



Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
St. Luke 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 St. Luke parish and Our Lady of Hope parish, the members of St. Luke parish provided their views regarding the future of their parish by completing surveys and participating in visioning sessions and attending open prayerful discernments. 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 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. Luke 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 St. Luke parish constitute the reasons, in summary, for the canonical merger of St. Luke parish into Our Lady of Hope parish (canon 51):

- St. Luke parish has shared a pastor and expenses with Our Lady of Hope parish since 2012;
- The number of Catholic households in St. Luke parish boundaries has declined from 766 in 2004 to 406 in 2023.
- The number of attendees at Mass at St. Luke parish has declined from 536 in 2004 to 183 in 2023;
- 67% of Mass attendees (123 persons) are over the age of 60;
- There has been a decline in the number of sacramental celebrations at the parish;
- The parish has operated at a deficit for 9 of the last 20 years and has been forced to sell assets to continue operation leaving few funds available for ministry;
- The parish is experiencing an increase in the costs of facilities and unpaid bills indicating an inability to cover expenses, even with a shared pastor and pastoral collaboration;
- The parish requires more than 100% of its annual offertory to meet the costs of its buildings and reserve; and
- St. Luke parish is 4.3 miles (6.9 kilometers) from Our Lady of Hope parish.

From these facts, considered as a whole, it is my opinion that left to itself, St. Luke 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 St. Luke 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 St. Luke parish into Our Lady of Hope parish. As a result, I do hereby decree that St. Luke 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 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. Luke 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 St. Luke 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 St. Luke 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 St. Luke 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 St. Luke 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 St. Luke 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

