



DECREE

EFFECTING THE MERGER OF SAINT THERESA PARISH (SHINGLEHOUSE) INTO SAINT RAPHAEL PARISH (ELDRED)

History

A. Saint Theresa Parish

When Sacred Heart Parish in Genesee was established in 1910, it had missions at Saint Mary in Kinney (closed in 1953) and Saint Theresa in Shinglehouse, Potter County, which had been established as a mission on May 7, 1901. By 1917, Saint Theresa became a parish of its own. Following renovations, the church was blessed on July 27, 1930 but was later torn down in 1996 and a new edifice was blessed on January 31, 1999. Since 1997, the parish has shared a pastor or administrator with Saint Raphael Parish in Eldred and its mission in Sartwell.

B. Saint Raphael Parish

The mission community at Saint Raphael church in Eldred, McKean County was established in 1878 as a mission of Saint Mary Parish in Sartwell. The church, constructed during the 1880's, was dedicated on October 15, 1885. Another mission of Saint Mary Parish at Saint John church in Duke Center had already been constructed twelve years earlier. A newer Saint Raphael church was dedicated on September 7, 1919. Saint Raphael church remained a mission church until July 1926, when in a reversal of status, it became the parish church and the mother church, Saint Mary in Sartwell, became its mission. Thus, in 1926 Saint Raphael Parish found itself with two missions, one in Sartwell and one in Duke Center. Following renovations, a new altar at Saint Raphael was dedicated on August 28, 1994. Although the mission church of Saint Mary in Sartwell remains open, the mission church of Saint John in Duke Center was closed in 1990.

Current Situation

Like the rest of northwestern Pennsylvania, McKean and Potter counties, including the communities of Eldred, Sartwell, and Shinglehouse, have been affected by the significant demographic changes which have transpired in the regions in recent decades. According to the US Census Bureau, Eldred's population of 825 individuals in 2010 was 66% of what it had been in its peak in 1910. Shinglehouse's 2010 population of 1,127 persons represents 70% of

its peak, also in 1910. There is no indication that this decline in population in either community is likely to reverse itself. Although Shinglehouse is the larger community in total population, in 2015 Saint Theresa Parish listed only 42 households with an average Sunday Mass attendance of 50 persons, while Saint Raphael Parish in Eldred listed 193 households, with an average weekend Mass attendance of 88 individuals at the parish and mission church combined. It should be noted that Saint Theresa in Shinglehouse and Saint Raphael in Eldred with its mission in Sartwell have shared a pastor since 1997, and that along the driving route between these locations, Eldred is the most centrally located of the three communities.

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 separate parishes in Shinglehouse and Eldred is no longer possible. Given that the parishes have shared a pastor for the last nineteen 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 Theresa Parish in Shinglehouse and Saint Raphael Parish in Eldred 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 Theresa Parish into Saint Raphael Parish, with Saint Theresa church becoming a secondary mission church of Saint Raphael 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 Theresa and Saint Raphael 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 Theresa Parish into Saint Raphael Parish, with Saint Theresa church becoming a mission church of Saint Raphael Parish. 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 Theresa Parish in Shinglehouse and Saint Raphael Parish in Eldred, while also considering the already diminished number of parishioners, 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 location of the parishes relative to travel between the communities,

the historical origins of both Saint Theresa Parish and Saint Raphael Parish, the fact that both parishes have shared a pastor for the past nineteen 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 the northern adjoining regions of McKean and Potter counties but also for the Diocese as a whole, I hereby decree the following:

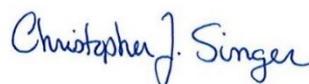
1. By means of an extinctive union, Saint Theresa Parish in Shinglehouse shall be merged and subsumed into Saint Raphael Parish in Eldred.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Saint Raphael Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses, and to it will be added all of the territory of Saint Theresa Parish.
3. All sacramental records from Saint Theresa Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Saint Raphael Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Saint Theresa Parish shall be transferred to Saint Raphael Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Saint Raphael church. In light of the distance which the faithful, many of them elderly, from points beyond Shinglehouse would otherwise have to travel for Mass, Saint Theresa church shall become a secondary mission church of Saint Raphael 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 Theresa church.
6. Furthermore, Saint Theresa church is 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 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