



**Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Baltimore City
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 St. Francis of Assisi parish and St. Matthew parish, the members of St. Francis of Assisi parish participated in surveys, open prayerful discussions, visioning sessions and hosted their own listening sessions on the parish campus in order to provide information about their vision for their future. 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. Francis of Assisi 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 St. Francis of Assisi parish constitute reasons, in summary, for the canonical merger of St. Francis of Assisi parish into St. Matthew parish (canon 51):

- The number of persons residing in the parish boundaries has declined by 10% since 2000;
- The parish has shared a pastor and expenses with Shrine of the Little Flower parish since 2021;
- The number of persons attending Mass at St. Francis of Assisi parish has declined from 489 in 2004 to 170 in 2023;
- The number of those receiving sacraments has declined since 2014;
- The parish operated at a deficit for 18 of the last 20 years and its assets will be depleted over time to cover future deficits;
- The parish needs 1.2 times their current offertory to meet the operating cost of buildings operations and annual recommended facilities reserve, leaving little for ministry;
- There are 8 other parishes within 2 miles of St. Francis of Assisi parish;
- St. Francis of Assisi parish is 2.8 miles (4.5 kilometers) from St. Matthew parish; and
- St. Mathew parish is able to welcome the parishioners and ministries of St. Francis of Assisi parish.

From these facts, considered as whole, it is my opinion that left to itself, St. Francis of Assisi parish 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 St. Francis of Assisi 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. Francis of Assisi parish into St. Matthew parish. As a result, I do hereby decree that St. Francis of Assisi 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 St. Francis of Assisi 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 St. Francis of Assisi 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 continue its designation as the parish church for the canonically merged parishes.

Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records

The parish registers for St. Francis of Assisi 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 St. Francis of Assisi 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 St. Francis of Assisi 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 St. Francis of Assisi 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

