



Decree Of Canonical Parish Merger
St. William of York Parish
St. Agnes 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.

Regarding the proposed merger of St. William of York parish and St. Agnes parish, members of St. William of York parish participated in three visioning sessions and attended an open prayerful discernment. 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 final proposal in May 2024 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. William of York parish into St. Agnes 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. William of York parish constitute reasons in summary for the canonical merger of St. William of York parish into St. Agnes parish (canon 51):

- The number of persons residing within St. William of York parish boundaries has decreased 19% in the last 20 years;
- St. William of York parish has shared a pastor and expenses with St. Agnes parish since 2010;
- There are only 128 registered Catholic households in St. William of York parish boundaries and only 20 of those were registered at St. William of York parish in 2023;
- The number of persons attending Mass at St. William of York parish has significantly decreased from 307 persons in 2004 to 98 in 2023;
- Sacramental activity at this parish has declined from 6 baptisms in 2004 to 3 baptisms in 2023 and only 4 confirmations since 2014;
- Parish assets have consistently declined over the last 10 years with the parish operating at a deficit for 15 of the last 20 years;
- The parish would need more than 2.5 times its current offertory just to meet the cost of buildings operations and annual recommended facilities reserves, leaving few funds for ministry; and
- St. Agnes parish is 1.1 miles (1.8 kilometers) from St. William of York parish;
- St. Agnes parish has sufficient space to accommodate the parishioners and ministries of St. William of York parish.

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

Boundaries

The boundaries of St. Agnes 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. William of York parish and the civilly incorporated St. Agnes parish, all under the canonical administration of the pastor of St. Agnes 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. William of York 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. Agnes 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. Agnes Church remains the parish church for the canonically merged parishes.

Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records

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

Parish Seal

All parish seals shall be the property of St. Agnes 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. William of York parish and St. Agnes 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. William of York 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

