



## DIOCESE OF YOUNGSTOWN

David J. Bonnar

By the Grace of God and the Apostolic See

### BISHOP OF YOUNGSTOWN

Prot. N. B1-2026

#### 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(ibid., n. 14), it is necessary to avoid, “any pastoral action that is limited to the territory of the Parish [that] is outdated, which is something the parishioners themselves observe when their Parish appears to be more interested in preserving a nostalgia of former times as opposed to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**, on April 30, 2013, the Dicastery for the Clergy issued “Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes and the Closure, Relegation and Alienation of Churches,” in which it was stated that there are “four possible types of parish modifications” including the “*extinctive union*: (sometimes also known as merger, or as amalgamation) A is subsumed into B, only B remains” (by analogy to can. 121).

**WHEREAS**, in response to the pastoral needs of their times, my beloved predecessors established Saint Philip Neri Parish at 11328 Gavers Rd. in Dunganon, Ohio as a territorial parish in 1817; During that time, the Christian faithful have heard the Word of God, have worshiped, and have received the Sacraments in this parish; In recent years the parish communities in Columbiana County, 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**, Saint Philip Neri Parish has experienced a reduction of active membership within the last decade, namely, the attendance at the weekly Sunday Mass has decreased to less than 50 persons on average, the parish is no longer able to provide ministries or outreach programs, the religious education programs and opportunities take place at neighboring parishes with which Saint Philip Neri has collaborated over the last few decades, and since 2019 there have only been two baptisms, and during the same time span, there have been no First Communions, Confirmations, or celebrations of the Sacrament of Marriage, all while only one new family has registered in the parish;

**WHEREAS**, Saint Philip Neri Parish has shared pastoral ministry with neighboring parishes in various ways for many years, including sharing a pastor, joint religious education programs, and other pastoral activities;

**WHEREAS**, there are just causes supporting an extinctive union between Saint Philip Neri Parish and its neighboring parish of Saint George at 271 West Chestnut Street Lisbon, Ohio, namely,

- a. To provide more effectively for the pastoral care of the Christian faithful in Dungannon, 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**, at meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council on August 26, September 16, October 13, and November 10, 2025, the pastor and the members of Council discerned the future for the parish of Saint Philip Neri, and at my pastoral visit to the same parish on December 6, 2025 the parishioners discussed with me the future of the parish;

**WHEREAS**, on January 5, 2026 the pastor of Saint Philip Neri Parish, presented to me and to the members of the Diocesan Presbyteral Council a letter recommending that Saint Philip Neri enter into an extinctive union with its neighboring parish of Saint George in Lisbon, Ohio;

**WHEREAS**, having heard the Presbyteral Council at the meeting of January 5, 2026, and having received from them unanimous counsel to accept this recommendation of the pastor, and having carefully reviewed the pastoral statistics and studied the facts, and having concluded that the pastoral care of souls will not suffer from the recommended extinctive union of Saint Philip Neri Parish in Dungannon, Ohio into the Parish of Saint George in Lisbon, Ohio;

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

### **DECREE**

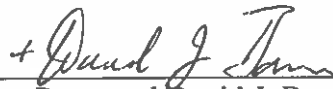
1. The Parish of Saint Philip Neri in Dungannon, Ohio and the Parish of Saint George in Lisbon, Ohio are now an extinctive union, in accordance with canons 121 and 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law, by which Saint Philip Neri Parish is subsumed into Saint George Parish.
2. All the rights and obligations, and all the assets and liabilities of Saint Philip Neri Parish will now belong to Saint George Parish.
3. The parish boundaries of Saint George are expanded to include all the territory belonging to Saint Philip Neri Parish.

4. Saint George Church is designated as the Parochial Church.
5. 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 Philip Neri are to be conveyed to the offices of the Parish of Saint George, 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 February 14, 2026. 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 the parishioners in the parish bulletin and on the parish website at both churches.

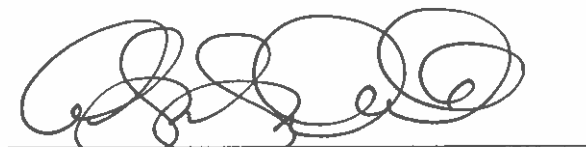
All those who claim to have been aggrieved by this decree are herewith notified that, if they desire to file recourse against this decree, they are required, *ad validitatem*, to submit a petition in the sense of canon 1734 §1 to us within ten useful days from the legitimate notification of this decree.

Given at Youngstown, Ohio this 15th day of January in the Year of Our Lord 2026.



Most Reverend David J. Bonnar  
Bishop of Youngstown

  
Joan Lawson  
Chancellor

  
Carolyn Wooten  
Notary

