



## DECREE

### EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SAINT HEDWIG PARISH (ERIE) INTO SAINT STANISLAUS PARISH (ERIE)

#### History

Provision for the pastoral care of Catholics of Polish heritage was established for the Erie area on October 11, 1885, when His Excellency Bishop Tobias Mullen erected Saint Stanislaus Parish in the City of Erie as a personal parish for these same Catholics.

At the time, the parish's membership included all Polish-speaking Catholics in the entire Erie area. It remained as such until the parish was divided in 1903, when Holy Trinity Parish was erected as a second personal parish to care for Polish-speaking Catholics living in the Erie area. Saint Stanislaus Parish was further divided on May 3, 1911 when Saint Hedwig Parish in Erie was formally established in Erie as a third personal parish for Catholics of Polish heritage, and in 1914 when Saint Casimir Parish was erected as a fourth personal parish for these same Catholics.

No clear delineation exists in the Chancery Office records to determine how membership in one or the other of these personal parishes was to be determined, since all appear to have had overlapping jurisdiction. In practice, Catholics of Polish heritage in Erie generally claimed membership in that parish whose church was closest to where they lived.

#### A. Saint Hedwig Parish

During the years following its creation, Saint Hedwig Parish at first grew and then declined in membership, reaching its peak in the 1950's and 1960's. Saint Hedwig church was dedicated on July 15, 1934. Although the parish was generous in fostering vocations both to the priesthood and religious life, the 1970's and 1980's saw a rapid decline in parish membership, so much so that the parish has not had a full-time pastor since 1987. Since then, Saint Patrick and Saint Hedwig Parishes have shared a pastor, in accord with can. 526. By 2015, the parish had only 93 registered households, with an average weekly Mass attendance of 57 members of the faithful. Thus, though greatly diminished in its membership and without the ministry of a full-time pastor for nearly twenty years, Saint Hedwig Parish



continues to be a personal parish for Catholics of Polish heritage in Erie. It possesses no territorial jurisdiction.

#### B. Saint Stanislaus Parish

By 1914, the creation of a second, third, and fourth personal parish for Polish speaking Catholics in Erie had reduced the membership of Saint Stanislaus Parish. Despite this fact, there followed a lengthy period of stable parish growth through the middle years of the twentieth century, with Saint Stanislaus remaining the largest Polish parish in Erie. The original church which had been dedicated on September 25 was replaced by the current church, which was dedicated on August 19, 1919 and later rededicated on October 8, 2000.

In 2009, St. Mary Parish (territorial) was merged with Immaculate Conception Parish (personal) to form the newly created Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish. It was both territorial and personal, with its membership including those who lived within the borders of the parish, as well African-American Catholics in the Erie area.

When it was no longer possible even for that merged community to maintain a separate parish, St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish was merged and subsumed into Saint Stanislaus Parish. As a result, effective July 31, 2015, Saint Stanislaus Parish was redefined as territorial parish, gaining all of the territory of the former Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish (within which Saint Stanislaus church is located). The merger also allowed for parish membership by virtue of an individual's Polish or African-American heritage. Saint Stanislaus Parish is thus both territorial and personal. Such is the current canonical status of Saint Stanislaus Parish.

#### Current Situation

The pastoral care which Saint Hedwig Parish has been able to provide for Catholics of Polish heritage has been steadily declining for the past thirty years. With the declining number of diocesan priests available for parish assignment, it will not be possible in the foreseeable future to provide anything more than part-time priestly care for the members of the parish. The number of parishioners, already small, is expected to continue to diminish. At present, there is only one Mass celebrated in the parish church each week. If the pastoral care of the parishioners is to continue, and their spiritual and cultural patrimony as Catholics of Polish heritage is to be preserved, then another more viable and sustainable means must be found for doing so.

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 Hedwig Parish 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 Hedwig Parish into Mother of Sorrows 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 pastor of Saint Patrick and Saint Hedwig Parishes, from the pastor of Saint Stanislaus Parish, from the Saint Hedwig parishioners themselves, from the Vicar Forane and the Vicar General, and from those responsible for overseeing the development of the pastoral plan. Numerous individuals expressed their thought that merging Saint Hedwig Parish into Saint Stanislaus Parish would provide a better opportunity for preserving the Polish spiritual patrimony of the parishioners. In light of this additional information, all of which was shared with the Presbyteral Council, I asked the council members for their advice on a modified proposal to merge Saint Hedwig Parish into Saint Stanislaus 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 better and more sustainable means to provide for the care of souls and to preserve the spiritual and cultural patrimony of the members of Saint Hedwig Parish, while additionally 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, and the general plan of pastoral care not only for the parish but also for the City of Erie and for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

1. By means of an extinctive union, Saint Hedwig Parish in Erie shall be merged and subsumed into Saint Stanislaus Parish in Erie.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Saint Stanislaus Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses. In addition, that area wherein Saint Hedwig church is located and which is bordered by Wallace Street on the west, Presque Isle Bay on the north, Ash Street on the east, and East 7<sup>th</sup> Street on the south is to be transferred from Saint Patrick Parish to Saint Stanislaus Parish. The resultant borders of Saint Stanislaus Parish shall be:

Beginning on the corner of East 18<sup>th</sup> and State Streets:

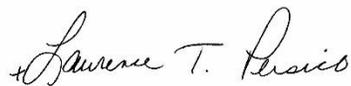
1. Northward on State Street to East 7<sup>th</sup> Street
  2. Eastward on East 7<sup>th</sup> Street to Wallace Street
  3. Northward on Wallace Street to Presque Isle Bay
  4. Eastward along Presque Isle Bay to a line consistent with Ash Street
  5. Southward along that line, following Ash Street to East 18<sup>th</sup> Street
  6. Westward along East 18<sup>th</sup> Street to State Street
3. The pastoral care previously provided by the personal parishes of Saint Hedwig and Saint Stanislaus to Catholics of Polish or African-American heritage in the Erie area is henceforth to be provided instead by an apostolate assigned to Saint Stanislaus Parish. That apostolate is to foster the appropriate preservation and inclusion in the life of the

parish of elements of the spiritual patrimony of the Polish and African-American cultures, according to the prudent judgment of the pastor, as well as a welcoming spirit toward those who claim that patrimony as their own. In order to fulfill this apostolate, the priests assigned to Saint Stanislaus Parish are hereby given the same faculties for Erie County Catholics of Polish or African-American heritage as they have for the faithful who reside within the territory of the parish.

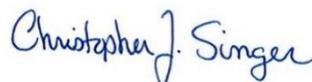
4. All sacramental records from Saint Hedwig Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Saint Stanislaus Parish.
5. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Saint Hedwig Parish shall be transferred to Saint Stanislaus Parish.
6. The parish church shall be Saint Stanislaus church. Saint Hedwig church shall become a secondary church – without mission status – of Saint Stanislaus parish.
7. Saint Hedwig 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 Hedwig 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