



**Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
St. Rita 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. Rita parish and Our Lady of Hope parish, the members of St. Rita parish provided their views about the future of their parish through the completion of a survey, the organizing of parish based listening sessions and attendance at Archdiocesan sponsored visioning sessions and 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 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. Rita 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. Rita parish constitute the reasons in summary for the canonical merger of St. Rita parish into Our Lady of Hope parish (canon 51):

- St. Rita parish has shared a pastor and expenses with Sacred Heart of Mary parish since 2012;
- The number of Catholic households in the area has declined from 990 in 2004 to 561 in 2023;
- The number of persons attending Mass has declined from 475 in 2004 to 262 in 2023;
- There has been a significant decline in the number of sacramental celebrations from 21 baptisms in 2014 to no baptisms in 2023;
- The parish has operated at a deficit for 19 of the last 20 years even while sharing expenses;
- The parish has had to sell its assets in order to continue to pay its bills;
- The parish is experiencing an increase in unpaid bills indicating an inability to cover all expenses;
- The parish requires 144% of offertory to pay for the operation of its buildings and recommended annual reserve, leaving no resources for ministry;
- There are 3 other parish churches within 2 miles of this location;
- The parish is 2.3 miles (3,7 kilometers) from Our Lady of Hope parish; and
- Our Lady of Hope parish is able to provide pastoral care and support the ministries of St. Rita parish.

From these facts considered as whole, it is my opinion that left to itself, St. Rita parish will be unable to continue providing pastoral ministry and sacramental life to its parishioners. Last year alone (2023) saw significant deficit spending with no baptisms, confirmations, or marriages. Merging with Our Lady of Hope parish will provide the greatest opportunity to continue and even strengthen the ministries which are presently offered for the parishioners of Saint Rita 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. Rita parish into Our Lady of Hope parish. As a result, I do hereby decree that St. Rita 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. Rita 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. Rita 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. Rita 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. Rita 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. Rita 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 of member of St. Rita 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

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