



## DECREE

### EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA PARISH (CAMBRIDGE SPRINGS) INTO OUR LADY OF THE LAKE PARISH (EDINBORO)

#### History

##### **A. Saint Anthony of Padua Parish, Erie**

Cambridge Springs was famous for its mineral water in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Catholic visitors to the resorts in town would attend Mass in one of the upper rooms on Main Street. The Bishop of Pittsburgh actually set up a fund to furnish the room with an altar and all the other necessities for Mass. In 1899 the Catholic families in Cambridge Springs bought the old Methodist church and began celebrating the sacraments there. In those early years, Saint Anthony was a mission of Saint Brigid Parish in Meadville. Their first resident pastor was a young Reverend John Mark Gannon, who came to them in 1906 as his first official pastorate. Fr. Gannon oversaw the building of the current church. The church was dedicated in 1911, around the time that the mineral water craze ended.

The mission in Saegertown began in 1950. Several sisters from the Catholic schools in Meadville organized catechism classes for the children in the old fire hall. In 1953 the community purchased a building of their own for religion classes, and eventually Mass was celebrated there as well. They built a church of their own in 1966, which they named after Saint Bernadette. A parish center was constructed in 1977. The community was at first a mission of Saint Agatha in Meadville. They had their own administrator or pastor from 1970 to 1978, after which they returned again to the care of Saint Agatha. Around 2015 the mission was transferred to Saint Anthony Parish in Cambridge Springs.

##### **B. Our Lady of the Lake Parish, Edinboro**

The early Catholic residents of Edinboro used to travel to Cambridge Springs or Crossingville for Mass. In 1923, Aime Doucette arranged for Mass to be celebrated in Edinboro in his own home. When attendance increased, he moved the location to his art classroom at Edinboro Normal School. The first church was finally built in 1950 and dedicated to Our Lady of the Lake. In 1953 the community was raised from a mission of Saint Anthony of Padua, Cambridge Springs, to a parish. The parish built a Newman Center adjacent to Edinboro College in 1970, which operated until 2004. Our Lady of the Lake Parish still continues its pastoral care for the students, faculty and staff of the university, now named Pennsylvania Western University – Edinboro Campus. The current parish church was completed in 2007.



## Current Situation

Our Lady of the Lake Parish, Edinboro, is located in south-central Erie County. Both Saint Anthony of Padua Parish, Cambridge Springs, and Saint Bernadette church, Saegertown, are located in a rural area of northern Crawford County – near the Erie County line. Our Lady of the Lake church is almost 8 miles from Saint Anthony of Padua church and 13 miles from Saint Bernadette church.

Regarding sacred edifices, Our Lady of the Lake Parish possesses the parish church, while Saint Anthony of Padua Parish possesses the parish church and the secondary mission church of Saint Bernadette.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Erie County peaked at 281,502 around the year 2012. By 2022, the county population had fallen to 267,689 – a drop of 4.9%. The population of Crawford County peaked in 2001 at 90,105. By 2022, it had fallen to 82,670 – a decline of about 8% during that 21-year period.

The population of Edinboro peaked around 1990 at 7,700 residents. By 2020, the population had declined 36% to about 4,900 persons. The population of Cambridge Springs peaked around 2010 at 2,600 residents. In 2022, the population was estimated to be about 2,300, a decrease of 12%.

The decline in parish membership and Mass attendance has been much steeper in recent years than the decline in the general population. Our Lady of the Lake Parish reported 1,667 registered parishioners in 2015 and 1,426 in 2023 – a drop of 14%. The October count (which estimates average Mass attendance) for 2015 was 444 and in 2023 it was 349. This indicates a 21% decline in Mass attendance over the last 8 years. In 2015 Our Lady of the Lake Parish reported 12 infant baptisms. This declined to 9 in the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

Saint Anthony of Padua Parish reported 490 members in 2015 and 608 in 2023 – an increase of 24%. The October count dropped from 197 in 2015 to 146 in 2023 – a decline of about 26%. In 2015, Saint Anthony of Padua Parish reported 3 infant baptisms. In 2023 it reported none.

The general population decline in Erie and Crawford Counties, combined with a more dramatic decline in the Catholic population in Edinboro, Cambridge Springs and Saegertown – as well as the decreasing number of available priests – necessitates a reconfiguration of parishes and better use of resources in order to properly provide for the care of souls in Erie and Crawford Counties.

The Diocese of Erie's comprehensive pastoral planning process began in 2014. In the years that followed, vicariate and deanery meetings were held throughout the diocese to gather information and ideas from pastors, parish leaders and parishioners in general. As the conditions across the diocese changed in recent years, the need for parish reconfiguration became more necessary.

Beginning in roughly 2018, a directed study of the demographics, and Catholic needs, in Erie and Crawford Counties was undertaken. Population trend data was projected by the Meitler firm. Meetings with pastors and parishioners also took place on the local level. On June 22, 2023, Bishop

Persico presented a preliminary plan for parish reconfiguration in Erie County (which includes both the East and West Erie Deaneries, and impacts some parishes bordering on Erie County) to the Presbyteral Council and opened it up for discussion among members.

On August 29, 2023, at a meeting held at St. Mark Catholic Center, Bishop Persico unveiled the Erie County preliminary plan to the pastors of the deanery and a representative group of lay leaders from each parish. The unveiling of the preliminary plan was preceded by three letters written by Bishop Persico which were read to parishioners (and published on the diocesan website) explaining the need for pastoral planning in Erie County and inviting the prayer and participation of all parishioners. Following the August 29 meeting, the Bishop then opened a several-week period of comment and feedback for pastors and people to give their views on the proposed changes.

The preliminary plan proposed that Our Lady of the Lake, Edinboro, would partner with Saint Francis Xavier, McKean.

After receiving feedback from parishioners and extensive consultation with the pastors of the area, the preliminary plan for these parishes was changed to the following: Saint Anthony of Padua Parish, Cambridge Springs, would merge into Our Lady of the Lake Parish, Edinboro. Our Lady of the Lake church would remain the parish church; Saint Anthony of Padua church would become a secondary mission church (i.e. with Mass on Saturday evening or on Sunday); and Saint Bernadette church would become a secondary church without mission status (i.e. no Mass on Saturday evening or on Sundays).

At the February 28, 2024, meeting of the Presbyteral Council, Bishop Persico presented the revised proposal for parish reconfiguration for Erie County. The Presbyteral Council unanimously approved the proposal to merge Saint Anthony of Padua Parish, Cambridge Springs, with its secondary mission church of Saint Bernadette, Saegertown, into Our Lady of the Lake Parish, Edinboro.

All of the requirements of canons 50, 51, 127, 166, and 515 have been fulfilled.

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Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the need for a stronger and more sustainable means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of Erie and Crawford Counties, while also considering the challenges presented by demographic decline and the reduced number of priests; the genuine desire on the part of parishioners and clergy alike to realign parish structures to best situate them for building a strong future; and envisioning this merger as an integral part of the overall pastoral plan for Erie County<sup>1</sup>; I hereby decree the following:

1. By means of an extinctive union, Saint Anthony of Padua Parish, Cambridge Springs, shall be merged and subsumed into Our Lady of the Lake Parish, Edinboro.

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<sup>1</sup> The pastoral plan for Erie County includes the following goals: to 1) create a more vibrant Catholic community, 2) improve Mass attendance and participation in parish life, 3) engage younger Catholics, 4) reach out to fallen-away Catholics and new parishioners, 5) increase the parishes' community and ecumenical involvement, 6) create a more welcoming environment, and 7) sustain the parishes financially.

2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Our Lady of the Lake Parish.
3. All sacramental records from Saint Anthony of Padua Parish shall be kept at the offices of Our Lady of the Lake Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Saint Anthony of Padua Parish shall be transferred to Our Lady of the Lake Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Our Lady of the Lake church.
6. Saint Anthony of Padua church shall become a secondary mission church of Our Lady of the Lake Parish. By diocesan law, therefore, Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, as well as on the evening preceding them, is permitted in Saint Anthony of Padua church.
7. Saint Bernadette church shall become a secondary church without mission status of Our Lady of the Lake Parish. By diocesan law, therefore, Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, as well as on the evening preceding them, is no longer permitted in Saint Bernadette church.
8. Saint Bernadette church is to remain open to the faithful at least occasionally for sacred worship, whether public or private.
9. Furthermore, as required by law, Mass is to be celebrated in each church every year on the solemnity of that church's title, in accord with current liturgical norms (cf. cann. 1167 §2 and 1168 of the former Code of Canon Law, and can. 2 of the present Code). If such an observance is impeded by another date of higher rank according to the Roman calendar, the impeded solemnity is to be transferred to the first available date thereafter.
10. Our Lady of the Lake Parish shall be territorial in nature, with boundaries as follows:

Beginning at the juncture of US Route 6N and State Route 98 in Erie County (Lavery Corner); north on State Route 98 to Old State Rd. (at Franklin Center); east on Old State Rd. to the Washington/Waterford township line; south then east on the Washington/Waterford township line to Sharp Rd./Conneauttee Valley Rd. (state road 3025/old state route 86); south on Conneauttee Valley Rd./Pleasant Rd. to the Erie/Crawford county line; east on the Erie/Crawford county line to state road 1007/Rockdale Rd. (the Rockdale/Bloomfield township line near Sturgis); south on state road 1007 to state road 1018/Guys Mills Rd.; southwest on Guys Mills Rd. to PA Route 408; north on PA Route 408 to PA Route 77; southwest on PA Route 77 to PA Route 198; northwest on PA Route 198 to Saegertown; along the southern border of Saegertown to French Creek/Woodcock township line; north along French Creek to PA Route 198 again; west on PA Route 198 to Interstate 79; north on Interstate 79 to the Hayfield/Cussewago township line; east and north on the Cussewago township border to the Crawford/Erie county line (Capp Rd.); west on the Crawford/Erie county line to Fry Rd.; north on Fry Rd. to US Route 6N; west on US Route 6N to State Route 98 at Lavery Corner.

This decree is effective July 9, 2024. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery  
of the Diocese of Erie  
on this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of May, 2024

*+Lawrence T. Persico*

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL  
Bishop of Erie

*G. Franklin Hannah*

Deacon G. Franklin Hannah  
Vice Chancellor