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Prot. N. 2019 RMC-22

DECREE

IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

“Likewise, parishes which are too small should be united insofar as the situation demands it and circumstances permit.” St. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *motu proprio, Ecclesiae Sanctae*, n. 21, (1), August 6, 1966

Changing demographics have affected the size and wealth of the Archdiocese of Chicago and the vitality of her parishes. This is particularly true in the City of Chicago itself, where the total population has decreased by nearly 20% since 1970, from 3,366,957 to an estimated 2,705,994 in 2018. The archdiocese has many vacant, old, and underused parochial buildings and fewer priests to pastor our faith communities.

According to the US Census Bureau, the Archdiocese of Chicago had an estimated total population of 5,881,250 in 2018. The 2018 *Anuario Pontificio* indicates our archdiocese had 345 parishes serving a Catholic population of 2,512,000: an average of 7,281 Catholics per parish. According to the same source, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles had a total population of 11,519,517, with 287 parishes for a Catholic population of 4,362,000: an average 15,199 Catholics per parish. For the Archdiocese of New York, the figures are 2,656,987 Catholics in 294 parishes: an average 9,037 Catholics per parish. A good number of our parishes were founded in the first half of the last century or earlier. Many were established for national, linguistic, or ethnic groups that no longer live in the archdiocese or in the neighborhoods where they once flourished.

Too many of our parishes have been unable to support themselves and have been receiving financial subsidies from the archdiocese. Between fiscal year 2012 and fiscal year 2018 these subsidies amounted to \$144,373,461.00, including \$38,171,840.00 to 106 parishes, and \$106,201,621.00 to 83 Catholic schools. In fiscal year 2019 our generous people contributed an additional \$4,448,745.00 to at least 78 of our parishes and \$13,511,371.00 to 76 Catholic schools in the archdiocese. We cannot continue this level of financial support for parishes and Catholic schools. Our hope is that our parishes will become more vital, that is, active centers of Christian discipleship, evangelical mission, scholarship, and charitable outreach. To achieve this hope, the parishes must be able to support themselves when possible.

Almost four years ago, inspired by the experience of St. Francis of Assisi before the cross of the ruined church of San Damiano, and by the Holy Father’s dream of “a missionary option ... capable of transforming everything” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 27, November 24, 2013), I announced the inauguration of *Renew My Church (RMC)*, a multi-year, intentional process aimed at obtaining and preserving the vitality of our parishes. It is my

intention that every parish of the Archdiocese of Chicago join with some of its neighbors and plan together for the future.

Careful planning will create a menu of possible options for future vitality. We are identifying parishes likely to be reconfigured through pastoral coordination with neighboring parishes, divisions, unions, and other significant alterations. This decree concerns the Hegewisch Grouping, two parishes in the far southeast Chicago neighborhood of Hegewisch and one parish in the adjacent municipality of Burnham: St. Columba Parish (established 1884), 13323 South Green Bay, Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60633-1509; St. Florian Parish (established 1905 as a personal parish for Polish-speaking Catholics), 13145 South Houston Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60633-1706; and Mother of God Parish (established 1946 as a mission, 1956 as a parish), 14207 South Green Bay Avenue, Burnham, Illinois 60633-16190.

In 2018-2019, the pastoral leadership and lay representatives from these three parishes, met in an *RMC* grouping to consider the future vitality of their area of the archdiocese. The Grouping Team presented a Community Engagement and Planning Feedback Summary to the Archdiocesan Standards and Recommendations Commission, a group formed by lay and ordained representatives from across the archdiocese. With respect to the three parishes considered here, the Archdiocesan Commission proposed the parishes be united to form a single new parish.

The proposal is supported by the data and arguments mentioned herein or attached to this decree. Significant is the aggregate 46% decline in Sunday Mass attendance for the three parishes over the past 20 years, and a corresponding 18% decline in the past ten years. Recent Sunday Mass attendance has been a combined total of 795: 538 at St. Florian Church (42% Spanish-speaking), 159 at St. Columba Church, and 98 at Mother of God Church. In each church the numbers are below the recommended 800 per Sunday that is foundational for sustained vitality. Moreover, the provision of services to Polish-speaking Catholics has changed to the provision for a Spanish-speaking population alongside English-speaking Catholics.

The total combined operating income of the parishes in the last fiscal year was \$476,601.00, a significant departure from the recommended minimum income of \$750,000.00 for a single parish. This income produced a combined annual operating deficit of \$196,781.00, resulting in a total combined church debt of \$1,069,474.00, all of which is assigned to St. Florian Parish, which also has a \$524,064.00 debt from operations of a parish school closed in 2016. The union of the three parishes will result in a parish of a more reasonable size, reduce the number of pastorates and the costs associated with maintaining three parochial staffs rather than one.

THEREFORE, know that I, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, according to the norms of canon 50, canon 127 §§1 & 3, canon 166, and canon 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law, having before me the proposal of the Archdiocesan Standards and Recommendations Commission, convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago on November 5, 2019, at St. Monica Parish, Chicago, Illinois. There, after hearing the Presbyteral Council,

receiving its vote of 36 for and none against the proposal, and invoking the Holy Spirit, I accepted the Presbyteral Council's advice and now

decree the following:

1. Effective April 13, 2020, St. Columba Parish and St. Florian Parish, both in the Hegewisch neighborhood of the City of Chicago, and Mother of God Parish in Burnham, Illinois, will be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form a single new juridic person, a territorial parish known, *ad interim*, as Mother of God and SS. Florian and Columba Parish;

2. The missions of the extinguished St. Columba Parish, the extinguished St. Florian Parish, and the extinguished Mother of God Parish will be subsumed completely into the newly established Mother of God and SS. Florian and Columba Parish;

3. Each and all the parishioners of the three parishes to be extinguished will be fully and equally parishioners of the new Mother of God and SS. Florian and Columba Parish;

4. The territory of the new Mother of God and SS. Florian and Columba Parish will be the combined territories of the former Mother of God Parish and the former St. Columba Parish, namely the territory located within these boundaries:

Start at 118th Street and the Calumet River,
East on the south side of 118th Street to the Illinois-Indiana State Line,
South along the west side of the Illinois-Indiana State Line to State Street,
Northwest and west on the north side of State Street to the Bishop Ford Freeway,
North on the east side of the Bishop Ford Freeway to Butler Drive,
East on the north side of Butler Drive to the Calumet River, and
North along the west side of the Calumet River to 118th Street.

5. St. Florian Church will become the parish church of the new Mother of God and SS. Florian and Columba Parish while Mother of God Church and St. Columba Church become additional churches of the same parish, all three churches retaining their own titles;

6. Subject to the intention of founders and donors, and with due regard for any acquired rights, the goods and patrimonial rights of the extinguished St. Columba Parish, the extinguished St. Florian Parish, and the extinguished Mother of God Parish, together with any obligations with which they may be burdened, will become those of the newly established Mother of God and SS. Florian and Columba Parish (see canon 121);

7. The documents given to the Presbyteral Council on this matter, together with the minutes of the Council meeting of November 5, 2019, will be attached to this decree;

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8. In due course, the sacramental records and other materials relevant to historical research concerning the extinguished St. Columba Parish, the extinguished St. Florian Parish, and the extinguished Mother of God Parish will be commended to the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Archives and Records Center of the Archdiocese of Chicago for safe keeping and suitable access; and


9. Notification of this decree will be given immediately to the pastoral leadership of St. Columba Parish and St. Florian Parish, both in the Hegewisch neighborhood of the City of Chicago, and to that of Mother of God Parish, Burnham, and to the parishioners of the three parishes. Publication will be made through the parish bulletins, and generally on the archdiocesan website.

Before hierarchical recourse (appeal) may be taken against this decree, a petition to reconsider or amend the decree must be delivered to me within ten (10) useful days from notification of the decree (CIC cc. 1734, 1735, 1737).

Given this 19th day of November, A.D. 2019.
From the Archbishop Quigley Center,
Chicago, Illinois


Archbishop of Chicago




Chancellor

Attachments

ONCE AVAILABLE, THE DATA SUBMITTED TO THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL OF
THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO AND THE MINUTES OF
THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING OF NOVEMBER 5, 2019,
WILL BE ATTACHED TO THIS DECREE AND AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST
TO THE OFFICE FOR CANONICAL AFFAIRS