



Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
St. Wenceslaus Parish
St. Francis Xavier 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. Wenceslaus parish and St. Francis Xavier parish, the members of St. Wenceslaus parish provided their views regarding the future of their parish through the submission of a survey, sharing in prayerful discussions, including one for Black Catholics, and participation 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 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. Wenceslaus parish into St. Francis Xavier 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. Wenceslaus parish constitute reasons, in summary, for the canonical merger of St. Wenceslaus parish into St. Francis Xavier parish (canon 51):

- The general population within St. Wenceslaus parish boundaries has declined by 23% since 2000;
- The number of persons attending Mass at the parish has declined from 204 in 2004 to 57 in 2023;
- St. Wenceslaus parish has shared a pastor and expenses with St. Ann parish since 1995 and St. Francis Xavier parish since 2018;
- There have been only 24 baptisms, 10 confirmations and 4 weddings at the parish since 2014;
- The parish has had operational deficits in 18 of the last 20 years despite sharing expenses with other parishes;
- The parish has been forced to sell its assets in order to pay for its regular expenses;
- The parish would need over 4.2 times its current offertory to meet the cost of buildings operations and annual recommended facilities reserve;
- There are 15 other parishes within 2 miles of St. Wenceslaus parish;
- St. Wenceslaus parish and St. Francis Xavier parish share a unique history and culture;
- St. Wenceslaus parish church is 1 mile (1.6 kilometers) from St. Francis Xavier parish; and
- St. Francis Xavier parish is willing to welcome and support the parishioners and ministries of St. Wenceslaus parish.

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

Boundaries

The boundaries of St. Francis Xavier parish shall reflect the current outside boundaries of the two parishes on the date of 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. Wenceslaus parish and the civilly incorporated St. Francis Xavier parish, all under the canonical administration of the pastor of St. Francis Xavier 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. Wenceslaus 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. Francis Xavier 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. Francis Xavier Church will remain the parish church for the merged parishes.

Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records

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

Parish Seal

All parish seals shall be the property of St. Francis Xavier 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. Wenceslaus parish and St. Francis Xavier 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. Wenceslaus 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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