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Prot. N. 2021 RMC-3

DECREE

IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

“Likewise, parishes which are too small should be united insofar as the situation demands it and circumstances permit.” St. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *motu proprio, Ecclesiae Sanctae*, n. 21, (1), August 6, 1966

Changing demographics have affected the size and wealth of the Archdiocese of Chicago and the vitality of her parishes. This is particularly true in the City of Chicago itself, where the total population has fallen by 21% since 1970, from 3,366,957 to an estimated 2,686,530 in 2020. The archdiocese has many vacant, old, and underused parochial buildings and fewer priests to pastor our faith communities.

According to the US Census Bureau, the Archdiocese of Chicago (Cook and Lake Counties in Illinois) had an estimated total population of 5,881,250 in 2018. The 2018 *Annuario Pontificio* indicated our archdiocese had 345 parishes serving a Catholic population of 2,512,000: an average of 7,281 Catholics per parish. According to the same source, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles had a total population of 11,519,517, with 287 parishes for a Catholic population of 4,362,000: an average of 15,199 Catholics per parish. For the Archdiocese of New York, the figures were 2,656,987 Catholics in 294 parishes, an average 9,037 Catholics per parish. A good number of our parishes were founded in the first half of the last century or earlier. Many were established for national, linguistic, or ethnic groups that no longer reside in the archdiocese or in the neighborhoods where they once flourished.

Many of our parishes are unable to support themselves and have been receiving financial subsidies from the archdiocese. From fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2019 the Archdiocese of Chicago provided \$162,332,527.00 in support to parishes and Catholic schools: \$42,620,585.00 to 106 parishes and \$119,712,942.00 to 83 Catholic schools. This was due entirely to the generosity of the faithful people of the archdiocese and other gracious donors. The archdiocese cannot continue this level of financial support. Our mission is to convert our parishes, helping them to become more vital, that is, active centers of Christian discipleship, evangelical mission, scholarship, and charitable outreach. To achieve this mission, the parishes must have a growing or stable number of active parishioners and means to support themselves.

Nearly six years ago, inspired by the experience of St. Francis of Assisi before the cross of the ruined church of San Damiano, and by the Holy Father's dream of “a missionary option ... capable of transforming everything” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.

27, November 24, 2013), and after wide and continuing consultation among the clergy and lay faithful of the Archdiocese of Chicago, particularly in the Presbyteral Council, we embarked on the inauguration of *Renew My Church (RMC)*, a multi-year process aimed at obtaining and preserving the conversion and vitality of our parishes. It is my intention that every parish join with some of its neighbors (groupings) and plan the future. Careful planning will create a menu of possibilities. We are identifying parishes to be reconfigured through pastoral coordination with neighboring parishes, divisions, unions, and other structural and governance changes.

This decree concerns two parishes located within a territory of approximately three square miles in the Jefferson Park and Portage Park neighborhoods of the Northwest side of the City of Chicago: St. Constance Parish (personal parish for Polish faithful founded 1916), 5843 West Strong Street, Chicago, Illinois 60630-2098, and St. Robert Bellarmine Parish (founded 1930), 4646 North Austin Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60630-3157.

These two parishes have been serving an area of the City in which the population is changing from large numbers of Polish-speaking faithful to a growing population of Spanish-speaking faithful needing liturgical services and pastoral care in Spanish. With the coming union of St. Bartholomew Parish, Our Lady of Victory Parish, and St. Pascal Parish, support for ministry to the increasing Spanish-speaking faithful of the area has been placed. This decree seeks to stabilize the ongoing ministry to Polish-speaking faithful at St. Constance Parish, and unite this non-territorial personal foundation to St. Robert Bellarmine Parish, the neighborhood territorial parish in which the St. Constance Parish campus exists.

Many of the faithful attending St. Constance Parish live outside the neighborhood, and the area itself is now home to not only a growing Spanish-speaking population, but also a younger English-speaking population. To save the new parish from the difficult task of serving a tri-lingual community of Catholic faithful, the new parish will encompass ministry to Polish-speaking faithful from the St. Constance Campus while also serving the English-speaking faithful from both the St. Robert Bellarmine Campus and the St. Constance Campus.

Sunday Mass celebrated in Polish at St. Constance Parish encompasses 82% of the attendance, the remaining 18% is in English. Meanwhile, Mass is celebrated only in English at St. Robert Bellarmine Parish. The trends indicate an accelerating decrease in Polish-speaking faithful as they move from the area to suburban communities. Meanwhile there is also an increase in a younger English-speaking population. The union will provide a parish with the ability to continue serving the Polish population while addressing the needed outreach and evangelization among a growing and younger English-speaking population.

Over 10 years, from 2009 to 2019, there was a 26% decline in Sunday Mass attendance at St. Constance Parish. Over 20 years the decline has been nearly 47%, from 4,136 to 2,164. During the same 10-year period the decline was 24% at St. Robert Bellarmine Parish, and 51% over 20 years, from 1,744 to 854. In 2019, St. Constance had income of \$895,851.00 and expenses of \$926,660.00, leaving an operating deficit of \$30,809.00. At St. Robert Bellarmine

Parish the 2019 figures were income of \$723,112.00, expenses of \$810,531.00, and operating deficit of \$87,419.00. In October 2020, St. Constance Parish had savings of \$1,255,616.00, it also has a total debt of \$510,125.00 and capital expenditure needs of \$778,600.00. In the same month, St. Robert Bellarmine Parish had savings totaling \$1,189,875.00, no outstanding debt, and capital expenditure needs of \$452,250.00.

Following consultations last year with lay and clergy members of the parishes, including input from parishioners at large, a report was submitted to the Archdiocesan Standards and Recommendations Commission, a group of lay and clergy representatives from across the Archdiocese of Chicago. Recently, the Commission submitted its recommendations to the pastoral leadership of the archdiocese. The recommendations proposed that St. Constance Parish and St. Robert Bellarmine Parish, be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form one new territorial parish within the territory of St. Robert Bellarmine Parish and part of the territory of the former Our Lady of Victory Parish, with St. Robert Bellarmine Church designated the new parish church.

The proposal is supported by demographic changes in the area, and by data mentioned or attached to this decree. The two parishes now serve an area with a decreasing Polish-speaking population, and an increasing need for outreach to a growing and younger English-speaking group of Catholics. A union of the parishes avoids the need to assign more than one priest as pastor and saves the expenses of funding more than one governing administration. The continuing economic health of the faith community depends upon uniting the faithful as fully as possible. Moreover, the size of the territory of the proposed parish will be common for this area of the City of Chicago.

THEREFORE, know that I, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, according to the norms of canon 50, canon 127 §§1 & 3, canon 166, and canon 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law, have before me the proposal that St. Constance Parish and St. Robert Bellarmine Parish, both in the area of the Jefferson Park and Portage Park neighborhoods of the City of Chicago, be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form a single new territorial parish within the territory of St. Robert Bellarmine Parish and part of the territory of the former Our Lady of Victory Parish, with St. Robert Bellarmine Church designated the parish church. Know also, I convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago *via video* conference over the internet on December 18, 2020. Then, after hearing the Presbyteral Council and receiving its vote of 36 for and 1 against the proposal, I accepted the Presbyteral Council's majority advice and now, invoking the Holy Spirit,

decree the following:

1. Effective July 1, 2021, the above-mentioned St. Constance Parish and St. Robert Bellarmine Parish will be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form a single new juridic person, a territorial parish to be known, *ad interim*, as SS. Constance and Robert Bellarmine Parish;

2. The missions of the two extinguished parishes will be subsumed into that of the new SS. Constance and Robert Bellarmine Parish;

3. The parishioners of the two extinguished parishes and the faithful residing within the territory of the new parish will be parishioners of SS. Constance and Robert Bellarmine Parish;

4. The territory of the new SS. Constance and Robert Bellarmine Parish will be the territory of the extinguished St. Robert Bellarmine Parish and part of the territory of extinguished Our Lady of Victory Parish, as described and drawn in the attached document and map;

5. Subject to the intention of founders and donors, and with due regard for any acquired rights, the goods and patrimonial rights of the two former parishes, together with any obligations with which they may be burdened, will become those of the new SS. Constance and Robert Bellarmine Parish (c. 121);

6. The churches of the former St. Constance Parish and the former St. Robert Bellarmine Parish will be churches of the new SS. Constance and Robert Bellarmine Parish, retaining their own titles (c. 1218). St. Robert Bellarmine Church will be the parish church of the new parish;

7. The data submitted to the Presbyteral Council on this matter, together with the minutes of the Council meeting of December 18, 2020, are to be attached to this decree and become available upon request from those eligible to receive them;

8. The sacramental records and other materials relevant to historical research pertaining to the two former parishes will be collected and maintained at the St. Robert Bellarmine Church campus, unless otherwise determined by the expert staff of the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Archives and Records Center of the Archdiocese of Chicago; and


9. Notification of this decree shall be given immediately through the official website of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The decree shall be conveyed to the pastor of St. Constance Parish and to the pastor of St. Robert Bellarmine Parish. As soon as possible, the pastors shall inform their parishioners through the parish bulletin or other suitable means.

Before hierarchical recourse (appeal) may be taken against this decree, a written, dated, and signed petition to reconsider or amend the decree must be delivered to me within ten (10) useful days from notification of the decree (CIC cc. 1734, 1735, 1737).

Given this 28th day of January, A.D. 2021.
From Holy Name Cathedral,
Chicago, Illinois


Archbishop of Chicago




Ecclesiastical Notary

THE DATA SUBMITTED TO THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO AND THE MINUTES OF THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL MEETING OF DECEMBER 18, 2020, ARE ATTACHED TO THE FOREGOING DECREE AND WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM THE OFFICE FOR CANONICAL AFFAIRS UPON REQUEST FROM THOSE ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE THEM