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TIMOTHY MICHAEL DOLAN

Cardinal Priest of the Holy Roman Church

of the Title of Nostra Signora di Guadalupe a Monte Mario

By the Grace of God and the Apostolic See

ARCHBISHOP OF NEW YORK

## DECREE

### ON THE MERGER OF THE TERRITORIAL PARISHES OF SAINT MARY, WASHINGTONVILLE, AND SAINT COLUMBA, CHESTER, ORANGE COUNTY, NEW YORK

WHEREAS bishops “feed their sheep in the name of the Lord by fulfilling their office of teaching, sanctifying and governing them” and “pursue their apostolic work as witnesses of Christ to all people” (cf. Vatican II, Decree on the pastoral office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, October 28, 1965, n. 11);

WHEREAS the parish is “pre-eminent among all the other communities present in his Diocese, for which the Bishop has primary responsibility: it is with the parishes above all that he must be concerned” (Pope Saint John Paul II, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores gregis*, October 16, 2003, n. 45) and whereas the parish “remains the fundamental unit in the daily life of the Diocese” (ibid.);

WHEREAS “the parish is not an outdated institution” and “continues to be the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”, provided it “does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few”, but on the contrary is “a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach” (cf. Pope Francis, apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, November 24, 2013, n. 28);

WHEREAS the Bishop should proceed, after consulting the diocesan presbyteral council, to alter territorial boundaries, to divide parishes that are too large, to merge small

parishes, to establish new parishes or non-territorial centers for pastoral service in the community, or even to reorganize completely the arrangement of parishes within a particular city if the good of the faithful so requires, and whereas the Bishop may wish to set up a diocesan office or commission that can operate in collaboration with other relevant diocesan commissions in order to study all the issues pertaining to the establishment of parishes and the construction of churches (cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores*, February 22, 2004, n. 214);

WHEREAS the existing parish structure of the archdiocese was largely established between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and whereas radical changes and shifts in demographics have occurred over the past decades, including a move away from the urban center into the suburbs, together with a substantial immigration of Hispanics;

WHEREAS the Archdiocese faces a decline in the number of available priests, and whereas parishes are confronted with a declining number of faithful attending Sunday Mass on a regular basis;

WHEREAS the changing situation puts a huge financial burden on the smaller parishes, and whereas deficits are covered increasingly by archdiocesan loans with parishes unable to repay their debt;

WHEREAS on May 23, 2024, after consultation with the parish communities involved, I consulted the presbyteral council about the recommendation to merge the territorial parish of Saint Mary, 2 Father Tierney Circle, Washingtonville, New York, and the territorial parish of Saint Columba, 29 High Street, Chester, New York, based upon the complementarity of the two parishes, their proximity, the pastoral need for intensive collaboration, the need for the care of the souls, the priest shortage, and the new challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequences of which will be visible for a long time;

Therefore, I, the undersigned Archbishop of New York, have decided as follows:

#### DECREE

1. The territorial parish of Saint Mary, Washingtonville, New York, and the territorial parish of Saint Columba, Chester, New York, are merged. The name of the newly merged parish will be the parish of Saint Mary - Saint Columba until such time when the parish community through the pastor proposes a new name. The boundaries of the newly merged parish will be the same as the boundaries of the former parishes of Saint Mary, Washingtonville, New York, and Saint Columba, Chester, New York. The parish will have two churches.

2. The church of Saint Mary is herewith designated as the parish church.
3. The church of Saint Columba will maintain a regular schedule of Masses and other sacraments.
4. All members of the originating parishes shall now become members of the new parish.
5. All registers containing records of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and burials hitherto preserved by the parish Saint Mary, Washingtonville, New York, and the parish of Saint Columba, Chester, New York, are to be conveyed to the offices of the newly merged parish at the premises of Saint Mary, where they shall be faithfully preserved according to canon 535, 1°-5° of the Code of Canon Law.

This decree is effective immediately. 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 Archdiocese. This publication on the website will be the legitimate notification. A notarized copy of the decree will be sent to the pastor, and an announcement will be made in the Archdiocesan digital newsroom.

All those who claim to have been aggrieved by this decree are herewith notified that, if they desire to file recourse against our 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 the Chancery, New York, NY, this 12<sup>th</sup> of July 2024.



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Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan  
Archbishop of New York



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John P. Cahill  
Chancellor