



## DECREE

### EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SAINT ELIZABETH PARISH (CORRY) INTO SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE PARISH (CORRY)

#### History

##### A. Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish

Catholics first began arriving in what is now the Corry area 1855, and the first Saint Thomas the Apostle church was constructed in 1862 and dedicated on September 7 of that same year. The current church was dedicated in December of 1885 and following substantial renovations, was rededicated on February 18, 1996. For many years, Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish continued to grow. The parish had a convent of religious sisters who taught in the parish school. In addition, the parish established a mission church, Our Lady of Victory in Spartansburg, to provide for the pastoral care of the community which worshipped there. The parish continued to provide pastoral care for the mission community in Spartansburg until the late 1980's, when the care of the mission was transferred to Saint Elizabeth Parish, where it remained until Our Lady of Victory mission church was officially closed.

##### B. Saint Elizabeth Parish

Soon after the arrival of German-speaking Catholics in Corry, they petitioned the Bishop of Erie for a German-speaking parish. In response, the Bishop appointed the first pastor of Saint Elizabeth Parish in Corry on August 23, 1874. In contrast therefore to Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish, which is the territorial parish for all of the Corry area, Saint Elizabeth Parish was established as a personal parish for German-speaking Catholics and those of German Catholic heritage. The parish continued to serve the German-speaking faithful of Corry and their descendants for much of its history. The current church was dedicated on August 27, 1950. The parish center was erected in 1973 and, despite a notable decline in the number of parishioners, continues to serve as an important parish and community center even today.

#### Current Situation

In recent decades, the demographic changes affecting the Corry area and much of northwestern Pennsylvania have left their mark on both Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish and Saint Elizabeth

Parish. Among the effects of these changes were the closure of Our Lady of Victory mission church and the more recent closure of Saint Thomas the Apostle parish school.

In addition, both parishes have seen notable decreases in the number of parishioners. St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, always the larger of the two, had 326 registered households in 2015, while Saint Elizabeth had 130. Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish had an average weekly Mass attendance of 229 persons, and Saint Elizabeth Parish had 103. A decline in the number of available priests who could provide for the pastoral care of souls further contributed to the situation, such that neither parish has had a full-time pastor since 1998, both parishes instead sharing a pastor. At present, there is only one Mass celebrated in Saint Elizabeth church each week, all the rest being celebrated at St. Thomas the Apostle church. With no future possibility in sight of providing a full time pastor for either 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 Corry 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 Saint Elizabeth and Saint Thomas the Apostle Parishes 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 Saint Elizabeth Parish into Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish, thus returning the personal parish to the territorial parish from which it originated.

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 Elizabeth and Saint Thomas the Apostle 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 Elizabeth Parish into Saint Thomas the Apostle 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.

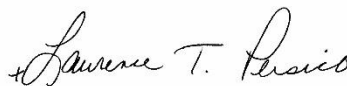
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Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the need for a stronger and more sustainable means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful in the Corry area, while additionally considering the already diminished number of parishioners in both Saint Elizabeth Parish and Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish and the projected further decline of their number, the lack of available priests which renders it impossible to provide a full-time pastor for either parish, the relevant demographics of each parish, the territorial or personal nature of each parish, 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 Corry area but also for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

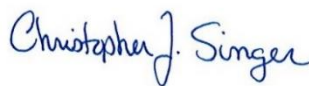
1. By means of an extinctive union, Saint Elizabeth Parish in Corry shall be merged and subsumed into Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish in Corry.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses.
3. The pastoral care previously provided by the personal parish of Saint Elizabeth to the German-speaking Catholics of Corry and to their descendants who continue German-Catholic traditions, no longer a uniquely pressing pastoral concern, is henceforth to be provided directly by Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish, since every member of Saint Elizabeth Parish already resides within the territory of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish.
4. All sacramental records from Saint Elizabeth Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish.
5. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Saint Elizabeth Parish shall be transferred to Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish.
6. The parish church shall be Saint Thomas the Apostle church. Saint Elizabeth church shall become a secondary church – without mission status – of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish.
7. Saint Elizabeth 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 Elizabeth church every year on the solemnity of the anniversary of the church's dedication and 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 20th day of September, 2016



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



The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL  
Chancellor