



*Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Saint Cloud*

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DECREE
Parochus parochianique

Preamble

The pastor and parishioners of the Saints by the Lake Area Catholic Community (ACC) have proposed a variety of different plans in response to the All Things New planning process. Each plan has demonstrated careful consideration of the immediate circumstances of the parishes of Sacred Heart in Glenwood, St. John Nepomuk in Lake Reno, and St. Bartholomew in Villard. Consulting carefully, I have weighed these different plans, each in turn, in the larger context of realities and challenges in the region and at the diocesan level. With prayerful hope and pastoral care, therefore, I take what I believe to be a good and necessary step for the salvation of souls, namely, the merger of the aforementioned parishes into an extinctive union, creating one new parish.

Article I - Merger

General motivations from the diocesan situation

Whereas in 2019, in response to declining numbers of clergy and Catholics, Bishop Emeritus Donald Kettler instructed the parishes of the diocese to form ACCs according to the plan assembled by the Diocesan Planning Council;

Whereas, upon my consecration as bishop of the Diocese of Saint Cloud in 2023, I spent time listening to the people of the Diocese of Saint Cloud, both clergy and laity, and became aware of poor health and overwork of the clergy, declining participation in religious education programs, shifts away from the demographics that had originally motivated the foundation of the majority of parishes in the diocese, and a parochialism that obscures membership in the diocesan and Universal Church;

Whereas, in an effort to address these concerns, I initiated the All Things New planning process, established parameters as a guide for each ACC to reform in a manner best suited to present and anticipated pastoral needs, and called upon all ACCs of the diocese to form planning councils and present plans by December 31, 2025;

Motivations particular to the parishes concerned

Whereas, in response to my aforementioned request to develop an ACC pastoral plan, the parishes of the Saints by the Lake ACC formed an ACC planning committee and developed a pastoral plan;

Whereas the several versions of this plan are related by a definite effort to minimize any real change in parishioner experience — for instance, all versions of the plan explicitly or implicitly seek to prevent any changes to the one pastor of the three parishes celebrating four regularly scheduled Masses every weekend, and this schedule expressly contravenes the planning parameter I established, for the health of the clergy, that no priest should have more than *three* regularly scheduled weekend Masses (cc. 384; 838 §4; 905);

Whereas these many versions of the ACC's plan, produced as they are from true consultations with the pastor and parishioners, must be acknowledged and considered, in accord with c. 50;

Consultation with the CAP

Whereas, on December 15, 2025, a representative group of the ACC presented a pastoral plan to the Committee for the Affirmation of Plans (CAP), a group of canonical, financial, and pastoral experts, both clerical and lay, assembled by the Planning Office of the Diocese of St. Cloud;

Whereas the CAP reviewed the ACC planning council's plan, noting how it improved upon a previous plan by proposing a merger of the three parishes of the ACC;

Whereas the CAP recommended to me that the parishes of the ACC be merged into an extinctive union, and *only* that they be merged, unfortunately misinformation quickly spread that this recommendation was, in fact, a ploy to close one or more of the ACC's churches;

Consultation with Presbyteral Council

Whereas, having received the recommendation of the CAP, I recognized as a requirement what is established by c. 515 §2, and subsequently presented the proposed merger to the Presbyteral Council on January 30, 2026, requesting a consultative vote;

Whereas the Presbyteral Council in fact recommended, by a consultative vote, that I proceed with the proposed merger;

Whereas the merger proper is within the parameters of the All Things New planning process, and likewise is, in my judgment, a prudent remedy to the general challenges to health and holiness in the Diocese of Saint Cloud, especially those challenges to clergy health, and those resulting from changing language groups, cultures, infrastructure and demographics;

Whereas, mindful of the Legislator's general principle that a pastor is to serve only one parish (c. 526 §1), the proposed merger better aligns with the current and anticipated numbers of available pastors in the diocese, and it arranges things to better meet the customary expectations of the faithful of these parishes with regard to parochial pastoral ministry, *ie* one pastor to one parish;

Whereas the proposed merger adjusts the governing structures to ease co-responsible governance of the current parishes, establishing one set of trustees and one finance council that share the same mandate as the pastor;

Whereas the proposed merger affords the opportunity for the pastor to utilize these more-efficient governance structures and more easily accessible ecclesiastical goods, granting him the opportunity to spend less time on administrative tasks and more time on pastoral care, which gives benefit to priest *and* parishioner health;

Whereas the merger opens further possibilities and developments, such as hiring a business administrator, that would otherwise be more difficult to enact while maintaining the distinct parishes;

Whereas the proposed merger draws together historic and distinct communities, creating the vision of the parish set forth by Pope Francis, “a community of communities” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 28), building on past collaboration to avoid any semblance of a small, isolated, homogenous, or self-selecting community, and instead forging one deeply aware of its membership in a larger diocesan and Universal Church (c. 529 §2);

Whereas the proposed merger is also, in my judgment and in accord with the foregoing observations and motivations, for the good of the souls of the parishioners of the ACC, not enacting anything as drastic as a closure of a church but, nonetheless, preparing the parishioners for the oneness of Heaven, where there are no parochial divisions (Revelation 21:22);

I hereby merge the parishes of Sacred Heart in Glenwood, St. John Nepomuk in Lake Reno, and St. Bartholomew in Villard in an extinctive union, such that they form a new parish under the title Our Lady of the Lakes, encompassing the territories, assets, rights and obligations of all three.

And, whereas he is of the order of presbyter and has served these parishes for some time;

I hereby appoint Father Joseph Vandenberg as pastor of the newly merged parish (cc. 521, 523); and I hereby dispense from the obligation of taking possession in accord with c. 527 §2, such that he takes possession immediately, this decree serving as sufficient notification to the people of the parish (see Art. II).

Art. II - Notification and Appeals

If a member of the faithful is aggrieved by this decree, that member may present a petition for modification or revocation within ten working days of notification of the decree, *ie* the petition must be received at the Chancery of the Diocese of Saint Cloud before the close of business on August 18, 2026 (see the address of the chancery in the header).

To that end, **I hereby direct that notification take place according to the following:**

§1 The Pastor is to receive a signed copy of the decree;

§2 The Pastor or his delegate is hereby directed to read the Preamble, an appropriate summary of Article I, and this article at all weekend Masses on August 1 and 2, 2026;

§3 The Pastor or his delegate is to ensure that paper copies of this decree are provided in the churches of each parish merged by this decree;

§4 This decree is to be posted to the All Things New website of the Diocese of St. Cloud by July 31, 2026.

So long as notification takes place as described above, **this decision goes into effect on September 1, 2026**, without prejudice to my ability to alter or revoke this decree, in whole or in part, especially in response to a petition from a member of the faithful (c. 1734).

Given at the Chancery, the 29th Day of July, the Year of Our Lord 2026.

+ Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C.

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Bishop, Diocese of Saint Cloud

[SEAL]

Joseph C. Towalski

Ecclesiastical Notary

Prot. No 108-26