



## DECREE

### EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SAINT VENANTIUS PARISH (ROUSEVILLE) INTO SAINT STEPHEN PARISH (OIL CITY)

#### History

##### A. Saint Stephen Parish

Saint Stephen Parish was the second Catholic parish erected in Oil City, being formed in October of 1898 when the territory of Saint Joseph Parish was divided in half, with Saint Stephen Parish receiving the parish territory south of the Allegheny River, and Saint Joseph Parish retaining the territory north of the river. A new Saint Stephen church was dedicated on December 22, 1907 and was subsequently rededicated on June 1, 1952 following substantial renovation. The parish has never undergone any addition or division to its territory since its founding, and today it is the largest parish in terms of membership in the Oil City area.

##### B. Saint Venantius Parish

Mass was first celebrated in Rouseville by priests from Oil City. In 1872 a mission church was built. It was at various times connected with missions in Petroleum Center, Mageetown, and Spartansburg. Following the dedication of the present church on June 24, 1923, Saint Venantius Parish received its first resident pastor, who also served the aforementioned missions. Since the mid-1980's, however, there has been no resident priest at Saint Venantius Parish, and the rectory itself was demolished in 1996.

#### Current Situation

The entire greater Oil City area, including the Rouseville area, has seen significant demographic changes in which decades of growth and prosperity were followed by decades of population decline and economic challenges. The current population of the Borough of Rouseville is less than half of what it was in 1950. There is no indication that the situation will reverse itself. This decline in the overall population, coupled with an ever-growing secularism and an aging population, has resulted in the fact that Saint Venantius Parish, like others in the region, has seen a considerable decline in membership.

Pastoral collaboration with other parishes in the region, especially in the sharing of pastors or parish administrators, has enabled Saint Venantius Parish to continue providing pastoral care in a rather limited fashion up to the present day, but the long-term sustainability of five separate parishes in the area is no longer feasible, or even possible. This is certainly true concerning Saint Venantius Parish, which by 2015 had decreased to only 64 households, with an average Sunday Mass attendance of 63 persons. The care of souls for the faithful in Rouseville and throughout the greater Oil City area could be better served by a more efficient use of personnel and temporal resources, even greater collaboration between the various communities of the faithful, and a unified pastoral vision and approach to meet the needs of the faithful of the entire greater Oil City area.

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 Saint Venantius 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 Saint Venantius Parish into Saint Stephen 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 shared pastor of Saint Venantius and Saint Stephen Parishes, 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 Saint Venantius Parish into Saint Stephen 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.

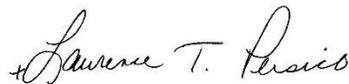
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Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the need for a stronger and more sustainable means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of Saint Venantius Parish, while also considering the already diminished number of parishioners and the projected further decline of their number, the lack of available priests which renders it impossible to provide a full-time pastor for the parish, the relevant demographics of each parish in Oil City as well as projected future trends, the fact that Saint Venantius and Saint Stephen Parishes already share a pastor, 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 Oil City area but also for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

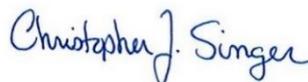
1. By means of an extinctive union, Saint Venantius Parish in Oil City shall be merged and subsumed into Saint Stephen Parish in Oil City.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Saint Stephen Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses, to which will be added all of the territory of Saint Venantius Parish, which is to include the Borough of Rouseville and all of the area of Cornplanter Township west of Oil Creek.
3. All sacramental records from Saint Venantius Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Saint Stephen Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Saint Venantius Parish shall be transferred to Saint Stephen Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Saint Stephen church. Saint Venantius church shall become a secondary church – without mission status – of Saint Stephen Parish.
6. Saint Venantius 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 Saint Venantius church every year on the solemnity of the anniversary of the church's dedication and on the solemnity of the church's title (August 5), 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