



Office of the Archbishop
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Prot. N. 2022 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 2,693,976 in 2020. During the last decade, the total population of the Archdiocese of Chicago (Cook and Lake Counties in Illinois) declined by less than 2%, from 5,903,190 in 2010 to an estimated 5,821,933 in 2020. However, over the same ten-year period, the Catholic population of the Archdiocese of Chicago declined by nearly 7% (159,000), from 2,338,000 to 2,179,000.

A good number of our parishes were founded more than 100 years ago, in the 19th Century or the first half of the 20th Century. Many were established for national, linguistic, or ethnic groups that no longer reside in the archdiocese or in the neighborhoods where they once flourished. Today, many are unable or struggling to support themselves. Consequently, from Fiscal Year 2012 through Fiscal Year 2021, the Archdiocese of Chicago provided \$187,818,176.00 in support to parishes and Catholic schools: \$49,452,924.00 to 119 parishes and \$138,365,252.00 to 99 Catholic schools. This includes \$10,708,494.00 during Fiscal Year 2021 alone: \$3,120,340.00 to parishes and \$7,588,154.00 to Catholic schools, mostly parochial 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. 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 mission, the parishes need a growing and stable membership and the financial means to support themselves.

More than 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 my 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 located within approximately two and one-half square miles in the West Suburban municipality of Oak Park, Illinois: St. Edmund Parish (established 1907), 188 South Oak Park Avenue, Oak Park, Illinois 60302-2902, and Ascension

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Parish (established 1907), 808 South East Avenue, Oak Park, Illinois 60304-1327. The churches of these two parishes are approximately one mile apart, a drive of four minutes.

In Fiscal Year 2020 the pre-COVID-19 average Sunday Mass attendance at St. Edmund Parish was 506, a 47% decline from the 952 attending in Fiscal Year 2000. The same year, the average Sunday attendance at Ascension Parish was 1,010, also a 47% decline from the 1,890 attending in Fiscal Year 2000.

In Fiscal Year 2020, St. Edmund Parish had an operating surplus of \$54,541.00, savings of \$91,921.00 on deposit, and church debt of \$601,522.00 (since paid down to \$383,425.00). The same year Ascension Parish had an operating surplus of \$61,738.00, savings of \$103,832.00 on deposit, and no church debt.

During Fiscal Year 2019, liturgical life outside Sunday Mass at St. Edmund Parish included 28 funerals, 10 marriages, and 26 Baptisms. In the same period Ascension Parish had 39 funerals, 12 marriages, and 64 Baptisms. The combined totals of the two parishes are 67 funerals, 22 marriages, and 90 Baptisms.

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 the Commission's recommendation to the pastoral leadership of the archdiocese. Due to the steady decline in the number of faithful at both parishes and the continuing decline in the number of priests able to serve as pastors, the Church in this area of the Archdiocese of Chicago will struggle financially and administratively to sustain both parishes. If the care of souls, evangelization, and discipleship are to be the focus of future mission, the consolidation and conservation of resources within one new parish is the recommended course of action.

THEREFORE, know that I, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, according to the norms of canon 50, canon 121, canon 127 §§1, 2, 2°, & 3, and canon 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law, have before me a proposal that the above-mentioned St. Edmund Parish and Ascension Parish, both in Oak Park, Illinois, be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form one new juridic person, a territorial parish named, *ad interim*, Ascension and St. Edmund Parish, located within the combined territorial boundaries of St. Edmund Parish and Ascension Parish. Ascension Church is to be designated the parish church. Know also, I convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago electronically *via* the internet on December 21, 2021, and January 18, 2022. Then, after hearing the Presbyteral Council and receiving its January 18th vote of 32 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, 2022, the above-mentioned St. Edmund Parish and Ascension Parish, both in Oak Park, Illinois, 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 the two parishes. The new parish is to be called, *ad interim*, Ascension and St. Edmund Parish;

2. The ministries of the two extinguished parishes will become those of the new Ascension and St. Edmund 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 Ascension and St. Edmund Parish;

4. The territory of the new Ascension and St. Edmund Parish will be the combined territories of the extinguished St. Edmund Parish and the extinguished Ascension Parish, 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 Ascension and St. Edmund Parish (canon 121);

6. The churches of the extinguished St. Edmund Parish and the extinguished Ascension Parish will be churches of the new Ascension and St. Edmund Parish, retaining their own titles. Ascension 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 meetings of December 21, 2021, and January 18, 2022, 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 Ascension 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 pastors of St. Edmund Parish and Ascension 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

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address is Office of the Archbishop of Chicago, Archbishop Quigley Center, 835 North Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

Given this 28th day of March, A.D. 2022.
From Holy Name Cathedral,
Chicago, Illinois

Stan Cardinal Cupic
Archbishop of Chicago



Rev. Robert Fede
Ecclesiastical Notary

Attachments

THE DATA SUBMITTED TO THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO AND THE MINUTES OF THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING OF DECEMBER 21, 2021, AND JANUARY 18, 2022, WILL BE ATTACHED TO THE FOREGOING DECREE AND WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM THE OFFICE FOR CANONICAL AFFAIRS UPON REQUEST FROM THOSE LEGITIMATELY SEEKING THEM