



DECREE

EFFECTING THE MERGER OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP PARISH (LEWIS RUN) INTO SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI PARISH (BRADFORD)

History

A. Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish

In December of 1876, the first resident priest was assigned to the newly-established Saint Bernard of Clairveaux Parish in Bradford, Pennsylvania. For generations, all of the faithful in the Bradford area were served by Saint Bernard of Clairveaux Parish, until April 17, 1946 when Archbishop John Mark Gannon divided the parish into three, with one part remaining as Saint Bernard of Clairveaux Parish, one part becoming the new Saint Francis of Assisi Parish in Bradford, and one part becoming the new Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish in Lewis Run. Construction on a new parish church for Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish began in 1951. The parish has not been immune to the significant demographic decline which has affected all of Northwestern Pennsylvania. Since 1992, the parish has shared a pastor or administrator with Saint Francis of Assisi Parish in Bradford.

B. Saint Francis of Assisi Parish

As noted above, Saint Francis of Assisi Parish in Bradford was also formed by the division of Saint Bernard Parish on April 17, 1946, with the eastern section of Saint Bernard of Clairveaux Parish – known as East Bradford and comprising the Sixth Ward at the time – becoming the new Saint Francis of Assisi Parish. Land was purchased very shortly thereafter for the construction of a parish church. Construction took place during the year 1950. Affected by the same demographic changes as Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Lewis Run, the two parishes have shared a pastor or administrator since 1992.

Current Situation

The Bradford area and all of McKean County have seen significant demographic changes, due in large part to changing situations in the oil industry. According to the US Census Bureau, the population of Bradford itself in 2010 was less than half of what it was in its peak in 1930, and almost exactly half of what it was when Saint Bernard of Clairveaux Parish was divided into

three separate parishes in 1946. There is no indication that this decline in population is likely to reverse itself. In 2015, Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish listed only 134 households with an average Sunday Mass attendance of 75 persons, while Saint Francis of Assisi Parish listed 220 households with an average weekend Mass attendance of 187 individuals.

Due to diminishing numbers of parishioners, an aging population, the shortage of clergy, and the need to practice better stewardship of resources, both personnel and financial, the long-term sustainability of three separate parishes in the Bradford area is no longer possible. Given that Saint Francis of Assisi Parish and Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish have shared a pastor or administrator for the past twenty-four years, it seems that the care of souls for the faithful in those parishes could be better served by a more efficient use of personnel and temporal resources, greater collaboration between their communities of the faithful, and a unified pastoral vision for both parishes.

In pursuit of that end, as a part of a comprehensive pastoral planning process involving extensive study, collaboration, and dialogue throughout the diocese, together with an analysis of objective data regarding demographic shifts and population trends for individual parishes, specific communities and regions, I brought the matter of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish and Saint Francis of Assisi Parish before the Presbyteral Council on March 9, 2016. With the support of the Presbyteral Council, I announced on April 13, 2016 a preliminary plan to merge Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish into the larger Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, with Our Mother of Perpetual Help becoming a secondary church of Saint Francis of Assisi Parish but without mission status.

I specified a time period in which I would welcome feedback in response to this preliminary proposal. As a result, I received input and advice from the shared pastor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and Saint Francis of Assisi Parishes, from the parishioners themselves, from the Vicar Forane and the Vicar General, and from those responsible for overseeing the development of the pastoral plan. I shared the results of this feedback with the members of the Presbyteral Council. In light of the new information, I then asked the council members once again for their advice on the aforementioned proposal to merge Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish into Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, but with the change that Our Mother of Perpetual Help church would be granted mission status. The Presbyteral Council members expressed their unanimous support on June 28, 2016.

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

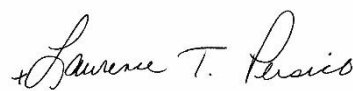
Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the need for a stronger and more sustainable means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish and Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, while also considering the already diminished number of parishioners and the projected further decline of their number, the lack of available priests which renders it impossible to provide a full-time pastor for either parish, the relevant demographics of each parish in the Bradford area as well as projected future trends, the historical origins of both Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish and Saint Francis of Assisi Parish as simultaneous offshoots of Saint Bernard Parish of Clairveax, the fact that Our Mother

of Perpetual Help and Saint Francis of Assisi Parishes have shared a pastor or administrator for the past twenty-four years, the possibility of better stewardship in the shared use of temporal goods and personnel between the two parishes, and the general plan of pastoral care not only for the Bradford area but also for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

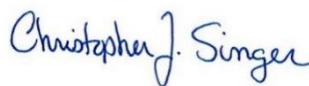
1. By means of an extinctive union, Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish in Lewis Run shall be merged and subsumed into Saint Francis of Assisi Parish in Bradford.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Saint Francis of Assisi Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses, and to it will be added all of the territory of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish.
3. All sacramental records from Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Saint Francis of Assisi Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish shall be transferred to Saint Francis of Assisi Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Saint Francis of Assisi church. In light of the distance which the faithful, many of them elderly, from points beyond Lewis Run would otherwise have to travel for Mass, Our Mother of Perpetual Help church shall become a secondary mission church of Saint Francis of Assisi Parish. By diocesan law, therefore, Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, as well as on the evening preceding them, is permitted in Our Mother of Perpetual Help church.
6. Furthermore, Our Mother of Perpetual Help church is to remain open to the faithful at least occasionally for sacred worship, whether public or private (cf. can. 1214). As required by law, Mass is to be celebrated in Our Mother of Perpetual Help church every year on the solemnity of the 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.

This decree is effective February 13, 2017, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Erie
on this 22nd day of September, 2016



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



The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor