



**Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger**  
**St. Benedict Parish**  
**Our Lady of Victory 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 St. Benedict parish and Our Lady of Victory parish, members of St. Benedict parish participated in listening sessions, open prayerful discussions and 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 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 St. Benedict parish into Our Lady of Victory 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 St. Benedict parish constitute the reasons in summary for the canonical merger of St. Benedict parish into Our Lady of Victory parish (canon 51):

- The number of persons residing within St. Benedict parish boundaries has declined by 19% since 2000;
- The parish has only \$27,886 in assets since all properties (the church and other buildings and accounts) used by the parish are owned by the Order of St. Benedict;
- St. Vincent Archabbey has chosen not to assign a monk as pastor for this parish and has decided to continue charitable efforts in this area under its own auspices;
- With its shortage of clergy, the Archdiocese of Baltimore would be hard pressed to take over the pastoral care of the parish and can better provide pastoral care from Our Lady of Victory parish;
- The Order of St. Benedict has transformed the property into a neighborhood outreach center for the poor and has leased the property to “Project Place”, an organization that works with the poor and homeless;
- The parish has experienced 16 years of parish deficits in the last twenty years due to the decline in the numbers of parishioners and income;
- Actual attendance at Mass at the parish has declined significantly;
- Our Lady of Victory Parish has sufficient resources to provide spiritually for the parishioners of St. Benedict parish and will continue to collaborate with the work of the Benedictine Order through their outreach center;
- There are 4 parishes within 2 miles of the parish; and
- St. Benedict parish is 2.7 miles (4.3 kilometers) from Our Lady of Victory 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 St. Benedict parish into Our Lady of Victory parish. As a result, I do hereby decree that St. Benedict parish is to be canonically merged into Our Lady of Victory parish, Baltimore, effective December 1, 2024.

### **Boundaries**

The boundaries of Our Lady of Victory parish shall reflect the current outside 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 St. Benedict parish and the civilly

incorporated Our Lady of Victory parish, all under the canonical administration of the pastor of Our Lady of Victory 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 St. Benedict 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 Victory parish. Our Lady of Victory Church will remain the parish church for the canonically merged parishes.

### **Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records**

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

### **Parish Seal**

All parish seals shall be the property of Our Lady of Victory 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 St. Benedict parish and Our Lady of Victory 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 St. Benedict 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 25<sup>th</sup> 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

