish into Our Lady of Hope parish (canon 51):

- Sacred Heart of Mary parish has shared a pastor and expenses with St. Rita parish since 2012;
- The number of attendees at Mass at Sacred Heart of Mary parish has decreased from 1109 in 2004 to 218 in 2023;
- The number of registered Catholic households within Sacred Heart of Mary parish boundaries has declined from 1685 in 2004 to 957 in 2023;
- 65% of Mass attendees (142 persons) are over the age of 60;
- The number of sacramental celebrations has declined from 26 baptisms in 2014 to 5 in 2023;
- The parish has operated at a deficit for 8 of the last 20 years;
- The parish has had a deficit in 4 out of the last 5 years and its assets are not adequate to cover future deficits leaving few funds for ministry;
- Sacred Heart of Mary parish has had a 36% decline in offertory and, since losing rental income in 2020, the parish has suffered significant operating deficits;
- The average parish deficit is \$97,000 annually;
- The parish needs 3.7 times their current offertory to meet the costs of building operations and facilities reserve, leaving few funds for ministry;
- There are 3 other parishes located within 2 miles of this parish; and
- Sacred Heart of Mary parish is 2.7 miles (4.3 kilometers) from Our Lady of Hope parish.

From these facts, considered as a whole, it is my opinion that left to itself, Sacred Heart of Mary parish will only continue to decline with the resultant diminishing of pastoral ministry and sacramental life. Merging with Our Lady of Hope parish will allow the greatest opportunity to continue and even strengthen the ministries which are presently offered for the parishioners of Sacred Heart of Mary 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 Sacred Heart of Mary parish into Our Lady of Hope parish. As a result, I do hereby decree that Sacred Heart of Mary parish is to be canonically merged into Our Lady of Hope parish, Baltimore effective, December 1, 2024.

Boundaries

The boundaries of Our Lady of Hope parish shall reflect the boundaries of the two parishes as of 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 Sacred Heart of Mary parish and the civilly incorporated Our Lady of Hope parish, all under the canonical administration of the pastor of Our Lady of Hope 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 Sacred Heart of Mary Church remains a sacred edifice to which the faithful have the right of entry under canon 1214, it now becomes a subsidiary church of Our Lady of Hope 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). Our Lady of Hope Church will remain the parish church for the canonically merged parishes.

Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records

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

Parish Seal

All parish seals shall be the property of Our Lady of Hope 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 Sacred Heart of Mary parish and Our Lady of Hope 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 Sacred Heart of Mary 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.

+ William E. Lori

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

Diane L. Barr

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

