



*Prot. No. 19-013*

**Decree of Extinctive Union of  
St. Joseph Parish, St. Norbert Mission, St. Gregory Parish, St. Thomas Parish,  
St. Phillip Mission, St. Jerome Parish, and St. Matthew Mission**

**Decree of Establishment of Saint John the Apostle Parish**

**Preamble**

Catholicism in Lunenburg County dates back to the 1600s, when the area was served by Capuchin priests who ministered to the Mi'kmaq and those in the French Settlements.

Around the time the Vicariate of Nova Scotia was established in 1817, a priest stationed in Prospect was responsible for the region from Halifax to Shelburne, across to Annapolis, and through the valley to Windsor. Small groups of Catholics (sometimes as small as one family) were dispersed through the region, and the priest traveled extensively through the territory to minister to them.

In Liverpool, which was a thriving fishing community and shipping centre, Irish-Catholic emigrants came from Newfoundland and built a small chapel in 1829, dedicated to St. Patrick. A resident priest was appointed to Liverpool in the early 1830s, responsible for a large territory including parts of Lunenburg and Queens Counties.

St. Norbert Church was begun in 1839, with the first Mass celebrated in 1840.

In West Caledonia, in 1836 a church dedicated to St. Joseph was built, along with a cemetery and likely a rectory. At this point there were more Catholics in West Caledonia than in Liverpool, so it became a parish, with Liverpool as its mission.

In 1839 the region was divided, with Liverpool, Mills Village, and Caledonia treated as one.

In the 1850s and onward, Lunenburg County and nearby communities were treated as a sole parish, including Lunenburg, Chester, Sherbrook, Dalhousie, New Ross, and Bridgewater. At times this parish was administered by the pastor in Kentville; at other times a resident priest lived in Chester or (beginning in 1885), in Bridgewater.

In 1859 and 1860, Queens County became part of the Annapolis Parish.

In 1879, the church in Caledonia was extensively renovated, and from that point was called St. Jerome. Around the same time, St. Patrick in Liverpool became known as St. Gregory, which may also indicate extensive renovations.

St. Thomas Church in Shelburne opened in 1881, as a mission of the Parish of East Pubnico. It became a parish in 1956, as part of the Diocese of Yarmouth.

In 1889, St. Norbert's closed due to the shrinking Catholic population and the erection of nearby St. Joseph Parish in Bridgewater that same year. In the 1930s there was an influx of predominantly Catholic Newfoundland fishermen who worked seasonally in the area from March to October every year. With this increased Catholic population, the church re-opened in 1935. As the population continued to grow, a new wing was added in 1982.

Queens County also experienced a population resurgence in the 1930s thanks to the opening of a pulp and paper mill in Liverpool and a sawmill in nearby Brookfield. Due to this growth, in 1941 Liverpool and Caledonia were split into separate parishes.

In 1946 Lunenburg County was divided and Chester was erected as a parish.

In 1947 St. Matthew Church in Elmwood was opened as a mission of St. Joseph, Bridgewater. Since 1889 Masses had been celebrated in the region in homes a few times a year, and later weekly in the summer in a schoolhouse.

In 1968, St. Philip Church was opened in Barrington, primarily because of the presence of the Baccaro military base and the Catholics it brought to the area.

Recently, with the steady decrease in Mass attendance across the province of Nova Scotia and accompanying financial restraints, the decline in the number of priests available to serve the parishes, the continued secularization of the culture, and a desire to consolidate parish ministries and services, decisions regarding the configuration of parishes in the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth were required.

### **Consultation & Decision**

In 2017 I released a diocesan pastoral plan, *Equip the Saints*, to begin to address these challenges to our local Church. Among other initiatives, the plan proposed a reconfiguration of our parishes to help us more fully orient our temporal goods and pastoral activity towards fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ. All clergy and parishioners were encouraged to read, discuss, and reflect on this plan, and invited to submit any questions they had. I, along with members of my diocesan staff, personally responded to this feedback at the 2017 Assembly of the People of God, our annual diocesan adult conference, in October 2017. In February 2018, members of the parishes were invited to

participate in a diocesan-wide Lenten Video Series, which outlined the vision and general timeline for restructuring. At that time parishioners were asked to send in questions, concerns, and comments about this vision by the Feast of Pentecost (May 2018).

Additionally, clergy from each region of the diocese were specifically consulted and asked to submit proposals, developed in consultation with their lay leaders, for new parish configurations by June 30, 2018. I met specifically with the clergy of the North and South Shore Regions on March 9, 2018 to hear their concerns and receive their feedback.

Using the proposals and feedback from clergy and laity, my staff and I developed an action plan titled *New Parishes: Stronger Together*. This first draft was shared with the clergy of the entire diocese during two days of consultations in October 2018. Following these meetings, a revised draft of the plan was presented to all the faithful at the October 2018 Assembly of the People of God, with further input from the faithful sought until mid-November 2018.

On December 6, 2018 a final draft of the plan – which included the establishment of a new parish comprising St. Joseph, St. Norbert, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Phillip, St. Jerome, and St. Matthew – was presented to all the clergy for final discussion. Having heard the clergy, the Presbyteral Council was consulted, and accepted the proposed parish configurations on December 6, 2018. The action plan was launched January 1, 2019.

A transition team was established in February 2019, comprising parishioners, staff, and the pastor of St. Joseph, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Jerome, and their missions. This team informed and involved parishioners of all seven communities in determining the necessary facilities, human resources, and administrative structures of a new parish, as well as determining a name deemed appropriate to the community's charisms and devotions.

The transition team met seven times between February and September 2019, plus a subset of the team met for three meetings specific to financial concerns. In September, 2019, the pastor and transition team recommended that Saint John the Apostle Parish be established, comprising the former parishes of St. Joseph, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Jerome, and their missions. The recommendation included the retention of St. Joseph, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Jerome, St. Norbert, St. Phillip, and St. Matthew as worship spaces.

Whereas the parishioners of St. Joseph, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Jerome, and their missions were all invited to provide recommendations about the diocesan reconfiguration generally and their own parish merger specifically;

Whereas Rev. Jim O'Connor, pastor of St. Joseph, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Jerome, and their missions, submitted a letter to me dated September 30, 2019 requesting the above merger;

Whereas the Council of Priests was apprised of the situation of these seven communities on December 6, 2018 and the Council agreed with the proposal for these seven communities, effective January 1, 2020. Additionally, on October 31, 2019 the Council voted unanimously on a specific motion to create the new parish of Saint John the Apostle;

Whereas the spiritual needs of the parishioners of the seven communities have been closely considered and are able to be met through the creation of this new parish;

Whereas Canon 515 §2 of the Code of Canon Law gives the diocesan bishop the authority to erect, suppress or alter parishes, after he has consulted the Presbyteral Council of the Diocese;

Whereas the Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, *Apostolorum Successores*, of February 22, 2004 reminds the bishop that he has the responsibility of proceeding, after consulting the Presbyteral Council of the Diocese, to alter territorial boundaries, to merge smaller parishes, to establish new parishes for the pastoral service in the community, or even to reorganize completely the arrangement of parishes within a particular city;

Whereas the Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops reminds the bishop that he has the responsibility to organize the arrangement of parishes in ways adapted to the care of souls, according to a vision of the appropriate use of resources in the diocese (nn. 214-251).

Therefore, invoking the authority given to me as the Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth, and from canon 515 §2, and judging that all the conditions have been met, I hereby decree that, effective January 1, 2020, the parishes of St. Joseph, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Jerome, and their missions will be merged to create one parish, called Saint John the Apostle.

I furthermore decree as follows:


- The territory that composed the former St. Joseph, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Jerome, and their missions will henceforth compose the territory of the new parish;
- St. Joseph, St. Norbert, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Phillip, St. Jerome, and St. Matthew churches will be places of worship for the new parish;


- The parish records and sacramental registers of the former parishes shall become the responsibility of the new parish;
- The real property – lands and buildings – of the former parishes shall, upon their merger into the new parish, become the property of the new parish, to be maintained, administered, alienated, or otherwise disposed of in accordance with civil and canon law;
- Any monetary funds of the former parishes that were previously designated as "restricted," shall continue to be maintained separately as part of the patrimony of the new parish, and used solely for those purposes for which they were restricted;
- After payment of any outstanding debts, any remaining monetary funds of the former parishes shall automatically become the patrimony of the new parish; likewise, any outstanding liabilities of the former parishes shall automatically become the responsibility of the new parish (see Canon 121).

Anyone who feels aggrieved by these decrees may have recourse following the appropriate procedures outlined in the *Code of Canon Law* (Canon 1734).

It is my hope and prayer that the parishioners of St. Joseph, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, St. Jerome, and their missions will accept this decision in a spirit of faith. May this new parish be a sign of the commitment and vitality of the parishioners as they continue to grow and serve as a vibrant Christian community in the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth.

Given at Halifax, NS under our signature, the seal of the diocese, and the signature of the chancellor this 12<sup>th</sup> day of December in the year of our Lord, two thousand and nineteen.

  
† Anthony Mancini  
Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth

  
Rev. Mr. Robert Doyle  
Chancellor