



DECREE

EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL PARISH (EMLENTON) INTO BELOVED DISCIPLE PARISH (GROVE CITY)

History

A. Saint Michael the Archangel Parish, Emlenton

Initial care for the Catholics in southern Venango County can be traced to the late 1860's. The pastor of Immaculate Conception parish in Clarion first began making rounds to Emlenton in 1867. By 1871 a church was built, and Saint Michael the Archangel Parish was organized with its own pastor. Since 2017 the parish has been served by a non-resident administrator.

B. Beloved Disciple Parish, Grove City

Catholics first settled in Grove City in the 1870's. The first Mass was celebrated in 1898 in a private home. Area Catholics continued to be visited occasionally by the pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary parish in Mercer. In 1900, one of the visiting priests purchased a home and moved it to the outskirts of town to be used as a Catholic church. This first church was named Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. In 1904 Our Lady of the Sacred Heart received its first resident pastor. The Catholic community in Grove City continued to grow, and so in 1927 they built a new church to replace the house-church. Bishop John Mark Gannon chose the design and a new name, Church of the Beloved Disciple.

Current Situation

Both Saint Michael the Archangel Parish, Emlenton, and Beloved Disciple Parish, Grove City, possess a single parish church building and a rectory. Emlenton and Grove City are approximately 25 miles apart.

Venango County has experienced significant demographic changes in recent decades. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the overall population of Venango County has decreased by more than 7,700 people – a decline of 13.5% in the period from the year 2000 to 2022. The decline in both the general and Catholic population of the area – combined with the decreasing number of available priests – necessitates the reconfiguration of parishes and the better use of resources in order to assure the proper care of souls in southern Venango and Clarion Counties. Due to demographic changes, as well as Mass time changes necessitated by a lack of available priests, the

average weekend Mass attendance at Saint Michael the Archangel Parish declined from 182 in 2014 to 77 in 2022 (as determined by the October count).

The Catholic population (and the overall population) of southern Venango County is quite small. However, due to the rural nature and hilly topography of this area, the few Catholic inhabitants of this area would have a very long and challenging distance to travel if Mass were not available in the Emlenton area. These were among the factors considered in the proposed merger plan.

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 demographic conditions in the Oil City Deanery changed in recent decades, the need for parish reconfiguration and the better use of material and human resources became more urgent.

On March 9, 2023, Bishop Persico presented Presbyteral Council with a preliminary plan for parish reconfiguration in the Oil City Deanery. The preliminary plan was opened for discussion among members of the Council.

On March 22, 2023, at a deanery meeting held at Immaculate Conception church in Clarion, Bishop Persico presented the Oil City Deanery preliminary plan to the clergy of the deanery and a representative group of lay leaders from each parish. The Bishop then opened a several-week period of comment and feedback for pastors and people to give their views on the proposed changes.

At the May 10, 2023 meeting of the Presbyteral Council, the Council members heard feedback from the parishioners and clergy associated with Saint Michael the Archangel Parish. Ideas included merging St. Michael the Archangel Parish into the Franklin or Clarion parishes. A suggestion was also made that an effective merger could be made into Beloved Disciple Parish – which is just across the border in the Sharon Deanery.

At the June 22, 2023 meeting of the Presbyteral Council, Bishop Persico presented a finalized proposal for parish reconfigurations in the Oil City Deanery. After continued consultation with the people and clergy of the area, Bishop Persico presented to the Council the plan to merge Saint Michael the Archangel Parish into Beloved Disciple Parish, with Saint Michael the Archangel Parish remaining a secondary mission church. The Presbyteral Council unanimously approved the plan and recommended it to Bishop Persico.

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 whole Venango, Clarion, and Mercer County areas, 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 the envisioning of this merger

as an integral part of the overall pastoral plan for the Oil City and Sharon Deanery area¹; I hereby decree the following:

1. By means of an extinctive union, Saint Michael the Archangel Parish, Emlenton, shall be merged and subsumed into Beloved Disciple Parish in Grove City.
2. The name of the receiving parish, for official purposes, shall be formally changed from Church of the Beloved Disciple Parish to Beloved Disciple Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with Beloved Disciple Parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses, and to it will be added all of the territory of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish.
3. All sacramental records from Saint Michael the Archangel Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Beloved Disciple Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish shall be transferred to Beloved Disciple Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Beloved Disciple church in Grove City.
6. Saint Michael the Archangel church in Emlenton shall come a secondary mission church of Beloved Disciple 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 Michael the Archangel church.
7. The boundaries of Beloved Disciple Parish shall be:

Starting where Interstate 79 crosses the Mercer County southern border; north on Interstate 79 to the Findley Township line; east along the northern border of Findley Township and continuing along the northern border of Wolf Creek Township to the Mercer/Venango county border; north along the Mercer/Venango County border to the northern border of Irwin Township in Venango County; east along the northern border of Irwin Township and continuing along the northern border of Clinton Township to the Allegheny River/Rockland Township border; north and east along the Rockland Township border to the Venango/Clarion County border; north and east on the Clarion County border to Cogley Road; south on Cogley Road to Ashland Church Road; west on Ashland Church Road to Camp Coffman Road; south on Camp Coffman Road to the intersection of US Route 322 and PA Route 338; south on PA Route 338 to Blairs Corners Road near Beaver Creek; south on Blairs Corners Road to PA Route 58; south on PA Route 58 to PA Route 368 at Callensburg; west on PA Route 368 to the Allegheny River and Clarion/Armstrong County border; north along the Clarion/Armstrong County border; west along the Venango/Butler County border; south along the Butler/Mercer County border; north along the Mercer/Lawrence County border to Interstate 79.

¹ The pastoral plan for the Oil City and Sharon Deanery areas 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 parish's community and ecumenical involvement, 6) create a more welcoming environment, and 7) sustain the parish financially.

8. As required by law, Mass is to be celebrated in each 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 January 1, 2024. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Erie
on this 7th day of December, 2023

+Lawrence T. Persico

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

Christopher J. Singer

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor