OF THE MERGER OF THE PARishes OF ATLANTIC CITY AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARISH OF SAINT MONICA

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that a parish is “the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ’s saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love...” (CCC, 2179)

Mindful of these critical roles of a parish in the life of Catholics; and also that a parish is tremendously meaningful and involved with the “certain community of the Christian faithful” for which it is constituted within the diocese; (cf. Can. 515, §1) it is only with careful study, sincere consideration, and prayer before the Eyes of God that a diocesan bishop makes a decision to alter parishes within the local church of the diocese which has been entrusted to his care to shepherd along with the cooperation of diocesan presbyterate. (cf. Can. 369)

The role of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in Atlantic City has been public and identifiable from at least the time of the mid-nineteenth century. With the passage of time, the Church has sought to adapt to changing needs within Atlantic City. In the early period, the needs of Catholics in Atlantic City were met by members of the Order of Saint Augustine and then also by members of the diocesan clergy as the Catholic population grew. Since 1997, all pastoral care of the Church in Atlantic City has been the responsibility of the Diocese of Camden.

In recent years, it has become increasingly evident that the existing parish structures struggle in carrying out the work for which they had been established; at different times and under different circumstances. Each of the individual parishes is unique and has adapted, insofar as possible, to conditions which challenge the work of the Church in Atlantic City such as significant demographic and population shifts, a reduction in the number of resident and practicing Catholics within Atlantic City, a corresponding decrease in revenue to support the work of the parishes in Atlantic City, a reduction in the number of diocesan clergy, and other conditions and trends which are either applicable to all of Atlantic City; or to the particular circumstances of the individual parishes within Atlantic City.

The following just causes, therefore, suggest that the parishes of Atlantic City should be merged and a new parish erected:

1) to provide more effectively for the pastoral needs of the faithful of the area, in which the Catholic population has declined over the years;
2) to address serious financial difficulties that have developed within certain parishes in Atlantic City and which inhibit a maximum efficiency of outreach and ministry within Atlantic City;
3) to assure the vitality of parish life in the area, both now and into the future;
4) to provide for the optimum use of clergy, religious, and lay personnel.

Accordingly, having judged that sufficient just causes are present and that the good of souls will not be thereby impaired; and having consulted and heard the opinion of the Presbyteral Council in accord with canon 515, §2 at a meeting held on April 16, 2015 in which the members deliberated, thoroughly and in depth and then voted unanimously to recommend to me that I declare this merger; furthermore, having heard the opinions of the Reverend Pastors of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine Parish and Our Lady, Star of the Sea Parish; the Reverend Administrators of Saint Michael Parish and Saint Monica Parish; all of whom have consulted with the lay leadership of their respective parishes (cf. Can. 519), the members of their parish pastoral councils, the members of their parish finance councils as well as others; furthermore, having also heard the opinion of the local vicar forane; and with due consideration to the findings and opinion of an ad hoc pastoral-canonical committee which was established to study and consider what might be the best possible scenario for the good of the Church in Atlantic City and to most effectively minister to the Catholic population and work to support the wider community as well; in virtue of the precepts of canons 121 and 515, §2 of the Code of Canon Law, in order to provide more effectively for the spiritual welfare and the salvation of souls,

I HEREBY DECLARE

The territorial and complete merger of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine Parish (civilly incorporated as the Church of St. Nicholas); Our Lady, Star of the Sea Parish (civilly incorporated as Our Lady, Star of the Sea); Saint Michael Parish (civilly incorporated as St. Michael’s Church); Saint Monica Parish (civilly incorporated as St. Monica’s Church); and the territory which at one time made up Holy Spirit Parish (civilly incorporated as The Church of the Holy Spirit);

And concomitant with this merger, in accord with canons 116, §2 and 515, §2, the establishment of the Parish of Saint Monica.

The territorial boundaries of the Parish of Saint Monica will be the same as the municipal boundary of Atlantic City. The establishment of these parish boundaries is duly recorded at the Chancery Office of the Diocese of Camden as:

Start at Jackson Avenue, the southernmost boundary of Atlantic City. 
1. Use an imaginary extension of Jackson Avenue to the shoreline to mark the starting place.
2. Northwest on Jackson Avenue to an imaginary extension of Jackson Avenue into the middle of Beach Thorofare (an inland waterway)
3. Follow the municipal boundary southwest through Beach Thorofare, west through Turtle Gut and northeast through Lakes Bay
4. Crossing to the north of US 322 and the Atlantic City Expressway just to the east of Bay Dr., West Atlantic City
5. North through Jonathon Thorofare, northeast through Absecon Bay, east through Steelman Thorofare, southeast through Broad Creek to Rt. 87/ Brigantine Blvd
6. South on Rt. 87 to the middle of Absecon Channel
7. East through Absecon Channel and Absecon Inlet to the Atlantic City shoreline
8. South along the Atlantic City shoreline to the imaginary extension of Jackson Avenue (point of origin)

The Reverend Jon-Peter Thomas will serve as the pastor of the Parish of Saint Monica according to the norms of canons 522 and 538, §1 for a term of six years.

The parochial church of the Parish of Saint Monica, which retains its proper title and the name Our Lady Star of the Sea church, is located at 2651 Atlantic Avenue, Atlantic City. Saint Nicholas of Tolentine church, which retains its proper title and will be used as a second worship site and is located at 1409 Pacific Avenue, Atlantic City. Liturgical use of Saint Michael church and Saint Monica church, which fall within the parish boundaries, will eventually be discontinued after a period adjustment.

The goods and property of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine Parish, Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish, Saint Michael Parish, and Saint Monica Parish, including real estate and buildings, as well as all debts and obligations, shall be assigned to the Parish of Saint Monica as a juristic person in law according to the precepts of canons 121 and 123; always having observed before else the intention of the founders and donors according to the norms of the same canons.

As of the effective date of this DECREED, the sacramental records of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine Parish, Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish, Saint Michael Parish, and Saint Monica Parish shall be closed and transferred to the newly established Parish of Saint Monica.

As of the effective date of this DECREED, the financial accounts of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine Parish, 1409 Pacific Avenue, Atlantic City; Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish, 2651 Atlantic Avenue, Atlantic City; Saint Michael Parish, 10 North Mississippi Avenue, Atlantic City; Saint Monica Parish, 108 N. Pennsylvania Avenue, Atlantic City; and Holy Spirit Parish, 631 Market Street, Camden will have been closed and will be transferred to the financial account the newly established Parish of Saint Monica.

This DECREED becomes effective on July 1, 2015.

If a person considers himself or herself aggrieved by this administrative DECREED, that person is within his or her canonical rights to seek revocation or emendation according to the norms of canon 1734 and to make hierarchical recourse according to the norm of canon 1737.

I instruct that this DECREED be communicated immediately to the parishioners of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine Parish, Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish, Saint Michael Parish, and Saint Monica Parish by their respective pastors and administrators. This DECREED is likewise to be published immediately in the Catholic Star Herald and on the diocesan website. All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given in Atlantic City, on this 5th day of June, in the Year of Our Lord, 2015.

Bishop of Camden