



DIOCESE OF YOUNGSTOWN

David J. Bonnar

By the Grace of God and the Apostolic See

BISHOP OF YOUNGSTOWN

Prot. N. B2-2025

DECREE

WHEREAS, a parish is a “certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church” (c. 515 §1), which, “is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration” (Pope Francis, apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, n. 28);

WHEREAS, a parish exists, “as a response to a precise pastoral need, namely that of bringing the Gospel to the People through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments” (Congregation of the Clergy, instruction, *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church*, July 20, 2020, n. 7), and, since it is “no longer ... the primary gathering and social centre, as in former days, it is thus necessary to find new forms of accompaniment and closeness” (ibid., n. 14), it is necessary to avoid, “any pastoral action that is limited to the territory of the Parish [that] is outdated, which is something the parishioners themselves observe when their Parish appears to be more interested in preserving a nostalgia of former times as opposed to looking to the future with courage.” (ibid., n. 16);

WHEREAS, bishops “feed their sheep in the name of the Lord by fulfilling their office of teaching, sanctifying and governing them” (Second Vatican Council, decree, *Christus Dominus*, October 28, 1965, n. 11) and are called to “have special solicitude for missionary work, especially by initiating, fostering, and sustaining missionary endeavors in their own particular churches” (c. 782 §2); and Whereas bishops establish parishes to carry out the missionary activity of the Church in each particular place, recalling that “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 27; cf. John Paul II, post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, November 22, 2001, n. 19);

WHEREAS, “It is only for the diocesan bishop to erect, suppress, or alter parishes” after “he has heard the presbyteral council” (c. 515 §2), and the bishop cannot act in an arbitrary manner in this regard, but rather “concern for souls should be the basis for determining or reconsidering the erection or suppression of parishes and any other changes of this kind which the bishop is empowered to undertake on his own authority” (*Christus Dominus*, n. 32); and Whereas canon 515 §2 makes no provision as to the gravity of the cause required, it is nevertheless necessary that a just cause be present (cf. Decrees of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, Prot. N. 24048/93 CA, December 6, 1993 and Prot. N. 38159/06 CA, April 18, 2008);

WHEREAS, in response to the pastoral needs of their times, my beloved predecessors established Saint Stephen Parish, 129 West Park Avenue in Niles, Ohio as a territorial parish in 1853, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, 381 Robbins Avenue in Niles, Ohio in 1906, originally a mission of Saint Stephen Parish and within its own boundaries, as a personal parish for the Italian Catholics present within the same territory; During that time, the Christian faithful have heard the Word of God, have worshiped, and have received the Sacraments in these parishes; In recent years the parish communities of Niles, Ohio have worked more and more closely, enabling them to continue to give an effective witness of what it is to live out the Catholic faith;

WHEREAS, in the past few decades, there have been radical changes and shifts in the demographics throughout the region in which the Diocese of Youngstown lies, including within our own boundaries, and these changes have impacted the Catholic community in substantial ways;

WHEREAS, the number of Catholics residing within the Diocese of Youngstown has significantly diminished, and the number of active clergy in the Diocese has been greatly reduced in recent years;

WHEREAS, as a result of the pressing realities facing the Diocese of Youngstown, my predecessor promulgated the Diocesan Pastoral Plan in 2019, which implemented structural changes aimed at developing effective ministries and supporting missionary activity, based on certain criteria, including the number of parishioners and worshipers, parish finances, population shifts within the region, effective use of buildings, and effective use of a limited number of priests and lay ecclesial ministers;

WHEREAS, the parishes of Saint Stephen and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Niles, Ohio have experienced a reduction of active membership within the last decade, namely, the number of funerals far exceeds the number of baptisms and registrations of new parishioners, the collective offertory contributions of the parishes have shown a slight decline while the costs to administer the parishes separately have grown steadily, the parishes have both struggled to meet their goal for the Diocesan Annual Appeal to support the works of the Catholic Charities and the ministries of the Diocese, and Mass attendance has declined significantly, resulting in the reduction of the number of Masses celebrated at each parish;

WHEREAS, the parishes of Saint Stephen and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Niles, Ohio have shared pastoral ministry with neighboring parishes since 2015 in various ways, including sharing a pastor, joint religious education programs, and other pastoral activities; and whereas at times in the past these joint ventures have been shared even among the two parishes in Niles;

WHEREAS, Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Niles, Ohio was established as a personal parish, which is “determined by reason of the rite, language, or nationality of the Christian faithful of some territory, or even for some other reason” (c. 518); and whereas it is now no longer the case that there is a language barrier among the descendants of that immigrant population;

WHEREAS, there are just causes supporting a merger between Saint Stephen Parish and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, namely,

- a. To provide more effectively for the pastoral care of the Christian faithful in the City of Niles, Ohio and its environs;
- b. To strengthen the preaching of the Gospel to assure the vitality of the parish life;
- c. To provide for a more effective stewardship of the parishes’ resources, both human and temporal;
- d. To provide for the best use of clergy;

WHEREAS, beginning July 1, 2023 the two parishes entered into a collaborative relationship with each other by sharing a pastor, certain staff members, and other resources;

WHEREAS, after a time of consultation and discernment it was determined that these parishes should be merged in order, more effectively, to fulfill the mission of the Church in the given territory; and whereas the pastor began to work toward that goal by soliciting input from the members of the finance councils and pastoral councils of Saint Stephen Parish and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, which began to meet together in March of 2024, while remaining separate groups proper to each juridic person;

WHEREAS, on May 1, 2024 the pastor of Saint Stephen Parish and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, together with the members of both of the parishes’ pastoral councils wrote a letter indicating their affirmative viewpoint of the proposed merger of the parishes stating that “this is the right decision” and that they had “begun to seek out ways to bring together the two communities”, and in the same letter they proposed names for the new parish which reflect both communities and their rich history;

WHEREAS, after having observed all the requirements of the procedural law, and having heard the Presbyteral Council on two separate occasions (January 9, 2024 and May 6, 2024), on May 22, 2024, I issued a decree merging the parishes of Saint Stephen and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in an extinctive union (merger) under the name of Pope Saint John XXIII Parish, effective July 1, 2024 (cf. c. 121; Congregation for the Clergy, letter, “Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes and the Closure, Relegation and Alienation of Churches,” April 30, 2013, n. 1.c.i);

WHEREAS, recourse against said decree was made to the Dicastery for the Clergy, and the decree was revoked by the same Dicastery on February 20, 2025; and whereas my request of the Dicastery for the Clergy for a reconsideration of their decree was rejected on June 17, 2025;

WHEREAS, during the time that the recourse was pending, avenues of communication and consultation were maintained, especially with the parish leadership, including with the parochial

administrator and members of the parish finance and pastoral councils, and a pastoral visit was made to speak to and hear directly from the Christian faithful of the parish;

WHEREAS, having carefully reviewed the pastoral statistics and studied the facts, and having convened the Diocesan Presbyteral Council anew on July 8, 2025 for their consultation and advice;

THEREFORE, I, the undersigned Bishop of Youngstown have decided as follows, and I hereby

DECREE

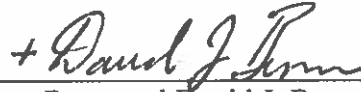
1. The territorial parish of Saint Stephen in Niles, Ohio and the personal parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Niles, Ohio are merged in an extinctive union, in accordance with canons 121 and 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law. The name of the newly merged parish will be Saint Pope John XXIII Parish. The boundaries of the newly merged parish will be the same as the boundaries of the territorial parish of Saint Stephen.
2. The parish will maintain the two sacred edifices of Saint Stephen Church and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, preserving their sacred titles, and will use both churches for divine worship (cf. cc. 1214 and 1218).
3. All members of the originating parishes will now be members of the newly merged parish.
4. The parish will be served by one pastor, will maintain one parish office on the premises of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at 381 Robbins Avenue in Niles, Ohio, and will have one joint religious education program to enhance the faith formation of the children of the entire parish community.
5. All properties and assets of the parishes shall now become part of the new juridic person of the merged parish of Saint Pope John XXIII, including the Saint Stephen Parish Cemetery. All assets and debts shall be held now by the newly merged parish. By way of a particular document approved by the Chief Financial Officer of the Diocese of Youngstown, the management of all assets and debts that now concern the newly merged parish will be properly detailed, attentive to the principle of equity and for the common good of all concerned.
6. All registers containing records of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, deaths and burials hitherto preserved by the Parish of Saint Stephen and the Parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel are to be conveyed to the offices of the newly merged Parish of Saint Pope John XXIII at the premises of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, where they will be faithfully preserved in accordance with the norms of canon 535 §§1-5 of the Code of Canon Law.

This decree is effective immediately. At the same time, I order this decree to be made public to all the faithful through its publication on this day on the website of the Diocese of Youngstown. This publication on the website will serve as the legitimate notification. Furthermore, a notarized copy

of this decree will be sent to the pastor, who will make it available to them in the parish bulletin and on the parish website at both churches.

All those who claim to have been aggrieved by this decree are herewith notified that, if they desire to file recourse against this decree, they are required, *ad validitatem*, to submit a petition in the sense of canon 1734 §1 to us within ten useful days from the legitimate notification of this decree.

Given at Youngstown, Ohio this tenth day of July in the Year of Our Lord 2025.



Most Reverend David J. Bonnar
Bishop of Youngstown



Joan Lawson
Chancellor



Regina Yakimoff
Notary

