



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

Prot. N. 2023 RMC-2

## 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 21% since 1970, from 3,366,957 to an estimated 2,693,976 in 2020. In the decade between the census of 2010 and that of 2020, the total resident population in the territory of the Archdiocese of Chicago (Cook and Lake Counties in Illinois) declined by less than 2%, from 5,903,190 to an estimated 5,821,933 in 2020. Over the same ten-year period, the Catholic population of the Archdiocese of Chicago declined by 7% (159,000), from 2,338,000 to 2,179,000.

A considerable number of our parishes were founded more than 100 years ago, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Many were established for national, linguistic, or ethnic groups that no longer reside in the Archdiocese of Chicago or in the neighborhoods where they once flourished. Some parishes have been struggling to support themselves or are unable to do so. Consequently, from Fiscal Year 2012 through Fiscal Year 2022, the Archdiocese of Chicago provided \$198,651,631.00 in grants to parishes and Catholic schools: \$52,913,911.00 to 119 parishes and \$145,737,720.00 to 99 Catholic schools. This includes \$10,833,455.00 during Fiscal Year 2022 alone: \$3,460,987.00 to parishes and \$7,372,468.00 to Catholic schools, mostly elementary schools. These contributions are due to the generosity of the faithful people of the archdiocese and other gracious donors. However, with rising costs and fewer active parishioners, these subsidies cannot continue as before. 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 seven 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 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 has been 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, as well as through possible divisions, unions, and other structural and governance changes.

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This decree concerns two parishes located within approximately four-square miles of the northwest suburbs of Cook County: St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish (established 1956), 411 North Wheeling Road, Prospect Heights, Illinois 60070-1322; and St. Thomas Becket Parish (established 1968), 1321 North Burning Bush Lane, Mt. Prospect, Illinois 60056-1897. The churches of these two parishes are approximately 2.6 miles apart, a drive of seven minutes.

Today St. Thomas Becket Parish serves a growing Polish-speaking population. Forty-six percent of the combined total of 1,975 regularly attending Sunday Mass in the two parishes in Fiscal Year 2022 did so at one of two Polish Masses on Sunday at St. Thomas Becket Church. Fifty-four percent attended one of six Sunday Masses in English, three at St. Alphonsus Liguori Church and three at St. Thomas Becket Church.

In Fiscal Year 2020 the pre-COVID-19 average Sunday Mass attendance at St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish was 879. This is a 38% decline from the 1,425 attending in Fiscal Year 2000. In the same fiscal year (2020), the average Sunday attendance at St. Thomas Becket Parish was 1,488 (66% Polish and 34% English), a near 19% increase from the 1,253 attending in Fiscal Year 2000.

In Fiscal Year 2022, St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish had an operating deficit of \$70,261.00, savings of \$1,087,111.00 on deposit, and no church debt. The same year St. Thomas Becket had an operating surplus of \$10,553.00, savings of \$118,103.00 on deposit, and no church debt. In July 2022, St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish's needed capital expenditures were assessed at \$2,443,600.00, those at St. Thomas Becket Parish were assessed at \$122,050.00 in June 2022.

During Fiscal Year 2022, liturgical life outside Sunday Mass at St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish included 37 funerals, nine marriages, and 38 Baptisms. In the same period, St. Thomas Becket Parish recorded 32 funerals, nine marriages, and 56 Baptisms. The combined totals of the two parishes were 69 funerals, 18 marriages, and 94 Baptisms. Consistent with many individual parishes in Northwest Cook County.

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 38% decline in the number of faithful at St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish, alongside an increase of 19% at St. Thomas Becket Parish; the care St. Thomas Becket Parish has been providing for a growing Polish-speaking population; and significant needs resulting from unmet capital expenditures and operating deficits at St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish, the Church in this area of the Archdiocese of Chicago will struggle financially and administratively to sustain two parish structures. When the care of souls, evangelization, and discipleship are the focus of future mission, the consolidation and conservation of resources within one new parish is in order.

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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. Alphonsus Liguori Parish and St. Thomas Becket Parish, both in northwest suburban Cook County, be extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church and united to form one new juridic person, a territorial parish named, *ad interim*, SS. Thomas Becket and Alphonsus Liguori Parish, located within the combined territories of the two parishes. St. St. Thomas Becket Church is to be designated the parish church of the new parish. Know also, I convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, Illinois, on January 16-17, 2023. After hearing the Presbyteral Council and receiving its January 16<sup>th</sup> vote of 31 for and one against the proposal, I accepted the Presbyteral Council's advice and now, invoking the Holy Spirit,

***I decree the following:***

1. Effective July 1, 2023, the above-mentioned St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish and St. Thomas Becket, both in northwest suburban Cook County, 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 two parishes. The new parish is to be called, *ad interim*, SS. Thomas Becket and Alphonsus Liguori Parish;
2. The ministries of the two extinguished parishes will become those of the new SS. Thomas Becket and Alphonsus Liguori Parish;
3. Each and all the parishioners of the two extinguished parishes, along with the faithful domiciled within the new parish boundaries, will be parishioners of the new SS. Thomas Becket and Alphonsus Liguori Parish;
4. The territory of the new SS. Thomas Becket and Alphonsus Liguori Parish will be the combined territories of the extinguished St. Thomas Becket Parish and the extinguished St. Alphonsus Liguori 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 two extinguished parishes, together with any obligations with which they may be burdened, will be those of the new SS. Thomas Becket and Alphonsus Liguori Parish (canon 121);
6. The churches of the extinguished St. Thomas Becket Parish and the extinguished St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish will become churches of the SS. Thomas Becket and Alphonsus Liguori Parish, retaining their own titles. St. Thomas Becket Church shall be designated the parish church of the new parish;

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7. The data submitted to the Presbyteral Council on this matter, together with the minutes of the Council meeting of January 16-17, 2023, are to be attached to this decree and will become available upon request to those eligible to receive them;

8. The existing sacramental records and other materials relevant to historical research pertaining to the two extinguished parishes will be collected and maintained at the St. Thomas Becket 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 pastors of St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish and St. Thomas Becket Parish. As soon as possible, the pastors shall inform their parishioners of this decree through the parish bulletins 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 2<sup>nd</sup> day of March, A.D. 2023.  
From Holy Name Cathedral,  
Chicago, Illinois

  
Archbishop of Chicago



  
Ecclesiastical Notary

Attachments

## 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 St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Thomas Becket will form a new parish on July 1, 2023. The decree states the new parish will have an *ad interim* name. This means that the parish will be called SS. Thomas Becket and Alphonsus Liguori Parish until we propose a new name to Cardinal Cupich for his consideration and approval. The order of the names within an interim parish name follows this hierarchy: a title of Jesus is always first, a title of Mary is always next, then martyrs are listed first among saints. St. Thomas Becket as a martyr comes first in this case. As a reminder, each church building retains its dedicated name. St. Alphonsus Liguori School retains its name as well.

When you read the decree, you will notice the decree states St. Thomas Becket Church will be the parish church of the new parish and that the churches of St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish and St. Thomas Becket 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 St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Thomas Becket will be maintained at the offices on the St. Thomas Becket 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 St. Thomas Becket campus.

Second, the decree states that each of the churches of St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Thomas Becket will be churches of the new parish. When a new parish is formed, all of the assets of each former parish become part of the new parish. This includes the churches. As shared at the announcement in January, both St. Alphonsus Liguori Church and St. Thomas Becket Church will continue to have a regular schedule for Mass. The specific Mass schedule after July 1 is an important topic to be discussed with parish leadership in the coming months.

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.