



DECREE

EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SAINT ANNE PARISH (WILCOX) INTO HOLY ROSARY PARISH (JOHNSONBURG)

History

A. Saint Anne Parish

The history of Saint Anne Parish in Wilcox is closely connected with that of the former Holy Cross Parish in Rasselas. At the time when it was elevated to a parish in 1896, the community at Holy Cross church had been a mission of Saint Joseph Parish in Warren for more than twenty years. As a parish, Holy Cross had its own mission church of Saint Anne in Wilcox. In 1949, Saint Anne church was destroyed by fire, and a new church was constructed and blessed in 1951. At the same time, the seat of the parish was transferred from Rasselas to Wilcox, so that Holy Cross church became a mission church and Saint Anne church became the parish church. Due to a diminishing population coupled with a declining number of available priests, Saint Anne Parish has not had a full time pastor since 1993. Furthermore, the celebration of Sunday Masses was discontinued at Holy Cross church in 2003, and its mission status was withdrawn.

B. Holy Rosary Parish

Mass was first celebrated in the Johnsonburg area in 1876. With the arrival of its first resident pastor in 1896, Holy Rosary mission, which had until then been a mission of Saint Callistus Parish in Kane, was elevated to a parish, and the first church was completed in 1889. At times, the parish had mission churches of its own – now all closed – in Glen Hazel, Straights, and Instanter. Construction on the present church was begun in 1904 and the church was dedicated on July 17, 1904. The parish saw many years of growth, but eventually the same demographic changes affecting the rest of northwestern Pennsylvania also affected the Johnsonburg area. Since 1993, the parish has shared a pastor with Saint Anne Parish in Wilcox.

Current Situation

According to the US Census Bureau, in 2010 the population of Wilcox was fewer than 400 individuals. The population of Johnsonburg was just under 2,500, but that figure is less than half of its historic high in 1920. There is no indication that this decline in population in either community is likely to reverse itself. In 2015 Saint Anne Parish listed 108 households

with an average Sunday Mass attendance of 80 persons, while Holy Rosary Parish in Johnsonburg listed 632 households, with an average weekend Mass attendance of 455 individuals. As noted, Saint Anne and Holy Rosary Parishes have shared a pastor since 1993.

Due to diminishing numbers of parishioners, an aging population, the shortage of clergy, and the need to practice better stewardship of both personnel and financial resources, the long-term sustainability of a separate parish in Wilcox is no longer feasible. Given that the parishes in Wilcox and Johnsonburg have shared a pastor for the last twenty-three years, it seems that the care of souls for the faithful in those parishes could be better served by a more efficient use of personnel and temporal resources, greater collaboration between their communities of the faithful, and a unified pastoral vision for both parishes.

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 Anne Parish in Wilcox before the Presbyteral Council on March 9, 2016. With the support of the Presbyteral Council, I announced on April 13, 2016 a preliminary plan to merge Saint Anne Parish together with Holy Cross church into Holy Rosary Parish, with Saint Anne church becoming, like Holy Cross church, a secondary church without mission status.

I specified a time period in which I would welcome feedback in response to this preliminary proposal. As a result, I requested input and advice from the shared pastor of Saint Anne and Holy Rosary 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 Anne Parish into Holy Rosary Parish, with the change that Saint Anne church would receive mission status while Holy Cross church, already lacking mission status, would remain a secondary church without mission status. The Presbyteral Council members expressed their unanimous support on June 28, 2016.

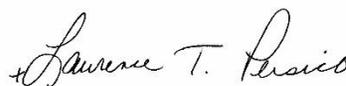
All of the requirements of canons 50, 51, 127, 166, and 515 have been fulfilled.

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 of Saint Anne Parish in Wilcox and Holy Rosary Parish in Johnsonburg, while also considering the already diminished number of parishioners especially at Wilcox, the lack of available priests which renders it impossible to provide a full-time pastor for either parish, the relevant demographics of each parish as well as projected future trends, the historical origins of both Saint Anne Parish and Holy Rosary Parish, the fact that both parishes have shared a pastor for the past twenty-three years, the possibility of better stewardship in the shared use of temporal goods and personnel between the two parishes, and the general plan of pastoral care not only for Wilcox, Rasselas, and Johnsonburg but also for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

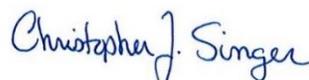
1. By means of an extinctive union, Saint Anne Parish in Wilcox together with its secondary church of Holy Cross in Rasselas shall be merged and subsumed into Holy Rosary Parish in Johnsonburg.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Holy Rosary Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses, and to it will be added all of the territory of Saint Anne Parish.
3. All sacramental records from Saint Anne Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Holy Rosary Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Saint Anne Parish shall be transferred to Holy Rosary Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Holy Rosary church. In light of the distance which the faithful, many of them elderly, from points beyond Wilcox and Rasselas would otherwise have to travel for Mass, Saint Anne church shall become a secondary mission church of Holy Rosary 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 Anne church.
6. Holy Cross church in Rasselas, however, shall remain a secondary church without mission status, and Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, as well as on the evening preceding them, is prohibited by diocesan law.
6. Both Saint Anne church and Holy Cross church are to remain open to the faithful at least occasionally for sacred worship, whether public or private (cf. can. 1214). As required by law, Mass is to be celebrated on the solemnity of the church's title, in accord with current liturgical norms, as well as on the anniversary of the church's consecration, provided that it was truly consecrated (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