



DECREE

EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SAINT ANDREW PARISH (ERIE) INTO SAINT JUDE THE APOSTLE PARISH (ERIE)

History

A. Saint Andrew Parish, Erie

Saint Andrew Parish was founded in 1871 to serve the northwest corner of the City of Erie. The first church, built that same year, burned down in 1896. Construction of a second church began soon after. However, due to lack of funds, it never progressed past the cellar. For 18 years Mass was celebrated in the roofed-over cellar, colloquially called the “catacombs.” The current church was built in 1915-1916 on the other side of the block. It was completely decorated in 1936, including the main altar of African marble. The parish ran St. Andrew School from 1929 to 2006. In 2017, Saint Andrew was partnered with Sacred Heart and Saint Paul parishes.

B. Saint Jude the Apostle Parish, Erie

Archbishop John Mark Gannon established Saint Jude the Apostle Parish in 1955. The Archbishop bought a nine-acre plot between West Sixth and West Eight Streets to be the site of the parish church and school. Masses were initially held in the chapel of St. Joseph Home for Children, while the pastor lived at Villa Maria Academy for the first two years. Diocesan regulations at the time required the construction of the school before the church. Before it opened in 1959, the diocese decided that the school should serve both St. Jude and St. Julia parishes. The school was therefore named Our Lady’s Christian School rather than St. Jude. Also in 1959, the parish Masses and office moved to the auditorium of the new school. Ten years later, the parish purchased an additional four acres along West Sixth Street. The church was constructed on the additional acreage in 1970. The parish complex was enlarged in the 1980’s to include additional offices and a parish center. In 1990 Saint Jude purchased another 4.5 acres, taking the parish property from Lowell Avenue all the way to Peninsula Drive, where they erected a free-standing bell tower. Our Lady’s Christian School was incorporated into the Erie Catholic School System in 2017, at which time the name was changed to St. Jude School.



Current Situation

Saint Andrew Parish is located on the West side of the City of Erie in Erie County. Saint Jude the Apostle Parish is located in Millcreek Township to the west of the City of Erie. Regarding sacred edifices, Saint Andrew Parish and Saint Jude the Apostle Parish each possess one church. Saint Jude also hosts Saint Jude elementary school. The church buildings are 2.5 miles apart from each other.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Erie County peaked at 281,502 around the year 2012. By 2022, the county population had fallen to 267,689 – a drop of 4.9%. The population of the City of Erie peaked at 138,440 around the year 1960. By the year 2000, the City had approximately 103,748 residents. In 2021, that number had dropped to 93,999 – a decline of 32% since its 1960 peak. However, the population of Millcreek Township, which surrounds the City of Erie and in which Saint Jude the Apostle church is located, has not fallen. In 1960 the township population was 28,239; by 2000 it was 52,129; and in 2022 it was 53,411.

The decline in parish membership and Mass attendance in recent years has been steep. Saint Andrew Parish reported 998 registered parishioners in 2015 and 698 in 2023 – a drop of 30%. The October count for 2015 was 345 and in 2023 it was 111. This indicates a 68% decline in Mass attendance over the last 8 years. Saint Jude the Apostle Parish reported 3,855 members in 2015 and 2,884 in 2022 – a drop of 25%. The October count Mass attendance estimate dropped from 1555 in 2015 to 849 in 2023 – a decline of about 45%. The general population decline in the City of Erie, as well as the decreasing number of available priests, necessitates a reconfiguration of parishes and better use of resources in order to properly provide for the care of souls on the West side of the City of Erie and Millcreek Township.

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 conditions in the West Erie Deanery changed in recent years, the need for parish reconfiguration became more necessary.

Beginning in roughly 2018, a directed study of the demographics, and Catholic needs, in the City of Erie was undertaken. Population trend data was projected by the Meitler firm. Meetings with pastors and parishioners also took place on the local level. On June 22, 2023, Bishop Persico presented a preliminary plan for parish reconfiguration in Erie County (which includes both the East and West Erie Deaneries) to the Presbyteral Council and opened it up for discussion among members.

On August 29, 2023, at a meeting held at St. Mark Catholic Center, Bishop Persico unveiled the Erie County preliminary plan to the pastors of the deanery and a representative group of lay leaders from each parish. The unveiling of the preliminary plan was preceded by three letters written by Bishop Persico which were read to parishioners (and published on the diocesan website) explaining the need for pastoral planning in Erie County and inviting the prayer and participation of all parishioners. Following the August 29 meeting, the Bishop then opened a several-week period of comment and feedback for pastors and people to give their views on the proposed changes.

The preliminary plan proposed that Saint Andrew Parish be merged into Saint Jude the Apostle Parish. Saint Jude the Apostle church would become the parish church and Saint Andrew church would become a secondary church without mission status (i.e. no Mass Saturday evening or on Sundays).

After receiving feedback from parishioners and extensive consultation with the pastors of the area, the preliminary plan was changed to the following: Saint Andrew Parish would merge into Saint Jude the Apostle Parish with Saint Andrew church becoming a secondary church (i.e. no Mass Saturday evening or on Sundays) and then the enlarged Saint Jude the Apostle Parish would be partnered with Saint Stephen of Hungary Parish in Erie. Saint Jude the Apostle and Saint Stephen of Hungary churches are 3.1 miles apart.

At the February 28, 2024 meeting of the Presbyteral Council, Bishop Persico presented the revised proposal for parish reconfiguration for Erie County. The Presbyteral Council unanimously approved the proposal to merge Saint Andrew Parish into Saint Jude the Apostle Parish, and then to partner Saint Jude the Apostle Parish with Saint Stephen Parish.

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 West side of the City of Erie and Millcreek Township, 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 envisioning this merger as an integral part of the overall pastoral plan for the City of Erie and Erie County¹; I hereby decree the following:

1. By means of an extinctive union, Saint Andrew Parish in Erie shall be merged and subsumed into Saint Jude the Apostle Parish in Erie.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Saint Jude the Apostle Parish.
3. All sacramental records from Saint Andrew Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Saint Jude the Apostle Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Saint Andrew Parish shall be transferred to Saint Jude the Apostle Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Saint Jude the Apostle church.

¹ The pastoral plan for Erie County 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 parishes' community and ecumenical involvement, 6) create a more welcoming environment, and 7) sustain the parishes financially.

6. Saint Andrew church shall become a secondary church without mission status of Saint Jude the Apostle parish. By diocesan law, therefore, Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, as well as on the evening preceding them, is no longer permitted in Saint Andrew church.
7. Saint Andrew church is to remain open to the faithful at least occasionally for sacred worship, whether public or private (cf. can. 1214).
8. Furthermore, as required by law, Mass is to be celebrated in each church every year on the solemnity of that 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.
9. Saint Jude the Apostle Parish shall be territorial in nature, with boundaries as follows:

In Erie County, beginning at the southwest corner of Erie International Airport where Asbury Drive meets the railroad tracks: north on Asbury Drive to state highway 5A/ West Lake Road; east on West Lake Road to Marshall Drive; north on Marshall Drive to the lakeshore; east along the lake to Cherry Street; south on Cherry Street to West 12th Street/state highway 5; west on 12th Street to Greengarden Boulevard; south on Greengarden Boulevard to the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks near West 20th Street; west on the railroad tracks to Asbury Drive.
10. Furthermore, as will be enacted in a separate decree, Saint Jude the Apostle Parish is to be partnered with Saint Stephen of Hungary Parish in Erie.

This decree is effective July 9, 2024. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Erie
on this 11th day of April, 2024

+Lawrence T. Persico

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

Christopher J. Singer

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor