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Prot. N. 2020 RMC-20

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 fell by at least 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 *Annuario 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 of 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.

Many of our parishes have been unable to support themselves and have been receiving financial subsidies from the archdiocese. From fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2019 the Archdiocese of Chicago provided \$162,332,527.00 in support to parishes and Catholic schools: \$42,620,585.00 to 106 parishes and \$119,712,942.00 to 83 Catholic schools. This was entirely due to the generosity of the faithful people of the archdiocese and other gracious donors. The archdiocese cannot and should not continue this level of financial support. Parishes and Catholic schools struggling and supported by declining populations are no longer able to sustain themselves. Our mission must be to convert our parishes, helping them to become more vital, that is, active centers of Christian discipleship, evangelical mission, scholarship, and charitable outreach. To achieve this mission, the parishes must have a growing or stable membership and the financial ability to support themselves whenever possible.

Five 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.



Prot. N. 2020 RMC-20

Decree

December 10, 2020

Page 2

27, November 24, 2013), I announced the inauguration of *Renew My Church (RMC)*, a multi-year process aimed at obtaining and preserving the vitality of our parishes. It is my intention that every parish of the Archdiocese of Chicago will join with some of its neighbors and plan together for the future. Careful planning will create a menu of possibilities. We are identifying parishes to be reconfigured through pastoral coordination with neighboring parishes, divisions, unions, and other structural and governance changes.

This decree concerns two parishes located in the City of Harvey and one in the City of Markham, both suburban municipalities in southern Cook County, Illinois. The three parishes are in an area of approximately 11½ square miles. Since 2000 the population has declined by 17.5% and Sunday Mass attendance has declined by a combined total of more than 30%.

The first of these parishes is St. John the Baptist Parish, 600 East 158th Street, Harvey, Illinois 60426-3722, established in 1914 as a personal parish for Polish-speaking faithful. The second is St. Gerard Majella Parish, 16130 Clifton Park, Markham, Illinois 60428-4518, established as a parish in 1956. The third is Ascension-St. Susanna Parish, 15234 Myrtle Avenue, Harvey, Illinois 60426-3194, established through the 1986 union of the territorial Ascension Parish (1899) and St. Susanna (Polish) Parish (1927).

Today the three parishes serve an area of predominantly African American residents (74%); however, the Catholic faithful worshipping at the three parishes are of mostly Spanish-speaking origins. In 2019 Sunday Mass was celebrated regularly in St. John the Baptist Church for 724 in Spanish, 83 in English, and 77 in Polish. At St. Gerard Majella Church the numbers were 329 in Spanish and 55 in English, while in Ascension-St. Susanna Church they were 66 in English.

St. John the Baptist Parish had no debt and savings of more than \$1,700,000.00 in Fiscal Year 2019. That year's operating income was only \$221,028.00, but enough to cover expenses. In the same year, however, the other two parishes had accumulated debt of more than \$1,300,000.00 each, alongside a history of operating incomes insufficient to meet current expenses.

Following consultations earlier this year, lay and clergy members of the Markham-Harvey Grouping Discernment and Feedback Team, with input from parishioners at large, submitted a report to the Archdiocesan Standards and Recommendations Commission, a group of lay and clergy representatives from across the Archdiocese of Chicago. Recently, the Commission submitted its recommendations to the pastoral leadership of the archdiocese. The recommendations proposed that St. John the Baptist Parish, St. Gerard Majella Parish, and Ascension-St. Susanna Parish be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form one new territorial parish within the combined boundaries of St. Gerard Majella Parish and Ascension-St. Susanna Parish. Ultimately, the proposal included the recommendation that St. John the Baptist Church be designated the parish church of the new Parish. The proposal was submitted to the Presbyteral Council for its consideration and advice.



Prot. N. 2020 RMC-20
Decree
December 10, 2020
Page 3

The proposal is supported by the data already mentioned herein and that attached to this decree. The three parishes now serve a population of mostly Spanish-speaking Catholics. Furthermore, demographic changes make it clear that the reasons for the founding of St. John the Baptist Parish as a parish for Polish-speaking faithful no longer exist and do not justify a separate personal parish.

St. Gerard Majella Parish and Ascension-St. Susanna Parish have been sharing the same pastor, while one priest at St. John the Baptist Parish serves as parish administrator. Uniting the parishes will reduce the number of potential pastorates from three to one. Furthermore, the costs of maintaining three separate offices will decline as savings from uniting the three communities begin to appear. A parish territory of 11½ square miles will not be uncommon for a suburban parish in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

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, have before me the proposal that St. John the Baptist Parish and Ascension-St. Susanna Parish, both in Harvey, Illinois, and St. Gerard Majella Parish in Markham, Illinois, be extinguished as separate juridic persons and united to form a single new territorial parish within the combined territory of St. Gerard Majella Parish and Ascension-St. Susanna Parish, with St. John the Baptist Church designated to be the parish church. Know also, I convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago *via* video conference over the internet on October 27, 2020, and November 2, 2020. Then, after hearing the Presbyteral Council and receiving its vote of 31 for and 5 against the proposal, I accepted the Presbyteral Council's advice and now, invoking the Holy Spirit,

decree the following:

1. Effective April 5, 2021, the above-mentioned St. John the Baptist Parish, Ascension-St. Susanna Parish, and St. Gerard Majella Parish will be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form a single new juridic person, a territorial parish to be known, *ad interim*, as Ascension, SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish;
2. The missions of the three extinguished parishes will be subsumed completely into that of the new Ascension, SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish;
3. Each and all the parishioners of the three extinguished parishes and the faithful residing within the territorial boundaries of the new parish will be parishioners of the new Ascension, SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish;
4. The territory of the new Ascension, SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish will be the combined territories of the extinguished St. Gerard Majella Parish and the extinguished Ascension-St. Susanna Parish as given in the attached map and description;
5. Subject to the intention of founders and donors, and with due regard for any acquired



Prot. N. 2020 RMC-20
Decree
December 10, 2020
Page 4

rights, the goods and patrimonial rights of the three former parishes, together with any obligations with which they may be burdened, will become those of the new Ascension, SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish (see canon 121);

6. The churches of the former St. John the Baptist Parish, Ascension-St. Susanna Parish, and St. Gerard Majella Parish will be churches of the new Ascension, SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish, retaining their own titles, and St. John the Baptist Church will be the parish church of the new parish;

7. The data submitted to the Presbyteral Council on this matter, together with the minutes of the Council meetings of October 27, 2020, and November 2, 2020, are to be attached to this decree and will be available upon request to those eligible to receive them;

8. The sacramental records and other materials relevant to historical research pertaining to the three former parishes will be collected and maintained at the St. John the Baptist Church campus, unless otherwise determined by the expert staff of the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Archives and Records Center of the Archdiocese of Chicago; and

9. Notification of this decree shall be given immediately through the official website of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The decree shall be conveyed to the pastor of St. Gerard Majella Parish and Ascension-St. Susanna Parish and to the parish administrator of St. John the Baptist Parish. As soon as possible, these priests shall inform their parishioners.

Before hierarchical recourse (appeal) may be taken against this decree, a written, dated, and signed 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 10th day of December, A.D. 2020.
From Holy Name Cathedral,
Chicago, Illinois

Cardinal George T. Sisk
Archbishop of Chicago



Rev. Robert F. Fick
Ecclesiastical Notary

Attachments



THE DATA SUBMITTED TO THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO AND THE MINUTES OF THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETINGS OF OCTOBER 27, 2020, AND NOVEMBER 2, 2020, ARE ATTACHED TO THE FOREGOING DECREE WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM THE OFFICE FOR CANONICAL AFFAIRS UPON REQUEST FROM THOSE LEGITIMATELY SEEKING THEM