

Bruce Alan Lewandowski, C.Ss.R.
By the Grace of God and Favor of the Apostolic See
Bishop of Providence

DECREE

SPECIES FACTI

1. In the final decades of the 19th century, and due to increased use of railroad as a mode of travel in the State of Rhode Island, and particularly onto its East Bay, the Riverside neighborhood of the city of East Providence began to see a steady, incoming population. Riverside also gradually became a Rhode Island summer destination. By 1875, however, the Catholic parishes nearest Riverside remained St. Joseph, Providence, and St. Mary of the Bay, Warren.
2. A growing pastoral need began to present itself for the regular celebration of the Holy Mass in East Providence, to the point that Holy Mass was offered in Riverside during the summer months, beginning in 1889 when Winchester Hall on Bullocks Point was rented for that purpose. Beginning in the summer of 1891, the Turner Avenue School was used instead.
3. WHEREAS, in 1893, the pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, East Providence, purchased an acre of land on Sprague Avenue for a chapel in Riverside. That year, Bishop Matthew Harkins dedicated a mission chapel under the patronage of St. Brendan the Navigator. St. Brendan chapel served until the need was obvious for a larger edifice; and a bigger St. Brendan building was erected on Turner Avenue and dedicated in August 1905.

4. On April 29, 1909, the mission was raised to the status of a parish and Father Joseph Hughes was appointed the first pastor of St. Brendan Parish.

5. WHEREAS, during the first decades of the 20th century, the parish continued to see growth in population and sacramental practice. In May 1931, the remodeled and enlarged St. Brendan church was rededicated by Bishop Hickey.

In September 1956, the parish opened its longtime school, under the patronage of St. Brendan, and administered by the Religious Sisters of Mercy. Due to declining enrollment, the school closed in 2009, and sent faithful St. Brendan School families and students to neighboring parochial schools such as Sacred Heart, St. Margaret, and St. Luke.

6. WHEREAS, St. Brendan Parish has experienced a decline within approximately the past decade, including a decrease in sacramental practice and Mass attendance. In 2013, the parish reported 27 baptisms, 33 first communions, 35 confirmations, and 2 marriages (an average approximate total of 1,389 persons attended the weekend Masses). In 2023, the parish reported 3 baptisms, 11 first communions, 21 confirmations, and no marriages. In 2023, attendance at weekend Mass declined to 515 persons. Currently, there is one Sunday vigil Mass and one Sunday Mass at St. Brendan.

In 2024, St. Brendan Parish reported total revenues at \$497,403 and total expenditures at \$55,725.

7. Simultaneously, as St. Brendan Parish began to enjoy growing numbers due to the postwar population boom into the suburbs, St. Martha Parish in the neighboring Kent Heights section of the city of East Providence, was established on September 13, 1956 by Bishop Russell McVinney; he named Father Joseph Bracq as first pastor. The parish was formed from portions of Sacred Heart and St. Brendan parishes.

8. During the interim between the founding of the parish and the completion of the church building, Sunday and holyday Masses temporarily were celebrated, and baptisms administered,

at St. Mary Academy, Bayview. Funeral Masses were celebrated at either St. Brendan or Sacred Heart (whichever was closer geographically to the deceased's former residence). In 1958, the St. Martha Parish church building was finalized on the former Ide Farm property on Pawtucket Avenue, where it remains to this day.

9. WHEREAS, St. Martha Parish has experienced a decline within the last quarter-century, including a decrease in sacramental practice and Mass attendance. In the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the parish reported 47 baptisms, 41 first communions, 29 confirmations, and 22 marriages (an average approximate total of 1,700 persons attended the weekend Masses). In 2023, the parish reported 7 baptisms, 12 first communions, 15 confirmations, and 2 marriages. In 2023, attendance at weekend Mass declined to approximately 200 persons. Currently, St. Martha Parish has one Sunday Mass.

10. In 2024, St. Martha Parish reported total revenues at \$248,385 and total expenditures at \$139,934.

11. Since 2023, the St. Brendan and St. Martha communities have been actively collaborating in several areas of ministry and parish administration. Both parishes share a pastor, faith formation programs, and fundraising initiatives; there is currently an interparish office and shared parish website and bulletin. Parishioners from both parishes have participated in preliminary SENT evangelization training through the Secretariat for Evangelization and Pastoral Planning. The pastor has observed greater unity and vitality in the liturgical, pastoral, sacramental, and apostolic dimensions of parish life.

12. WHEREAS, on January 29, 2024, the Reverend Scott J. Carpentier, Pastor of St. Brendan and of St. Martha, with approximately 48 parishioners and trustees and finance council members from both parishes, attended a Night of Discernment;

13. WHEREAS, on September 7/8, 2024, a "Workshop on Missionary Discipleship" was facilitated by the Diocese of Providence for parishioners from both parishes (approximately 48 attend);

14. WHEREAS, on October 23, 2024, a “Planning for Mission” was held with a committee comprised of lay leaders from both parishes;

15. WHEREAS, on February 27, 2025, a “Planning for Mission” was held with a committee comprised of lay leaders from both parishes;

16. WHEREAS, on July 21, 2025, the Reverend Scott J. Carpentier, Pastor of St. Brendan and of St. Martha parishes, along with the respective parish trustees and finance council members, wrote to the Most Reverend Bruce A. Lewandowski, Bishop of Providence, requesting the canonical merger of both parishes into a new parish entity. In this letter, Fr. Carpentier wrote that this proposal, “undertaken with prayerful discernment and the support of the Secretary for Evangelization and Pastoral Planning, as well as the trustees and finance councils of both parishes, seeks to strengthen our collective mission and better serve the spiritual and pastoral needs of our communities now and into the future.”

17. WHEREAS, on December 2, 2025, Reverend Michael Najim, Vicar for Priests, and Mr. Michael Lavigne, Secretary for Evangelization and Pastoral Planning, met with the Reverend Scott J. Carpentier, Pastor of St. Brendan and of St. Martha, and with parish lay leaders from both parishes (numbering around 90 participants) to discuss the proposed merger;

18. WHEREAS, on January 13, 2026, Reverend Michael Najim, Vicar for Priests, and Mr. Michael Lavigne, Secretary for Evangelization and Pastoral Planning, met with the Reverend Scott J. Carpentier, Pastor of St. Brendan and of St. Martha, and with the finance councils and trustees of both parishes, to discuss the proposed merger. Trustees and finance council members affirmed their support to proceed with the merger.

19. WHEREAS, on April 16, 2026, the Most Reverend Bruce A. Lewandowski convened the Council of Priests, proposed the canonical merger, and received their affirmative consultation in accord with can. 515 §2.

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20.. The parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular Church (cf. can. 515 §1 CIC). Every legitimately erected parish enjoys juridic personality by the law itself and is entrusted to a pastor as its proper shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop (cf. can. 515 §§1, 3 CIC). The diocesan bishop alone is competent to erect, suppress, or alter parishes; but to do so, he must hear the presbyteral council and receive their counsel (cf. can. 127 §1; 515 §2 CIC). In keeping with the norms on individual administrative acts, before issuing an individual decree, an authority should seek out the necessary information and proofs and hear those whose rights can be injured, insofar as possible (cf. can. 50 CIC).

21. The law foresees four types of modifications of parishes, including suppression, extinctive union (whereby one parish is absorbed by another), extinctive union (whereby two parishes unite to form a new juridic person), and division (cf. canons 121-123 CIC). Whereas territorial parishes are united or divided, personal parishes may be suppressed, although they are ordinarily united or divided, either in connection to another personal parish or even to a territorial parish (cf. Congregation for the Clergy, Procedural Guidelines, Prot. N. 2013 2013 1348, n.1d). In the case of an extinctive union, the assets and liabilities of the former parish are absorbed by the receiving parish or the newly erected parish, *mutatis mutandis*.

22. The law requires at least a just cause to notably alter a parish. According to the praxis of the Dicastery for the Clergy and the jurisprudence of the Apostolic Signatura, the principal motivation for modifying a parish is the concern for souls (*Christus Dominus*, no. 32) and the modification should be undertaken when the good of the faithful requires it (*Apostolorum Successores*, no. 214). Although the just cause must be *ad rem*, the diocesan bishop can – and sometimes should – consider the good of the whole diocese (cf. Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, Decree Prot. N. 45082/11 CA, 27 April 2011; Congregation for the Clergy, Procedural Guidelines, Prot. N. 2013 2013 1348, n.1h).

23. Jurisprudence acknowledges that a paucity of clergy, a declining participation in parish life, or financial difficulties of the parish in question all meet the standard of a just cause for the extinctive union of a parish (cf. SSAT, def. sent. 21 May 2011, Prot. No. 42278/09 CA; Congregation for the Clergy, Procedural Guidelines, Prot. N. 2013 2013 1348, n.2f, h).

IN FACTO

24. Over the past several years, demographic shifts in the city of East Providence have necessitated renewed pastoral planning in keeping with the original mission for which St. Brendan and St. Martha parishes were established. In many ways, the factors that influenced the birth of each are long gone; Riverside is no longer a vacation destination, nor are the residents of Kent Heights that influenced St. Martha Parish's early growth any longer on the earthly scene. However, the current pastor of both parishes notes that "we see genuine signs of hope and renewal in our communities . . . we continue this path of growth in mission, discipleship, and evangelization by merging our two parishes into one."

THEREFORE

With the objective of strengthening the Catholic presence in this section of the city of East Providence; having consulted the Council of Priests in accord with Canon 515, §2; and weighing before God the good of souls and their pastoral care; and given the just causes presented above, I hereby

DECREE

that the Parish of St. Brendan, a territorial parish in the Riverside section of East Providence, shall merge with St. Martha Parish, a territorial parish in the Kent Heights neighborhood of the same city, in a *unio extinctiva* (can. 121).

Both parishes shall merge into a new and separate juridic person and parish entity (SS. Brendan and Martha), while maintaining both current worship sites;

The new parish entity shall receive all parishioners, assets and liabilities of St. Brendan Parish and of St. Martha Parish (can. 121 CIC).

All parish registers containing the records of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Marriage, and deaths of St. Brendan and St. Martha parishes will remain at the current office location, where they will be faithfully maintained in accord with canon 535 CIC.

The new parish entity will be territorial; and in absorbing the territories of both parishes, will be territorially bounded by the following demarcations:

Beginning at the corner of South Broadway and Warren Avenue, going East along Warren Avenue to County Street.

North on County Street to Grosvenor Avenue.

East along Grosvenor Avenue to Pawtucket Avenue.

North on Pawtucket Avenue to Waterman Avenue.

East by an airline from the junction of Pawtucket and Waterman Avenue to the Massachusetts/Rhode Island state line.

South along the Massachusetts/Rhode Island state line to Barrington town line.

West along East Providence/Barrington town line to the Providence River.

North along Providence River to a point adjacent to Watchemoket Cove.

East across Watchemoket Cove to the junction of Veterans' Memorial Parkway and Broadway.

North on South Broadway to the starting point.

FURTHERMORE

I hereby direct Rev. Scott Carpentier, Pastor of St. Brendan Parish and of St. Martha Parish, to inform the parishioners of both parishes at all the Masses on the weekend of May 9 – 10, 2026.

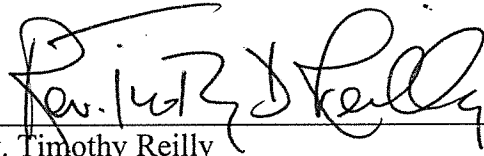
This decree will become effective at that time.

St. Brendan and St. Martha parishioners who wish to make recourse against this decree have the right to do so. Any *remonstratio* must be submitted in writing to the Bishop of Providence within the peremptory time limits of ten (10) useful (business) days within the above notification dates (May 9 – 10, 2026) of this decree, in accord with can. 1734 §2.

Given in Providence, at the Chancery, on, the 20th of April in the year of Our Lord 2026.



Most Rev. Bruce A. Lewandowski, C.Ss.R.
Bishop of Providence



Rev. Timothy Reilly
Chancellor

