



DECREE
OF THE MERGER OF
SAINT JOSEPH PARISH,
WAPAKONETA, OHIO,
SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST PARISH,
FRYBURG, OHIO,
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH,
BOTKINS, OHIO,
AND
SAINT LAWRENCE PARISH,
RHINE, OHIO
INTO THE NEW
HOLY FACE OF JESUS PARISH

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Joseph Parish was founded in 1839; the present church building was completed in 1911. Saint John the Evangelist Parish was founded in 1850, and its present church building was completed the same year. Immaculate Conception Parish was founded in 1865; the present church was completed in 1962. Saint Lawrence Parish was founded in 1856, its current church building being completed in 1893. Since 2014 all four parishes have been served by a common pastor. Over the years modifications have been made to the administrative structure of the four parishes such that they are now served by a shared central office, and all administrative and ministerial employees serve all four parishes. Since 2020 a single pastoral council has been serving the parishioners of all four parishes, composed of three members from each parish. Each parish currently has an individual finance council and building and grounds committee. Many discussions have taken place between the pastor, the other clergy and lay staff serving the parishes, the parishioners, and the appropriate archdiocesan offices regarding the best way to meet the needs of the faithful and evangelize in accordance with the mandate of the Lord Jesus.

The pastor of Saint Joseph, Saint John the Evangelist, Immaculate Conception, and Saint Lawrence Parishes with the recommendation of the members of the pastoral council and finance council of all four parishes, has proposed an extinctive union in which Saint Joseph Parish, Saint John the Evangelist Parish, Immaculate Conception Parish, and Saint Lawrence Parish are merged together into a single new parish – Holy Face of Jesus Parish. The pastor and people of these parishes see this arrangement as a fitting means to both best meet the pastoral needs of the faithful and most effectively manage the resources at

their disposal. Having consulted the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati on February 5, 2024, I have determined that the pastoral mission of the Catholic Church in this portion of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati would best be served through such a merger of Saint Joseph Parish, Saint John the Evangelist Parish, Immaculate Conception Parish, and Saint Lawrence Parish into the new Holy Face of Jesus Parish.

The following factors provide the just cause which motivates this decision:

- 1) there is a decline in sacramental practice in the four parishes;
- 2) there are an insufficient number of priests who are capable of being pastors in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati; this merger allows for one pastor to have the care of one parish (cf. canon 526 §1), in this region of the archdiocese;
- 3) the parishioners of these four parishes have worked effectively over the past decade to establish a high level of ministerial and social cooperation and have begun to use resources more effectively between them;
- 4) the administrative burdens on clergy and staff members would be reduced by such a unification;
- 5) this merger into one new parish will foster stability in the local Catholic Church by putting into place a parish configuration which can remain secure into the future;
- 6) this proposal would provide the opportunity for enhanced collaborative ministry and better utilization of clergy and lay personnel and allow for greater emphasis to be placed on evangelization.

Taking into account the supreme law of the Church, i.e. the salvation of souls (cf. canon 1752), it is my belief that this action will better serve the Church's mission to evangelize and allow for more efficient administration of the temporal goods of the faithful.

Therefore, in virtue of my office as diocesan bishop, in accordance with canon 515 §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*, I hereby decree the extinctive union by merger of Saint Joseph Parish (Wapakoneta), Saint John the Evangelist Parish (Fryburg), Immaculate Conception Parish (Botkins), and Saint Lawrence Parish (Rhine), canonically erecting the new parish under the title of Holy Face of Jesus Parish.

The intentions of the founders and donors regarding the temporal goods and patrimonial rights proper to the former parishes of Saint Joseph, Saint John the Evangelist, Immaculate Conception, and Saint Lawrence must be respected. Furthermore, the patrimonial goods, rights, and assets, including *bona sacra* and religious articles, as well as the obligations and liabilities of the former parishes of Saint Joseph, Saint John the Evangelist, Immaculate Conception, and Saint Lawrence shall belong to Holy Face of Jesus Parish, according to the norm of law (canon 121). The pastor of Holy Face of Jesus Parish will be responsible for the administration of all the temporal goods, in accordance with the universal law of the Church and the particular law of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

The territory of Holy Face of Jesus Parish shall include the territory of the former parishes of Saint Joseph, Saint John the Evangelist, Immaculate Conception, and Saint Lawrence. The new boundaries of Holy Face of Jesus Parish shall be:

On the north: beginning at the northeast corner of Union Township, Auglaize County, Ohio, west along the county line to the northwest corner of Union Township; then north 1 mile to the northeast corner of Duchouquet Township; then west along the north county line to the northwest corner of Duchouquet Township; then north 2 miles to the northeast corner of Logan Township; then west along the county line 1 mile to the northwest corner of section 24 of Logan Township; then,

On the west: south along the various section lines 24, 25, 36 of Logan Township; then continuing south along the western line of sections 1, 12, 13, and 24 of Moulton Township; then one mile west on the Glynwood Pike in Moulton Township to the northwest corner of section 26 Moulton Township; then south 4 ½ miles along the western line of sections 26 and 35 of Moulton Township and 2, 11, and 14 of Washington Township; then west along the north line of section 22 and 21 of Washington Township; then continuing west for approximately 1/3 mile across the north line of section 20 of Washington Township; then southwest approximately 7/8 mile to the center of the northern corporation line of New Knoxville; then east ¼ mile; then south ½ mile along the eastern corporation line; then west about ½ mile to New Knoxville; then south 3/8 mile; then west 1 mile; then south 1 mile to the southwest corner of section 31 Van Buren Township; then,

On the south: east on the south line of sections 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36 of Van Buren Township to the Wells Pike; then in a southwesterly direction along Wells Pike to the south line of section 14 Dinsmore Township; then east 2 1/8 miles to the northwest corner of section 20 Dinsmore Township; then south one mile; then east 1 1/8 miles to the C.H. & D. Railroad line; then south ½ mile along the railroad track; then east 1 3/8 miles to the center of section 27 Dinsmore Township; then south ½ mile to the south center line of section 27; then east along the south line of sections 27, 26, and 25 of Dinsmore Township; then continuing east along the south line of sections 30, 29, 28, 27, and 26 to the center of the south line of section 25; then,

On the east: north along the eastern line of Jackson Township, Shelby County to the Shelby-Auglaize County line; then continuing north along the eastern lines of Clay and Union Townships to the point of beginning.

I further decree that Saint Joseph Church will be the parochial church of Holy Face of Jesus Parish. Saint John the Evangelist Church, Immaculate Conception Church, and Saint Lawrence Church will all continue to function as subsidiary churches.

The sacramental records of the former parishes of Saint Joseph, Saint John the Evangelist, Immaculate Conception, and Saint Lawrence shall be closed and remain in the care and custody of Holy Face of Jesus Parish to be properly preserved and safeguarded. A new set of sacramental records is to be established for Holy Face of Jesus Parish. Any sacraments which take place at Saint Joseph Church, Saint John the Evangelist Church, Immaculate Conception Church, and Saint Lawrence Church are to be recorded in the sacramental registers of Holy Face of Jesus Parish.

Furthermore, for the spiritual benefit of the people of Holy Face of Jesus Parish, Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is hereby designated as the principal patron of the new parish, and it is permissible to celebrate her feast day annually with fitting liturgical solemnity.

The parishioners of the former parishes of Saint Joseph, Saint John the Evangelist, Immaculate Conception, and Saint Lawrence are to associate themselves with their new proper territorial parish, Holy Face of Jesus Parish, or another parish of their choice in accordance with universal and archdiocesan law.

The rich history and legacy of the former parishes of Saint Joseph, Saint John the Evangelist, Immaculate Conception, and Saint Lawrence are to be held in high esteem and rightly honored. Furthermore, the people of Holy Face of Jesus Parish, under the leadership of their pastor, are to strive diligently, with God's help, to form a unified, harmonious congregation dedicated to fulfilling the mission that Jesus Christ committed to his disciples.

This decree becomes effective on July 1, 2024, and is to be published immediately such that all members of Saint Joseph Parish, Saint John the Evangelist Parish, Immaculate Conception Parish, and Saint Lawrence Parish will be properly notified. Recourse may be made against this decree in accord with the norms of canon law.

Given from the Chancery of the Archdiocese,
Cincinnati, Ohio,
on the 19th day of March in the Year of Our Lord 2024,
Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati

SEAL



Reverend Jason A. Williams, J.C.L.
Chancellor