



DECREE

MERGING SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA AND SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL PARISHES, DUBOIS; SAINT BERNARD PARISH, FALLS CREEK; SAINT MARY PARISH, REYNOLDSVILLE; AND ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY PARISH, SYKESVILLE; AND ESTABLISHING HOLY SPIRIT PARISH, DUBOIS

History

DuBois

Saint Catherine of Siena parish was established in 1877, and the first church was built that same year. For the two years prior, a visiting priest had celebrated Mass every few weeks in family homes or any available gathering space. The current church was built in 1893, with extensive renovations after a fire in 1909. Saint Catherine parish provided for missions in Penfield, Helvetia, Beechtree, and Falls Creek at various times, as well as serving the old DuBois Hospital. Priests from the parish were also instrumental in establishing and ministering in Christ the King Manor and Central Christian High School (later DuBois Central Catholic).

In 1893, Bishop Tobias Mullen established Saint Joseph as a personal parish to serve the growing number of Lithuanian, Polish, and Slovak immigrants. Soon the Slovak community began to feel that Saint Catherine and Saint Joseph churches were too crowded. They petitioned Bishop Edmund Fitzmaurice to establish a new parish. Bishop Fitzmaurice declined, but the people began work on a new church anyway. Bishop Fitzmaurice consented to establish Saint Michael the Archangel as a personal parish for the Polish and Slovak people in 1912. St. Joseph parish merged into St. Michael parish in 2017. At the same time, Saint Michael the Archangel parish was partnered with Saint Catherine of Siena parish under one pastor.

Falls Creek

Saint Bernard church in Falls Creek began in 1901 as a mission of Saint Catherine of Siena parish in DuBois. The Eucharistic sacrifice was celebrated occasionally until around the time of World War II, when it ceased entirely. The celebration of the Mass resumed after the war, and in 1952 Saint Bernard was established as a parish with a resident pastor.

Reynoldsville

Mass was first celebrated in Reynoldsville in 1871. For the first several years, the Catholic families in Reynoldsville were served by the pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish in Brookville. By 1875 they were able to build a church of their own and Saint Mary Parish was established.

Sykesville

The Catholic community in Sykesville began to organize in 1923. The next year they built a church in honor of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Bishop John Mark Gannon appointed a pastor for them. Until 1972, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary parish also cared for the mission church of St. George in Soldier.

Current Situation

Since 2019, the parishes of Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Michael in DuBois, Saint Bernard in Falls Creek, Saint Mary in Reynoldsville, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sykesville have been engaged in a process of local pastoral planning, with the intent to position the Catholic community of the DuBois region to move confidently into the future. Local planning sought to maintain a priestly presence at DuBois Central Catholic School and Christ the King Manor, while developing vibrant faith formation and Catholic fellowship across the DuBois region. Considering that attendance at Mass has fallen by almost 40% in the last twelve years in the above-named parishes, and that the number of priests in the diocese continues to decline as well, the initial recommendation of the planning committee was to work toward the merger of all five parishes into one.

In 2022, the five parishes were formally partnered in accord with particular law, resulting in the reorganization of the separate parish councils into a single regional pastoral council, while each parish continued to retain its own distinct finance council (cf. can. 537). Since then, they all have been under the care of a single pastor, with the assistance of a parochial vicar, a senior associate, and a deacon.

The planning process involved considerable input not only from the clergy and the combined pastoral council as well as the five distinct parish finance councils, but also from parishioners at large from all five parishes. Regular updates were provided to parishioners who were invited to offer feedback. The results of that feedback were received and analyzed, resulting in a final version of a proposal with broad parishioner support. That final version was then approved by the combined pastoral council, who recommended it be proposed to Bishop Persico.

On August 18, 2023, Monsignor Richard R. Siefer, as pastor of all five affected parishes, formally petitioned that I accept the proposed pastoral plan for the DuBois region which includes the following canonical provisions: that all five parishes be merged by extinctive union from which a new territorial parish would arise (cf. can. 121), that Saint Catherine of Siena church in DuBois be designated as the parish church of the new territorial parish; that

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary church in Sykesville, Saint Michael church in DuBois, Saint Bernard church in Falls Creek, and Saint Mary church in Reynoldsville be designated as secondary churches of the new parish.

Members of the Presbyteral Council were notified in advance that discussion of parish restructuring in the DuBois area would take place at the September meeting. On September 7, 2023, while meeting in Clarion, the Council members discussed the proposal and the pastor's petition. Among the motivations supporting the petition are: 1) the decline in the Catholic population of DuBois, Falls Creek, Reynoldsville, and Sykesville 2) the decline in the number of priests which has rendered it impossible to assign more than one pastor to DuBois, 3) the need to reorganize the Catholic community in the DuBois region to build a more stable foundation for future ministry including the formation of a single finance council to parallel a single pastoral council, and 4) the need to make more prudent use of scarce resources – financial and other – in fulfilling the mission of the Church for the faithful of the DuBois region. The opinions of the dean and the regional vicar were requested, and both supported the petition. Following the discussion, Presbyteral Council members unanimously voted to recommend to the Bishop that he grant the petition.

Monsignor Siefer believes that merging the parishes and the subsequent establishment of one new parish for DuBois and the surrounding region, with Saint Catherine of Siena church as the parish church, and one of the other churches as a mission church, is the best decision to provide for the future care of souls in the DuBois region. He does not believe that these measures will result in harm to souls.

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 in the DuBois region, while also considering the decline in both the general and the Catholic population of DuBois, Falls Creek, Reynoldsville and Sykesville, the inability to assign more than one pastor to DuBois for the foreseeable future, the benefits of forming the Catholic community of the DuBois region into a single parish in order to build a more stable foundation for vibrant future ministry, the benefit of providing the Catholic community of the DuBois region with a single finance council to parallel a single pastoral council and thus better coordinate pastoral and apostolic activity and evangelization, and the advantage of making more prudent use of scarce resources to provide stronger programs for evangelization, care of the sick and elderly, the formation of youth, better resources for worship, and all other ministries and apostolates, and the general plan of pastoral care not only for the DuBois region but also for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

1. By means of an extinctive union, the parishes of Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Michael in DuBois, Saint Bernard in Falls Creek, Saint Mary in Reynoldsville, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sykesville shall be merged in accord with can. 121, and from that merger a new parish will be erected.

2. The name of the new parish shall be **HOLY SPIRIT** parish.
3. The boundaries of Holy Spirit parish will be as follows:
Starting at the northwest corner of Clearfield county: East along the northern border of Clearfield county until the Huston township line; South along the Sandy/Huston township line until Union township; East along the Huston/Union township line until Pine township; South along the Pine/Union township line until Pike township; West along the Bloom/Union township line to state road 4007 at the juncture with Anderson creek; South along state road 4007 to US route 219; West on US route 219 to south on state road 3011 to Penn township; West and South along the corner of Penn township and Brady; continue West along the Bell/Brady township line to the county line between Clearfield and Jefferson counties; South along the county line to Gaskill township; West along the Gaskill/Henderson township line to state road 2007 in Big Run Borough; North along state road 2007 to the juncture with state road 2008; West along state road 2008 to the juncture with state road 2023; from there directly West to the McCalmont township line; West along the McCalmont township line to Oliver township; continuing West along the Oliver/Knox township line to state road 3031; South on state road 3031 to PA route 36; North along PA route 36 to Slimak road at Smathers Run; Northeast on Slimak road to Five Mile Run; North along Five Mile Run to Brookville Borough; East and North on the Brookville border to PA route 28; North along PA route 28 to Allens Mills road (state road 1830, sometimes shows as PA route 830); East on Allens Mills road to Cemetery road; East on Cemetery road to Stevenson road (state road 1009); North on state road 1009 to Beechwood road; East on Beechwood road to Daugherty road; Northeast on Daugherty road to state road 1015; Southeast on state road 1015 to Old Grade road; Southeast on Old Grade road to Harvey Run; North along the Jefferson/Clearfield county line to the northwest corner of Clearfield county.
4. In accord with can. 121, all of the temporal goods, assets, and liabilities of the parishes of Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Michael in DuBois, Saint Bernard in Falls Creek, Saint Mary in Reynoldsville, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sykesville shall be transferred to Holy Spirit parish.
5. All sacramental records from the parishes of Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Michael in DuBois, Saint Bernard in Falls Creek, Saint Mary in Reynoldsville, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sykesville shall be retained at the parish office of Holy Spirit parish.
6. The parish church of Holy Spirit parish shall be Saint Catherine of Siena church in DuBois. Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary church in Sykesville shall become a secondary mission church of Holy Spirit parish. Saint Michael church in DuBois, Saint Bernard church in Falls Creek and Saint Mary church in Reynoldsville shall become secondary churches – without mission status – of Holy Spirit parish.
7. Saint Michael church in DuBois, Saint Bernard church in Falls Creek and Saint Mary church in Reynoldsville are 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 each church every year on the solemnity of the

church's title (January 1 for Saint Mary, August 20 for Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and September 29 for Saint Michael the Archangel), in accord with current liturgical norms (cf. can. 1167 §2 and 1168 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, can. 2 of the present Code, and nos. 59 4b and 4c of the Roman Calendar). 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 December 2, 2023, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Erie
on this 6th day of October, 2023

+Lawrence T. Persico

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

Christopher J. Singer

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor