



DECREE

EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SACRED HEART PARISH (SHARON) INTO SAINT JOSEPH PARISH (SHARON)

History

A. Sacred Heart Parish

Sacred Heart Parish in Sharon was established in 1864 and served a largely Irish Catholic population. The original parish church was dedicated on August 3, 1868. The current church was dedicated on September 11, 1892. During the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Sacred Heart Parish flourished, but the demographic changes affecting the Shenango Valley area and all of northwestern Pennsylvania eventually took their toll. The parish today has only a fraction of its former membership.

B. Saint Joseph Parish

The first Catholic parish established in the Sharon area was Saint Rose of Lima Parish, erected in 1860 in Hickory Township, together with Saint Ignatius mission church in Neshannock which lasted until 1887. The parishioners were mostly of German heritage. In 1893, construction was begun on a new church in the City of Sharon to replace Saint Rose church. That new church, entitled Saint Joseph church, was dedicated on May 29, 1898. Almost immediately parishioners and clergy alike began to refer to Saint Joseph Parish because of the name of the parish church. Eventually, Saint Rose of Lima church was torn down. Technically, however, Saint Rose of Lima was never officially suppressed until February 5, 1946, when Archbishop John Mark Gannon formally erected Saint Joseph Parish in its place. The current Saint Joseph church, built to replace the earlier one, was dedicated on May 2, 1965 and was rededicated after substantial renovations on August 11, 1996.

Current Situation

Every parish in the Shenango Valley has been affected by the major demographic changes in northwestern Pennsylvania in recent decades. According to the US Census Bureau, in

the 2010 the population of the City of Sharon was slightly more than half of its population from its peak in 1950, a fact which has impacted both Sacred Heart Parish and Saint Joseph Parish, they being the two territorial parishes for the City of Sharon. By 2015, Sacred Heart Parish listed only 241 households and an average weekend Mass attendance of 251 persons, while Saint Joseph Parish in Sharon listed 1,192 households with an average weekend Mass attendance of 643. The original distinction between Irish Catholics on the west side of Sharon and German Catholics on the east side of Sharon, which had given rise to two separate territorial parishes, has long since ceased to be a pressing pastoral concern. In light of the above, coupled with the shortage of clergy, it is no longer necessary or feasible to duplicate services with the existence of multiple territorial parishes in the City of Sharon. The care of souls for the faithful of Sharon could be better served by a single territorial parish, allowing for a more efficient use of personnel and temporal resources and a unified pastoral vision and approach with a larger parish community.

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 Sacred Heart Parish and Saint Joseph 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 Sacred Heart Parish into Saint Joseph Parish, resulting in a single territorial parish for the City of Sharon.

I specified a time period in which I would welcome feedback in response to this preliminary proposal. As a result, I requested input and advice from the pastor of Saint Sacred Heart Parish, from the pastor of Saint Joseph Parish, 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 to offer their advice once again on the aforementioned proposal to merge Sacred Heart Parish into Saint Joseph 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.

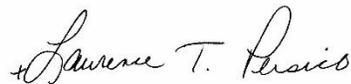
Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the need for a stronger and more sustainable means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of the City of Sharon, while also considering the already diminished number of parishioners especially of Sacred Heart Parish and the projected further decline of their number, the lack of available priests which renders it impossible to continue to provide a full-time pastor for Sacred Heart Parish, the relevant demographics of all of the parishes in the Sharon and Farrell area as well as projected future trends, the possibility of better stewardship in the shared use of temporal goods and personnel to meet the pastoral needs of the faithful of Sharon, and the

general plan of pastoral care not only for the Shenango Valley area but also for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

1. By means of an extinctive union, Sacred Heart Parish in Sharon shall be merged and subsumed into Saint Joseph Parish in Sharon.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Saint Joseph Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the current territory of Saint Joseph Parish, to which will be added all of the current territory of Sacred Heart Parish.
3. All sacramental records from Sacred Heart Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Saint Joseph Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Sacred Heart Parish shall be transferred to Saint Joseph Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Saint Joseph church. Sacred Heart church shall become a secondary church – without mission status – of Saint Joseph Parish.
6. Sacred Heart 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 Sacred Heart church every year on the solemnity of the anniversary of the church's dedication and 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 21st day of September, 2016



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



The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor