



**Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
St. Peter Claver Parish
St. Bernardine 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. Peter Claver parish and St. Bernardine parish, the members of St. Peter Claver parish completed surveys, attended open, prayerful discussions, including one for Black Catholics, and participated 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 on both the initial proposal in April 2024 and the final proposal in May 2024 for the above-referenced merger prior to their official 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. Peter Claver parish into St. Bernardine 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. Peter Claver parish constitute reasons, in summary, for the canonical merger of St. Peter Claver parish into St. Bernardine parish (canon 51):

- There are only about 5100 persons who reside within the parish boundaries;
- The number of Catholic households in the parish boundaries has declined from 410 in 2004 to 200 in 2023;
- The number of persons attending Mass at St. Peter Claver parish has declined from 167 in 2014 to 138 in 2023;
- 68% of Mass attendees (94 persons) are over the age of 50;
- St. Peter Claver parish has shared worship space, staff and expenses with St. Pius V parish since 2005;
- The parish has operated at a deficit for 11 of the last 20 years and parish assets are not adequate to cover future deficits;
- Rental income is 19% of total parish income;
- St. Peter Claver parish needs over 2.8 times its current offertory to meet the annual cost of buildings operations and recommended facilities reserves leaving few funds for ministry;
- St. Peter Claver parish and St. Bernadine parish share a unique history and culture;
- St. Bernadine parish is able to accommodate the members of St. Peter Claver parish with their facilities;
- St. Peter Claver parish is 3.2 miles (5.1 kilometers) from St. Bernadine parish so parishioners would have easy access to St. Bernardine parish church; and
- There are 12 parishes within 2 miles of St. Peter Claver.

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

Boundaries

The boundaries of St. Bernardine 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. Peter Claver parish and the civilly incorporated St. Bernardine parish, all under the canonical administration of the pastor of St. Bernardine 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. Peter Claver 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. Bernardine 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. Bernardine Church will remain the parish church for the merged parishes.

Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records

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

Parish Seal

All parish seals shall be the property of St. Bernardine 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. Peter Claver parish and St. Bernardine 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. Peter Claver 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



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