



DECREE

EFFECTING THE MERGER OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH (OSCEOLA MILLS) INTO CHRIST THE KING PARISH (HOUTZDALE)

History

A. Immaculate Conception, Osceola Mills

The Catholic history of Osceola Mills began in 1864 when the pastor of Saint Matthew Parish in Tyrone began visiting the newly incorporated borough monthly and celebrating Mass in private homes. Immaculate Conception Parish was established two years later in 1866. The first church was small, without a bell tower, and the early pastors were responsible for up to nine additional missions in surrounding towns. A new brick church was dedicated in 1882, and the present church was constructed in 1924. In 1990 Immaculate Conception Parish was partnered with Christ the King Parish, Houtzdale. The partnership was short-lived, as in 1994 Immaculate Conception was instead partnered with Saint Agnes Parish, Morrisdale, and its mission of Saints Peter and Paul, Hawk Run.

B. Christ the King Parish, Houtzdale

The municipality of Houtzdale began as a lumber and coal mining town in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In those years about 80% of the population was Catholic. Early on, the residents of Houtzdale attended Mass at Immaculate Conception Parish in Osceola Mills. In the 1870's the pastors at Immaculate Conception began to organize the Catholic community in Houtzdale and to celebrate Mass in a local hall. The first parish in Houtzdale, Saint Lawrence, remained a mission of Immaculate Conception until 1879, when Saint Lawrence church was consecrated and they received a resident pastor. In 1892 the Polish Catholics of the area formed Saint Barbara Parish. The Slovak Catholics quickly followed suite, organizing Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in 1893. All three parishes continued to serve Houtzdale until 1970 when they merged to form Christ the King Parish. A new parish church, built on the property of Sacred Heart, was dedicated in 1978. The former Sacred Heart of Jesus church was renamed Grace Chapel. From 1930 to 2012 Immaculate Conception church in Madera was a mission, first of Saint Lawrence and then of Christ the King Parish. The several parishes in Houtzdale also cared for the missions of Saint Joseph, Osceola Mills, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Guzman, at various times.



Current Situation

Immaculate Conception Parish, Osceola Mills, possesses a church building and a rectory. Presently, it is partnered with St. Agnes Parish in Morrisdale. Christ the King Parish in Houtzdale is currently a stand-alone parish possessing one church building and a rectory. The two church buildings are approximately 5.8 miles apart.

Clearfield County has experienced significant demographic changes in recent decades. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the overall population of Clearfield County has decreased by more than 5,400 people – a decline of 6.5% in the period from the year 2000 to 2022. Following the general population trend, parish membership has also declined significantly. In the years 2012/2013, Immaculate Conception Parish reported 211 registered households, and in the 2020/2021 period, that number had fallen to 200. However, the decline in average Mass attendance was more stark. As reported by the annual October Count, the average Mass attendance at Immaculate Conception Parish was 138 in 2014, and 60 in 2022 – a decline of more than 55% in less than a decade. Christ the King Parish reported 540 registered households in 2013/2014, and 465 in the 2020/2021 reporting year. Average Mass attendance for Christ the King Parish declined from 350 in 2014, to 222 in 2022 – a drop of more than 35%.

The decline in both the general and Catholic population of the area – combined with the decreasing number of available priests – necessitates the reconfiguration of parishes and the better use of resources in order to assure the proper care of souls in eastern Clearfield County.

The Diocese of Erie's comprehensive pastoral planning process began in 2014. In the years that followed, vicariate and deanery meetings were held throughout the diocese to gather information and ideas from pastors, parish leaders and parishioners in general. As the demographic conditions in the Clearfield Deanery changed in recent decades, the need for parish reconfiguration and the better use of material and human resources became more urgent.

On March 9, 2023, Bishop Persico, presented Presbyteral Council with a preliminary plan for parish reconfiguration in the Clearfield Deanery. The preliminary plan was opened for discussion among members of the Council.

On March 20, 2023, at deanery meeting held at St. Francis Church in Clearfield, Bishop Persico presented the Clearfield Deanery preliminary plan (which included the proposed merger of Immaculate Conception Parish into Christ the King Parish) to the clergy of the deanery and a representative group of lay leaders from each parish. The Bishop then opened a several-week period of comment and feedback for pastors and people to give their views on the proposed changes.

At the June 22, 2023 meeting of the Presbyteral Council, Bishop Persico presented a finalized proposal for parish reconfigurations in Clearfield County. The Presbyteral Council unanimously approved the plan, and within it, specifically recommended to Bishop Persico to merge Immaculate Conception Parish, Osceola Mills, into Christ the King Parish, Houtzdale.

All of the requirements of canons 50, 51, 127, 166, and 515 have been fulfilled.

Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the need for a stronger and more sustainable means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of the whole Clearfield area, while also considering the challenges presented by demographic decline and the reduced number of priests; the genuine desire on the part of parishioners and clergy alike to realign parish structures to best situate them for building a strong future; the envisioning of this merger as an integral part of the overall pastoral plan for the Clearfield area¹; I hereby decree the following:

1. By means of an extinctive union, Immaculate Conception Parish in Osceola Mills shall be merged and subsumed into Christ the King Parish in Houtzdale.
2. The name of the receiving parish shall continue to be Christ the King Parish. It shall be territorial in nature, with the parish retaining all of the territory which it now possesses, and to it will be added all of the territory which previously belonged to Immaculate Conception Parish.
3. All sacramental records from Immaculate Conception Parish shall be retained at the parish offices of Christ the King Parish.
4. In accord with the norm of law (cf. can. 121), all of the assets, responsibilities, and liabilities of Immaculate Conception Parish shall be transferred to Christ the King Parish.
5. The parish church shall be Christ the King church in Houtzdale
6. Immaculate Conception church shall become a secondary mission church of Christ the King Parish. By diocesan law, therefore, Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, as well as on the evening preceding them, is permitted in Immaculate Conception church.
7. The boundaries of Christ the King Parish shall be:
 In Clearfield County: Starting at the intersection of US route 322 and the Clearfield County line in Decatur township, south along the Clearfield/Centre County line to the Woodward/Gulich township line; northwest and then southwest along the Gulich township line to PA route 453 at Ramey; southwest on PA route 453 to state road 2002; southwest on state road 2002 to Muddy Run; south on Muddy Run to PA route 729; northwest along PA route 729 to Buck Run Road; north along Buck Run Road to state road 3020; east along state road 3020 to state road 2015 at McCartney; north along state road 2015 (Oak Ridge Road), across state road 3007, continuing northeast to the juncture with PA route 453 at Kellytown; east along Kellytown Road to Clearfield Creek/Knox township boundary; north along the Knox township boundary to Little Clearfield Creek; southwest along Little Clearfield Creek to state road 2023 at O'Shanter; north along state road 2023 to state road 2024; east along state road 2024 to the Clearfield County line.

¹ The pastoral plan for the Clearfield Deanery area includes the following goals: to: 1) create a more vibrant Catholic community, 2) improve Mass attendance and participation in parish life, 3) engage younger Catholics, 4) reach out to fallen-away Catholics and new parishioners, 5) increase the parish's community and ecumenical involvement, 6) create a more welcoming environment, and 7) sustain the parish financially.

8. Furthermore, as required by law, Mass is to be celebrated in each church every year on the solemnity of the church's title, in accord with current liturgical norms (cf. cann. 1167 §2 and 1168 of the former Code of Canon Law, and can. 2 of the present Code). If such an observance is impeded by another date of higher rank according to the Roman calendar, the impeded solemnity is to be transferred to the first available date thereafter.

This decree is effective December 2, 2023, the beginning of Advent. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Erie
on this 10th day of November, 2023

+Lawrence T. Persico

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of Erie

Christopher J. Singer

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor