



Prot. No. 19-010

**Decree of Extinctive Union of
St. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs Parishes**

Decree of Establishment of Good Shepherd Parish

Preamble

St. Agnes Parish was established in 1887, and the building blessed and dedicated by Archbishop O'Brien in 1890. It was a mission of St. Mary's until it became a parish in 1892. It was the fourth parish established in Halifax. In November 1950 St. Agnes School was opened, and for many years held a close affiliation with the church. By 1961 the community had outgrown the original church. The existing St. Agnes Church was blessed and opened on September 8, 1965 by Archbishop James Hayes.

In 1919, a group of Catholic laymen petitioned Archbishop McCarthy to open a new church in the West End of Halifax in order to relieve pressure on the over-crowded St. Mary's Cathedral. On July 20th of the same year, the cornerstone of St. Thomas Aquinas Church was laid, with plans to eventually build a larger church on the same site. By the 1930s the community had grown such that the basement of the church was converted to a chapel in order to celebrate more Masses to accommodate the attendance. Masses were celebrated simultaneously beginning Christmas 1936.

In 1952, Archbishop McNally announced the establishment of Canadian Martyrs Parish to relieve overcrowding at both St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Mary's Cathedral. The first Mass was celebrated in September 1952 in the main lobby of St. Mary's University. The first church for the parish was the centre wing of what is now called the McNally Building of St. Mary's University. This served as the parish church until 1970, when the university required the building for its own use. A new church was built for the parish, blessed and officially opened by Archbishop Hayes in December 1971.

Even with the establishment of Canadian Martyrs Parish, by 1956 St. Thomas Aquinas Parish had outgrown the existing building and began to raise funds for a new church. The church was consecrated April 12, 1958, and officially opened on April 27, 1958. It is

interesting to note that relics of the Canadian Martyrs were placed in the side altar of St. Joseph in the new church.

In 2004, the archdiocesan report *Forward in Faith* suggested the amalgamation of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish and Canadian Martyrs Parish, due to declining numbers and an aging population. On January 1, 2008 the new parish came into existence as St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs.

In January 2017 Canadian Martyrs Church was sold to reduce cost duplication in the parish.

Recently, with the continued 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 clergy from the Halifax peninsula three times in fall 2017 (September 6, October 4, and November 8), and then four times in 2018 (January 24, March 21, May 23, and September 5). A member of my staff and I also conducted a meeting for peninsula clergy and lay leaders on April 7, 2018.

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. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs – 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 early 2019, comprising parishioners, staff, and the pastor of St. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs Parishes. This team informed and involved parishioners of both 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 a total of eleven times between February and September 2019 and hosted a public town hall meeting for all parishioners on May 7, 2019. In August 2019, the pastor and transition team recommended that Good Shepherd Parish be established, comprising the former parishes of St. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs. The recommendation included the retention of St. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas as worship spaces.

Whereas the parishioners of St. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs were all invited to provide recommendations about the diocesan reconfiguration generally and their own parish merger specifically;

Whereas Rev. Irek Bem, SDS, pastor of St. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs, submitted a letter to me dated August 16, 2019 requesting the merger of St. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs;

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

Whereas the spiritual needs of the parishioners of these two 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. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs will be merged to create one parish, called Good Shepherd.

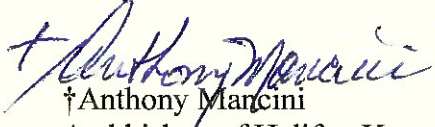
I furthermore decree as follows:

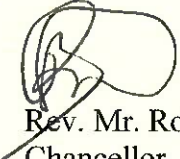
- The territory that composed the former St. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs will henceforth compose the territory of the new parish;
- St. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas churches will be places of worship for the new parish;
- The parish records and sacramental registers of the former parishes 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. Agnes and St. Thomas Aquinas-Canadian Martyrs 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 3rd day of December in the year of our Lord, two thousand and nineteen.


† Anthony Marcini
Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth


Rev. Mr. Robert Doyle
Chancellor