



Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Saint Cloud

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DECREE
Uniti in Corde Iesu

Preamble

United in the Heart of Jesus, the parishes of St. Charles in Herman, St. Olaf in Elbow Lake, and Our Lady of the Runestone in Kensington, the three parishes of the COR Area Catholic Community (ACC), have collaborated under the leadership of one pastor to meet the challenges of geography, demographics, and limited clergy. This collaboration has proven fruitful, but a process of discernment has found ways to further enhance the collaboration. I issue this decree, which contains a number of decisions and precepts drawn from the ACC's Pastoral Plan but chiefly enacts the merger of the aforementioned parishes, combining the churches, territories, assets, rights, and obligations of all three.

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 St. 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, inaccessible or dangerous parochial buildings, poor staffing, inefficient use of ecclesial resources, and parochialism that attacked the unity of the Body of Christ;

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, from 2021 onward, the parishes of the ACC were united under one pastor;

Whereas, in response to my aforementioned request to develop an ACC Pastoral Plan, the parishes of the COR ACC formed an ACC Planning Committee and developed a pastoral plan;

Whereas the committee held three town hall gatherings, one in each parish, and collected feedback from the parishioners of the parishes of the ACC, noting especially that parishioners did not want to see changes to the Mass Schedule;

Consultation with the CAP

Whereas, on January 12, 2026, a representative group of the COR ACC presented their 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 Saint Cloud;

Whereas the CAP reviewed the ACC Planning Council's plan, especially those elements which the CAP members recognized as deviations from the parameters I established at the beginning of the process;

Whereas, despite the deviations, such as the plan to continue rotations of Mass times in response to parishioner feedback, the CAP recommended to me the overall plan, especially the merger of the three parishes of the ACC in an extinctive union;

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 proposed merger is within the parameters of the All Things New Planning Process, (even as other elements of the ACC Pastoral plan are not, due to particular circumstances of the parishes involved) 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, 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, as well as the ACC in particular, and it arranges things so as 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 who 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 both priest *and* parishioner health;

Whereas the merger opens up further possibilities and developments, in accord with the ACC's pastoral plan that would not otherwise be achievable by maintaining the distinct parishes, especially with regard to building a centralized office and staff;

Whereas the proposed merger eases the hiring, remuneration, and efficiency of a single part-time business administrator serving all three parishes;

Whereas the proposed merger allows the parishioners of the three communities to more easily share resources that support common, collaborative ministries, as well as their shared pastor, prolonging the possibility for each parish and facility to be maintained and staffed rather than left vacant or be found financially insufficient for the support of necessary ministers;

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 the small, isolated, homogenous, self-selecting communities that can promote a parochialism contrary to the unifying message of the Gospel;

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 parishes of the COR ACC, urging them to recognize that there are no temples in heaven, save Christ Himself (Revelation 21:22);

I hereby merge the parishes of St. Charles in Herman, St. Olaf in Elbow Lake, and Our Lady of the Runestone in Kensington into an extinctive union, forming one new parish under the title of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and comprising the territory, assets, rights, and obligations previously included in each parish.

And, whereas Fr. Jose Chettoor, VC, is known to be of sound doctrine and uprightness of character, already serving well as pastor of the aforementioned parishes;

I hereby appoint Fr. Jose Chettoor, VC, 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 Article II below).

And I hereby enact further provisions detailed in Appendix I, which I will make directly available to the pastor of the aforementioned parishes.

Art. II - Notification and Appeals

The above merger and associated precepts and decisions, though related by reason of motivation and legal action, are nevertheless, strictly speaking, independent. Therefore, if a member of the Faithful is aggrieved by *any* article of this decree, that member may present a petition for modification or revocation of the whole decree or simply a single provision therein, 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 June 9, 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 May 23 and May 24, 2026;**
- §3 The Pastor or his delegate is to ensure that paper copies of this decree, less the appendix, are provided in the churches of each parish merged by this decree – the pastor may share part or all of the appendix at his discretion;**
- §4 This decree is to be posted, less the Appendix, to the All Things New Website of the Diocese of Saint Cloud on May 22, 2026.**

So long as notification takes place as described above, **all of the decisions, precepts, and other legal actions indicated in this decree go into effect on May 24, 2026**, according to the measures and timelines indicated and without prejudice to my right to suspend or revoke the provisions of this document, in whole or in part, especially in response to a petition from a member of the Faithful.

Given at the Chancery, the 22nd Day of May, the Year of Our Lord 2026.

+ Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C.
+Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C.
Bishop, Diocese of Saint Cloud

[SEAL]

James C. Towahl
Ecclesiastical Notary

Prot. No. 66-26