



DECREE

EFFECTING THE MERGER OF HOLY CROSS PARISH (BRANDY CAMP) INTO SAINT BONIFACE PARISH (KERSEY)

History

A. Holy Cross Parish

Catholics in the Brandy Camp area were originally served by priests from Saint Boniface Parish in Kersey, Saint Tobias Parish in Brockway, and Saint John the Baptist Parish in Shawmut. The original church in Brandy Camp was built around 1910 as a mission of the parish in Shawmut. Due to declining population, Saint John the Baptist Parish together with its mission of Holy Cross in Brandy Camp were placed under the spiritual care of Saint Boniface Parish in Kersey with its mission in Coal Hollow in 1912, but the arrangement lasted only four years, because in 1916 Holy Cross mission was raised to the level of a parish and Saint John the Baptist church in Shawmut became a mission of Holy Cross Parish. In 1928, the mission in Shawmut was closed and Holy Angels mission in Coal Hollow was transferred from Saint Boniface Parish to Holy Cross Parish. In August of 1957, Holy Angels mission was returned to the care of Saint Boniface Parish in Kersey and was eventually closed in the late 1980's.

From 1963 to 1966, Holy Cross Parish again came under the spiritual care of the pastor of Saint Boniface Parish in Kersey, but gaining its own pastor once again, the parish constructed the present church which was solemnly blessed on May 24, 1970. Eventually the demographic changes affecting all of northwestern Pennsylvania took their toll. Holy Cross Parish has not had a resident priest since 2000. The parish is currently being administered by the pastor of Saint Tobias Parish in Brockway, while sacramental and pastoral care is being provided once again from Saint Boniface Parish in Kersey. There have been no Sunday Masses celebrated in the church since the end of 2013.

B. Saint Boniface Parish

The Catholic community in the Kersey area is one of the oldest in the Diocese, dating back to around 1830. Immaculate Conception church was constructed at Irishtown, and priests traveled from Clearfield, Clarion, and Sloandale near Titusville to celebrate Mass there occasionally. The first resident pastor arrived in 1846. In May of 1853, the parish was entrusted to Benedictine priests from Saint Mary Parish in Saint Marys, who very quickly began construction of a new

Saint Ann church in Kersey. By the 1860's, the original Immaculate Conception church in Irishtown was no longer in use. In 1866, Saint Ann church was renamed Saint Boniface church, by which action the parish was also effectively renamed, and the following year the parish returned to the care of diocesan priests. Construction began on the current parish church, which was dedicated on August 19, 1894. Holy Angels mission, which had been established in Coal Hollow in 1910, was given to Holy Cross Parish in Brandy Camp in 1928 and was returned to Saint Boniface Parish in Kersey in 1957, eventually closing in the late 1980's.

Current Situation

The demographic changes affecting all of northwestern Pennsylvania have not left the Shawmut, Brandy Camp, and Coal Hollow areas untouched. The current population is only a fraction of what it was at its peak approximately one hundred years ago. In 2015, Holy Cross Parish listed only 37 households, and Sunday Mass had not been celebrated in the parish church for several years. The parishioners are receiving sacramental and pastoral care from Saint Boniface Parish in Kersey, which in 2015 numbered 632 households with an average weekend Mass attendance of 455. With no future possibility in sight of providing a full time pastor for Holy Cross Parish, or for reversing the current demographic situation, another more viable and sustainable means must be found to strengthen the pastoral care of the faithful in the Brandy Camp area for the years ahead.

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 Holy Cross Parish in Brandy Camp before the Presbyteral Council on March 9, 2016. With the support of the Presbyteral Council, I announced on April 12, 2016 a preliminary plan to merge Holy Cross Parish into Saint Boniface Parish in Kersey, with Holy Cross church becoming a secondary church of Saint Boniface Parish.

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 administrator of Holy Cross Parish, the administrator of Saint Boniface 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 once again for their advice on the aforementioned proposal to merge Holy Cross Parish into Saint Boniface Parish, for which they expressed unanimous support on June 28, 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 in the Brandy Camp area, while additionally considering the already diminished number of parishioners of Holy Cross Parish, the lack of available priests which renders it impossible to provide a full-time pastor for the parish, the

relevant demographics of both Holy Cross and Saint Boniface Parishes, the historical origins of each parish including the collaboration and shared ministry between the two parishes at various times over the past century, 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 Brandy Camp area but also for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

1. By means of an extinctive union, Holy Cross Parish in Brandy Camp shall be merged and subsumed into Saint Boniface Parish in Kersey.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Saint Boniface Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses, and to it will be added all of the territory of Holy Cross Parish.
3. All sacramental records from Holy Cross Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Saint Boniface Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Holy Cross shall be transferred to Saint Boniface Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Saint Boniface church. Holy Cross church shall become a secondary church – without mission status – of Saint Boniface Parish.
6. Holy Cross 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 Holy Cross 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 February 13, 2017, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Erie
on this 22nd day of September, 2016

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

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor