



**Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
St. Thomas More Parish
Immaculate Heart of Mary 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 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 More parish and Immaculate Heart of Mary parish, the members of St. Thomas More parish participated in the discernment of its future through completing a survey and attending open prayerful discussions. 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 More parish into Immaculate Heart of Mary 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 More parish constitute the reasons in summary for the canonical merger of St. Thomas More parish into Immaculate Heart of Mary parish (canon 51):

- St. Thomas More parish has shared a pastor and expenses with Immaculate Heart of Mary parish since 2022;
- The number of Catholic households in St. Thomas More parish boundaries has declined from 497 in 2004 to 233 in 2023;
- Only 48 of those Catholic households are registered at St. Thomas More parish;
- The number of parishioners attending Mass at St. Thomas More parish has declined from 466 in 2004 to 243 in 2023;
- The number of sacraments received at St. Thomas More parish has declined to an average of 6 baptisms a year, between 2014 and 2023;
- There were only 13 confirmations and 11 marriages at the parish from 2014 to 2023;
- The parish has operated at a deficit for 10 of the last 20 years;
- 61% of parish income comes from the rental of property;
- The parish requires 4 times its current offertory to meet the annual costs of building operations and reserves, leaving few funds available for ministry;
- There are 3 other parish churches within 2 miles of this location;
- St. Thomas More parish church is located 2.3 miles (3.7 kilometers) from Immaculate Heart of Mary parish church; and
- Immaculate Heart of Mary parish has the resources necessary to welcome the parishioners and ministries of St. Thomas More, including African Catholics, to their parish.

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

Boundaries

The Boundaries of Immaculate Heart of Mary 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 More parish and the civilly incorporated Immaculate Heart of Mary parish, all under the canonical administration of the pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary 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 More church remains a sacred edifice to which the faithful have the right of entry under canon 1214, it now becomes a subsidiary church of Immaculate Heart of Mary 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). Immaculate Heart of Mary church will remain the parish church for the canonically merged parishes.

Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records

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

Parish Seal

All parish seals shall be the property of Immaculate Heart of Mary 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 More parish and the Immaculate Heart of Mary 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. Thomas More 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