



Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
St. Thomas Aquinas Parish
Cathedral of Mary Our Queen Parish
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 Archdiocesan wide 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. Thomas Aquinas parish and the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish, members of St. Thomas Aquinas parish completed surveys and participated in visioning sessions. 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. Thomas Aquinas parish into Cathedral of Mary Our Queen 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. Thomas Aquinas parish constitute the reasons, in summary, for the canonical merger of St. Thomas Aquinas parish into Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish (canon 51):

- The number of Catholic households present in the parish boundaries has declined significantly from 584 in 2004 to 277 in 2023;
- Only 58 of these Catholic households are registered in St. Thomas Aquinas parish;
- The number of persons who attend Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas parish has decreased significantly from 477 in 2004 to 106 in 2023;
- Pastoral activity in the parish has declined significantly since 2004 from 40 baptisms in 2014 to 3 baptisms in 2023;
- There has been a total of 17 confirmations and 27 weddings at the parish between 2014 and 2023;
- The parish has had an operational deficit for 17 of the last 20 years with an average deficit of \$160,000 each year over the last 5 years;
- The parish needs 3 times its current offertory to meet the costs of building operations and annual recommended facilities reserve leaving no funds available for ministry;
- The parish is experiencing an increase in both costs of facilities and unpaid bills which indicates an inability to cover all expenses;
- The parish has had to rely on the funds obtained through leasing of properties in order to stay open for the last 10 years;
- There are 9 other parishes within 2 miles of the parish;
- St. Thomas Aquinas parish is 2.3 miles (3.7 kilometers) from the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish; and
- The Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish has sufficient facilities to accommodate the parishioners and ministries of St. Thomas Aquinas parish.

From these facts considered as whole, it is my opinion that left to itself, St. Thomas Aquinas parish is already unable to provide a satisfactory level of pastoral ministry and sacramental life. Merging with Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish will allow the greatest opportunity to continue providing necessary ministries for the parishioners of St. Thomas Aquinas 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. Thomas Aquinas parish into Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish. As a result, I do hereby decree that St. Thomas

Aquinas parish is to be canonically merged into Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish, Baltimore effective, December 1, 2024.

Boundaries

The boundaries of Cathedral of Mary Our Queen 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. Thomas Aquinas parish and the civilly incorporated Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish, all under the canonical administration of the pastor of Cathedral of Mary Our Queen 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. Thomas Aquinas Church remains a sacred edifice to which the faithful have the right of entry under canon 1214, it now becomes a subsidiary church of Cathedral of Mary Our Queen 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). Cathedral of Mary Our Queen Church will remain the parish church for the canonically merged parishes.

Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records

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

Parish Seal

All parish seals shall be the property of Cathedral of Mary Our Queen 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. Thomas Aquinas parish and Cathedral of Mary Our Queen 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. Thomas Aquinas 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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