



DECREE

EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SAINT WALBURGA PARISH (TITUSVILLE) INTO SAINT TITUS PARISH (TITUSVILLE)

History

A. Saint Titus Parish

Following the discovery of oil in the region, Titusville received its first resident priest in 1862, essentially marking the establishment of Saint Titus Parish. The parish church was dedicated on January 6, 1865. It was subsequently rededicated on November 11, 1937. For many years the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse was located in Saint Titus Parish but was transferred to Erie in 1970. The second half of the twentieth century saw a period of economic difficulties and population decline. Of the numerous mission churches in the Titusville area over the past one-hundred-fifty years, only Immaculate Conception mission church in Mageetown was still in use at the beginning of 2016.

B. Saint Walburga Parish

Saint Walburga Parish was established in 1872 when a group of Saint Titus Parish parishioners requested a personal parish for German-speaking Catholics and their descendants. The original parish church, a temporary building, was blessed on February 26, 1872, and a new permanent church building was dedicated on August 27, 1893. Ministry with a view to the original German-speaking character of the parish has long since ceased to have any pastoral application.

Current Situation

The Titusville area has not been immune to the overall demographic shifts which have occurred throughout northwestern Pennsylvania in the latter decades of the twentieth century and down to the present day. According to the US Census Bureau, in the 2010 the population of the Borough of Titusville was at 63% of its high recorded in the 1950 census. The parishes themselves show a similar decrease. In 2015, Saint Titus Parish listed 388 households with an average Sunday Mass attendance of 289 persons, i.e., 249 at Saint Titus church and an additional 40 at Immaculate Conception mission church. Saint Walburga Parish, on the other hand, listed 76 households with an average Sunday Mass

attendance of only 34 persons. Since 2002, the pastor of Saint Titus Parish has also served as the non-resident pastor of Saint Walburga Parish.

The pastoral need for outreach to German-speaking Catholics has not existed in Titusville for almost a century. It is no longer necessary or feasible to duplicate services with the existence of two separate and distinct parishes in Titusville. The care of souls for the faithful in the greater Titusville area could be better served by a more efficient use of personnel and temporal resources and a unified pastoral vision and approach.

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 Saint Walburga Parish before the Presbyteral Council on March 9, 2016. With the support of the Presbyteral Council, I announced on April 14, 2016 a preliminary plan to merge Saint Walburga Parish into Saint Titus Parish, thus reintegrating the members of Saint Walburga Parish into the territorial parish in which all of them already reside.

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 Saint Walburga and Saint Titus 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 Saint Walburga Parish into Saint Titus Parish, for which they expressed unanimous support on July 11, 2016.

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

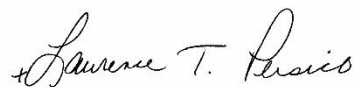
Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the need for a stronger and more sustainable means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of Saint Walburga Parish and indeed for the whole Titusville area, while also considering the already diminished number of parishioners and the projected further decline of their number, the lack of available priests which renders it impossible to provide a full-time pastor for Saint Walburga Parish, the relevant demographics of Saint Walburga and Saint Titus Parishes as well as projected future trends, the fact that these two parishes already share a pastor, the possibility of better stewardship in the shared use of temporal goods and personnel, and the general plan of pastoral care not only for the Titusville area but also for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

1. By means of an extinctive union, Saint Walburga Parish in Titusville shall be merged and subsumed into Saint Titus Parish in Titusville.

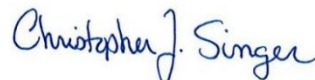
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Saint Titus Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses.
3. The pastoral care previously provided by the personal parish of Saint Walburga to the German-speaking Catholics of Titusville and to their descendants who continue German-Catholic traditions, no longer a pressing pastoral concern, is henceforth to be provided directly by Saint Titus Parish, since every member of Saint Walburga Parish already resides within the territory of Saint Titus Parish.
4. All sacramental records from Saint Walburga Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Saint Titus Parish.
5. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Saint Walburga Parish shall be transferred to Saint Titus Parish.
6. The parish church shall be Saint Titus church. Saint Walburga church shall become a secondary church – without mission status – of Saint Titus Parish.
7. Saint Walburga church is to remain open to the faithful at least occasionally for sacred worship, whether public or private (cf. can. 1214), but in accord with diocesan law, Masses are not to be celebrated there on Sundays or holy days of obligation or the evenings preceding them. As required by law, Mass is to be celebrated in Saint Walburga church every year on the solemnity of the anniversary of the church's dedication and on the solemnity of the church's title (February 25), 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 21st day of September, 2016



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



The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor