DIOCESE OF YOUNGSTOWN

David J. Bonnar

By the Grace of God and the Apostolic See

BISHOP OF YOUNGSTOWN

Prot. N. B13-2026

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 center, 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(ibid., n. 14), it is necessary to avoid, "any pastoral action that is limited to the territory of the Parish [that] is outdated, which is something the parishioners themselves observe when their Parish appears to be more interested in preserving a nostalgia of former times as opposed to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 Our Lady of Perpetual Help at 342 S Chillicothe Rd in Aurora, Ohio as a mission in 1955 and as a territorial parish in 1960 and Saint Joan of Arc Parish at 8894 Oh-14 in Streetsboro, Ohio as a mission in 1964 and as a territorial parish in 1965. During that time, the Christian faithful have heard the Word of God, have worshiped, and have received the Sacraments in these parishes; In recent time the parish communities 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 Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Aurora, Ohio and Saint Joan of Arc in Streetsboro, Ohio have shared pastoral ministry in various ways, including sharing a pastor, a parochial vicar, together with joint efforts related to the pastoral activity of the parishes;

WHEREAS, there are just causes supporting a merger between Saint Joseph in Mantua, Ohio and Saint Ambrose in Garrettsville, Ohio, namely,

a. To provide more effectively for the pastoral care of the Christian faithful in the Deanery of Portage, 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, 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 Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Aurora, Ohio and Saint Joan of Arc in Streetsboro, Ohio;

Whereas, on August 23, 2026, the Most Reverend David Bonnar along with his staff met with members of the finance councils and pastoral councils of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and Saint Joan of Arc to ensure that the path forward was discerned together in a spirit of mutual prayer and shared input;

WHEREAS, the pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Aurora, Ohio and Saint Joan of Arc in Streetsboro, Ohio, 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 merger will facilitate better coordination of pastoral ministry and sacramental service in our region, reflecting the current demographic trends of our local communities. Furthermore, this union will sustain and deepen the collaborative efforts our parishes have faithfully engaged in since May 2023";

WHEREAS, after having observed all the requirements of the procedural law and having heard the Presbyteral Council on September 21, 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 merger;

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

DECREE

1. The territorial parishes of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Aurora, Ohio and Saint Joan of Arc in Streetsboro, 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 determined shortly. The boundaries of the newly merged parish will be the same as the boundaries of the territorial parishes of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Aurora, Ohio and Saint Joan of Arc in Streetsboro, Ohio.

2. The parish will maintain the sacred edifices of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church and Saint Joan of Arc Church, the names given at the time of dedication preserving their sacred titles.

3. All members of the originating parishes will now be members of the newly merged parish.

4. The parish will be served by a single pastor and will maintain one parish office on the premises of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church 342 S. Chillicothe, **Aurora, Ohio,** and

will have one joint religious education program to enhance the faith formation of the children and adults 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. 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 Parishes of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Aurora, Ohio and Saint Joan of Arc in Streetsboro, Ohio are to be conveyed to the offices of the newly merged parish at the premises of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, 342 S. Chillicothe, Aurora, Ohio. 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 January 1, 2027. 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 faithful 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 Ninth day of October in the Year of Our Lord 2026.

+ David J. Bonnar

Most Reverend David J. Bonnar
Bishop of Youngstown

Joan Lawson

Joan Lawson
Chancellor

Carolyn Wooten
Notary

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF YOUNGSTOWN OHIO