



Prot. N. 2021 RMC-20

DECREE

IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

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 nearly 21% since 1970, from 3,366,957 to an estimated 2,686,530 in 2020. 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 (Cook and Lake Counties in Illinois) had an estimated total population of 5,881,250 in 2018. The 2018 *Annuario Pontificio* indicated 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 were 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 reside in the archdiocese or in the neighborhoods where they once flourished.

Many of our parishes are unable or struggling to support themselves. Consequently, many have been receiving financial subsidies from the archdiocese. From fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2020, the Archdiocese of Chicago provided \$177,109,682.00 in support to parishes and Catholic schools: \$46,332,584.00 to 106 parishes and \$130,777,098.00 to 83 Catholic schools. This was an increase of \$14,777,155.00 over a single year: \$3,711,999.00 more to parishes and \$11,064,156.00 more to Catholic schools. Completely due to the generosity of the faithful people of the archdiocese and other gracious donors, these subsidies cannot continue at this high level, especially in times of enormous economic strain. Our mission is to convert our parishes, helping them to become more vital, that is, active centers of Christian discipleship, evangelical mission, scholarship, and charitable outreach. For this the parishes need a growing and stable membership and the financial means to support themselves.

Six years ago, inspired by the experience of St. Francis of Assisi before the cross of the ruined church of San Damiano and the Holy Father's dream of "a missionary option ... capable of transforming everything" (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 27, November 24, 2013), and with wide and continuing consultation among the clergy and lay faithful of the Archdiocese of Chicago, particularly in the Presbyteral Council, we embarked on the inauguration of *Renew My Church (RMC)*. This is our multi-year process aimed at converting our parishes for mission. It is the intention that every parish join with some of its

neighbors (groupings) to plan 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 adjacent parishes and a parish mission located within approximately six square miles of the Southside of the City of Chicago and in the municipalities of Blue Island and Robbins in South Suburban Cook County, Illinois. These three communities are St. Benedict Parish (mission from 1851, parish established 1886), 2339 York Street, Blue Island, Illinois 60406-3899; St. Walter Parish (established in part from St. Benedict Parish 1953), 11722 South Oakley Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60643-4726; and St. Peter Claver Mission (established 1958 as mission for African American Catholics within the territory of St. Benedict Parish), 14139 South Claire Boulevard, Robbins, Illinois 60472-1925.

In Fiscal Year 2020 the pre-COVID-19 average Sunday Mass attendance at St. Benedict parish was 912 (49% English-speaking and 51% Spanish-speaking). The same year the average Sunday attendance at St. Walter Parish was 227 (100% English) and at St. Peter Claver Mission it was 46 (100% English). The combined Sunday attendance at the three parishes was 1,185 in late 2019, this is a total decline of 38% over 20 years (from 1,901 to 1,185). At St. Benedict Parish, the decline over the same 20-year period was 34% (from 1,378 to 912). At St. Walter Parish the decline was 50% over the same period (from 450 to 227), and at St. Peter Claver Mission it was 37% (from 73 to 46). From these figures, 39% of the combined total of those attending Sunday Mass at the three parishes are Spanish-speaking faithful.

In Fiscal Year 2019, St. Benedict Parish had an operating deficit of \$52,916.00, total parish debt (church and school) of \$1,135,799.00, and savings of \$250,924.00. That same year, St. Walter Parish had an operating deficit of \$90,785.00, no debt, and \$18,053.00 in savings. At St. Peter Claver Mission, the figures show an operating deficit of \$3,039.00, no debt, and savings of \$65,189.00.

During Fiscal Year 2019, liturgical life outside Sunday Mass at St. Benedict Parish included 25 funerals, five marriages, and 69 Baptisms. In the same period there were nine funerals, one marriage, and nine Baptisms at St. Walter Parish, and four funerals, no marriages, and three Baptisms at St. Peter Claver Mission. The 2019 combined totals for the three parishes were 38 funerals, six marriages, and 81 Baptisms, average for funerals and Baptisms and below average for marriages and Baptisms for a single parish of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The ratio of total funerals to the combined total of marriages and Baptisms, 38/87 indicates a relatively young population in St. Benedict Parish, particularly among the Spanish-speaking faithful.

Following consultations last year with lay and clergy members of the parishes, including input from parishioners at large, a report was submitted to the Archdiocesan Standards and Recommendations Commission, a group of lay and clergy representatives from across the Archdiocese of Chicago. Recently, the *Renew My Church* Executive Committee submitted its

recommendations to the pastoral leadership of the archdiocese. Due to significant and continuing decline in Sunday Mass attendance at both parishes and at the mission, deficit spending at each of the communities, fewer priests able to serve our parishes, change is needed. The Church in this area will struggle financially and administratively to sustain more than one parish. If the care of souls, evangelization, and discipleship are to be the focus of future mission, the consolidation of resources under the leadership of a single pastor and pastoral team is needed.

THEREFORE, know that I, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, according to the norms of canon 50, canon 121, canon 127 §§1 & 3, canon 166, and canon 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law, have before me the proposal that the above-mentioned St. Benedict Parish (Blue Island), and St. Walter Parish Chicago (Chicago and Blue Island) be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form one new juridic person, a territorial parish within the combined territories of St. Benedict Parish and St. Walter Parish, with St. Benedict Church to be designated the parish church. Know also, I convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago *via* video conference over the internet on March 2, 2021. Then, after hearing the Presbyteral Council and receiving its vote of 27 for and one against the proposal, I accepted the Presbyteral Council's advice and now, invoking the Holy Spirit,

I decree the following:

1. Effective July 1, 2021, the above-mentioned St. Benedict Parish and St. Walter Parish shall be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form one new juridic person, a territorial parish within the combined territories of St. Benedict Parish and St. Walter Parish, with St. Peter Claver Mission (Robbins) becoming a mission of the new parish and more deeply incorporated into the life of the new parish. The new parish is to be called, *ad interim*, SS. Benedict and Walter Parish;
2. The ministries of the two extinguished parishes will be subsumed into those of the new SS. Benedict and Walter Parish;
3. Each and all the parishioners of the two extinguished parishes along with the faithful domiciled within the new parish boundaries, will be parishioners of the new SS. Benedict and Walter Parish;
4. The territory of the new SS. Benedict and Walter Parish will be as depicted and described on the map and in the document attached to this decree;
5. Subject to the intention of founders and donors, and with due regard for any acquired rights, the goods and patrimonial rights of the two extinguished parishes, together with any obligations with which they may be burdened, will be those of the new SS. Benedict and Walter, Parish (canon 121);
6. The churches of the extinguished St. Benedict Parish and the extinguished St. Walter Parish will be churches of the new SS. Benedict and Walter Parish, retaining their own titles,

and St. Benedict Church shall be designated 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 meeting of March 2, 2021, are to be attached to this decree and will become available upon request to those eligible to receive them;

8. The sacramental records and other materials relevant to historical research pertaining to the two extinguished parishes will be collected and maintained at the St. Benedict 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/director of St. Benedict Parish and St. Peter Claver Mission, and to the pastor of St. Walter Parish. As soon as possible, the pastors shall inform their parishioners of the decree through the parish bulletin or other suitable means.

Before hierarchical recourse (appeal) may be taken against this decree, a written, dated, and signed petition asking me to revoke or amend the decree must be sent or delivered to me within ten (10) useful days from notification of the decree (CIC cc. 1734, 1735, 1737). The address is Office of the Archbishop of Chicago, Archbishop Quigley Center, 835 North Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

Given this 8th day of April, A.D. 2021.
From Holy Name Cathedral,
Chicago, Illinois


Archbishop of Chicago




Ecclesiastical Notary

Attachments

THE DATA SUBMITTED TO THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF
CHICAGO AND THE MINUTES OF THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING
OF MARCH 2, 2021, WILL BE ATTACHED TO THE FOREGOING DECREE
AND WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM THE OFFICE FOR CANONICAL AFFAIRS
UPON REQUEST FROM THOSE LEGITIMATELY SEEKING THEM