

Explanation of the Decree of Unification

Dear parishioners,

In this weekend's bulletin, you will see a decree signed by Cardinal Cupich. A decree is a pronouncement or document that formalizes a decision within the Church. In this case, the decree included here concerns the decision for our parishes to unify as a new parish after our grouping's Renew My Church discernment.

The decree states that Infant Jesus of Prague, St. Irenaeus, and St. Lawrence O'Toole will form a new parish on July 1, 2022. The decree states the new parish will have an *ad interim* name. This means that the parish will be called Infant Jesus of Prague and SS. Irenaeus and Lawrence O'Toole until we propose a new name to Cardinal Cupich for his consideration and approval. The order of the names within an interim name follows a hierarchy with a title of Jesus being first, a title of Mary being next, then those saints directly connected to the life of Jesus, followed by Martyrs, Doctors of the Church, and all other saints.

When you read the decree, you will notice the decree states Infant Jesus of Prague Church will be the parish church of the new parish and that the churches of Infant Jesus of Prague Parish, St. Irenaeus Parish, and St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish will be churches of the new parish. A couple of notes on this:

When two or more parishes unite as one parish, Rome requires that the united parish's sacramental records be kept in one place and for that location to be designated in the decree as the parish church. Practically speaking, the location of sacramental records is the only implication of the parish church designation. In the future the sacramental records of the united parish, as well as the past sacramental records of each of Infant Jesus of Prague, St. Irenaeus, and St. Lawrence O'Toole will be maintained at the offices on the Infant Jesus of Prague campus. For the current time, each parish's records will remain at their current locations, and updates will be provided when the records are brought together at the office on the Infant Jesus of Prague campus.

Second, the decree states that each of the churches of Infant Jesus of Prague Parish, St. Irenaeus Parish, and St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish will be churches of the new parish. This can understandably be confusing with what was shared at the announcement in January that Infant Jesus of Prague Church will be the sole location for the new united parish's regular schedule of Masses, with the specific timeline to fully transition Masses to Infant Jesus of Prague to be determined by parish leadership in the coming months. The decree is written as it is because under church law, when a new parish is formed, all of the assets of each former parish become part of the new parish. This includes the churches. Until the procedure for formally closing a church occurs, a church remains a church of the parish even if regular daily or Sunday Masses are not scheduled at the church.

Regarding the name of the new parish, there will be a process to include everyone. We will keep you updated on the timeline of when this process to consider a parish name will begin.

Let us hold fast to the Lord's promise that He is with us always, and trust in the fact that He is at work in a special way within our faith community and is creating something new for all of us.



Office of the Archbishop
835 North Rush Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
312.534.8230
archchicago.org

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DECREE

IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

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 fell by nearly 20% since 1970, from 3,366,957 to an estimated 2,693,976 in 2020. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated additional 100,000 individuals have left the Chicago area. During the last decade, the total population of the Archdiocese of Chicago (Cook and Lake Counties in Illinois) declined by less than 2% (81,257) from 5,903,190 in 2010 to an estimated 5,821,933 in 2020. However, over the same ten-year period, the Catholic population of the Archdiocese of Chicago declined by nearly 7% (159,000), from 2,338,000 to 2,179,000.

A good number of our parishes were founded more than 100 years ago, in the 19th Century or the first half of the 20th Century. Many were established for national, linguistic, or ethnic groups that no longer reside in the archdiocese or in the neighborhoods where they once flourished. Today, many are unable or struggling to support themselves. Consequently, from Fiscal Year 2012 through Fiscal Year 2021, the Archdiocese of Chicago provided \$187,818,176.00 in support to parishes and Catholic schools: \$49,452,924.00 to 119 parishes and \$138,365,252.00 to 99 Catholic schools. This includes \$10,708,494.00 during Fiscal Year 2021 alone: \$3,120,340.00 to parishes and \$7,588,154.00 to Catholic schools, mostly parochial schools. Completely due to the generosity of the faithful people of the archdiocese and other gracious donors, these subsidies cannot continue at this high level. 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. For this mission, the parishes need a growing and stable membership and the financial means to support themselves.

More than six years ago, inspired by the experience of St. Francis of Assisi before the cross of the ruined church of San Damiano and 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 with 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)*. This is our multi-year process aimed at converting our parishes for mission. It is my intention that every parish join with some of its neighbors (groupings) to 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 three neighboring parishes located within approximately 27 square miles of the far south suburban municipalities of Flossmoor, Olympia Fields, Matteson, Richton

Park, and Park Forest: St. Irenaeus Parish (established 1949), 78 Cherry Street, Park Forest, Illinois 60466-2010; Infant Jesus of Prague Parish (established 1954), 1131 Douglas Avenue, Flossmoor, Illinois 60422-1460; and St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish (established 1959), 4101 Saint Lawrence Avenue, Matteson, Illinois 60443-2347. The churches of the three parishes are between 3.5 and 5.2 miles apart, a drive of between seven and 12 minutes.

In Fiscal Year 2020 the pre-COVID-19 average Sunday Mass attendance at St. Irenaeus Parish was 438, a 30% decline from the 628 attending in Fiscal Year 2000. The same year, the average Sunday attendance at Infant Jesus of Prague Parish was 583 a 68% decline from the 1,837 attending in Fiscal Year 2000. At St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish, the Fiscal Year 2020 average Sunday attendance was 266, an 83% decline from 1,559 in Fiscal Year 2000.

In Fiscal Years 2019 to 2021, St. Irenaeus Parish had operating deficits of \$7,466.00, \$7,287.00, and \$42,512.00 respectively. In the same years, St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish had operating deficits of \$92,635.00, \$165,117.00, and \$177,883.00 respectively. Infant Jesus of Prague Parish had an operating deficit of \$76,386.00 in Fiscal Year 2019 and operating surpluses of \$88,062.00 and \$120,383.00 in Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021 respectively.

On October 31, 2021, St. Irenaeus Parish had savings of \$101,704.00 on deposit, and \$67,044.00 in total church debt. On the same date Infant Jesus of Prague Parish had savings of \$928,461.00 on deposit and no church debt, while St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish had savings of \$88,047.00 on deposit and total church debt of \$1,482,442.00 (significantly related to school operations but reflected on the church balance sheet).

During Fiscal Year 2019, liturgical life outside Sunday Mass at St. Irenaeus Parish included 17 funerals, one marriage, and four Baptisms. In the same period, Infant Jesus of Prague Parish had 33 funerals, 7 marriages, and eight Baptisms, while at St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish there were 12 funerals, one marriage, and eight Baptisms. The Fiscal Year 2019 combined totals for the three parishes are 62 funerals, nine marriages, and 20 Baptisms, figures indicative of aging populations.

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 *Renew My Church* Executive Committee submitted the Commission's recommendation to the pastoral leadership of the archdiocese. Due to the significant 20-year decline in the number of faithful at all three parishes, the continuing decline in the number of priests able to serve as pastors, significant church/school debt at St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish, and recent annual operating deficits, the Church in this area of the Archdiocese of Chicago will struggle financially and administratively to sustain two or three parishes. If the care of souls, evangelization, and discipleship are to be the focus of future mission, the consolidation and conservation of resources within one new parish is the recommended course of action.

THEREFORE, know that I, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, according to the norms of canon 50, canon 121, canon 127 §§1, 2,2°, & 3, and canon 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law, have before me a proposal that the above-mentioned St. Irenaeus Parish, Infant Jesus of Prague Parish, and St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish, be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form one new juridic person, a territorial parish named, *ad interim*, Infant Jesus of Prague and SS. Irenaeus and Lawrence O'Toole Parish, located within the combined territories of the three parishes. Infant Jesus of Prague Church is to be designated the parish church. Know also, I convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago electronically *via* the internet on January 17, 2022. Then, after hearing the Presbyteral Council and receiving its vote of 32 for and two against the proposal, I accepted the Presbyteral Council's advice and now, invoking the Holy Spirit,

I decree the following:

1. Effective July 1, 2022, the above-mentioned St. Irenaeus Parish, Infant Jesus of Prague Parish, and St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish shall be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form one new juridic person, a territorial parish within the combined territories of the three parishes. The new parish is to be called, *ad interim*, Infant Jesus of Prague and SS. Irenaeus and Lawrence O'Toole Parish;
2. The ministries of the three extinguished parishes will become those of the new Infant Jesus of Prague and SS. Irenaeus and Lawrence O'Toole Parish;
3. Each and all the parishioners of the three extinguished parishes, along with the faithful domiciled within the new parish boundaries, will be parishioners of the new Infant Jesus of Prague and SS. Irenaeus and Lawrence O'Toole Parish;
4. The territory of the new Infant Jesus of Prague and SS. Irenaeus and Lawrence O'Toole Parish will be the combined territories of the extinguished St. Irenaeus Parish, the extinguished Infant Jesus of Prague Parish, and the extinguished St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish, as depicted and described on the map and in the document attached to this decree;
5. Subject to the intention of founders and donors, and with due regard for any acquired rights, the goods and patrimonial rights of the three extinguished parishes, together with any obligations with which they may be burdened, will be those of the new Infant Jesus of Prague and SS. Irenaeus and Lawrence O'Toole Parish (canon 121);
6. The churches of the extinguished St. Irenaeus Parish, the extinguished Infant Jesus of Prague Parish, and the extinguished St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish will be churches of the new Infant Jesus of Prague and SS. Irenaeus and Lawrence O'Toole Parish, retaining their own titles. Infant Jesus of Prague Church shall be designated 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 January 17, 2022, are to be attached to this decree and will become available upon request to those eligible to receive them;

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8. The sacramental records and other materials relevant to historical research pertaining to the three extinguished parishes will be collected and maintained at the Infant Jesus of Prague 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/administrator of St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish and St. Irenaeus Parish and the Pastor of Infant Jesus of Prague Parish. As soon as possible, the pastor or administrator shall inform his parishioners of the decree through the parish bulletin or other suitable means.

Before hierarchical recourse (appeal) may be taken against this decree, a written, dated, and signed petition, asking me to revoke or amend the decree, must be sent or delivered to me within ten (10) useful days from notification of the decree (CIC cc. 1734, 1735, 1737). The address is Office of the Archbishop of Chicago, Archbishop Quigley Center, 835 North Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

Given this 25th day of April, A.D. 2022.
From Holy Name Cathedral,
Chicago, Illinois


Archbishop of Chicago




Ecclesiastical Notary

Attachments