



HIS EXCELLENCY
MOST REVEREND MICHAEL W. FISHER
By the Grace of God and the Authority of the Apostolic See
BISHOP OF BUFFALO

**DECREE THE ESTABLISHING OUR LADY OF CZESTOCHOWA PERSONAL
PARISH, CHEEKTOWAGA AS A TERRITORIAL PARISH AND MERGING ST.
BERNARD PARISH, BUFFALO AND ITS TERRITORY INTO, OUR LADY OF
CZESTOCHOWA, CHEEKTOWAGA**

THE FACTS

Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish was founded in 1922 for the Polish people of the Diocese of Buffalo living in the area of Clinton Street on the boarder of the City of Buffalo and Cheektowaga. This parish has never been assigned territorial boundaries, thus being established for a certain community of the faithful according to canon 216 §1 *CIC/17*. Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish, along with St. Casimir Parish, has served the Polish population of this section of Buffalo for over one hundred years.

St. Bernard Parish, founded on 6 August 1906 as a territorial parish for the sixty families of Germans and some Irish, was established as a means to minister to the needs of the community who did not come from Polish ancestry. Indeed, in 1942, communication from the parish boasted of serving not only Germans and Irish, but also Slovaks, French, Scotch, Syrian, and Russians. For years, the parish of St. Bernard served those in the same area of St. Casimir and Our Lady of Czestochowa who were seeking worship and communal contact in a language other than Polish. Again, the 1942 communication previously mentioned joyfully recognized the St. Bernard Parish community as a place where even Polish and German men were found working together while their countries were at war in Europe.

The land upon which the church of St. Bernard currently stands was once a part of the Buffalo Creek Reservation of Indians. Through a number of transactions, it was finally sold to St. Bernard Parish on 20 August 1906. A combination church/school building was finished in 1907, and the first parish Mass was celebrated there by the founding Pastor, Reverend William Bernet, on Christmas day at midnight in 1907. Since then, the parish has known many renovations and even a new church building which was completed in 1954.

In 2012, St. Casimir Parish was reduced to quasi-parish status. It continues to operate as a quasi-personal parish for those of Polish ancestry within the territorial boundaries of St. Bernard Parish. This change in status allows St. Casimir Parish to maintain its own sacramental records and operate independently of St. Bernard territorial parish. The status of St. Casimir is unaltered by the current decree.

In September of 2022, St. Bernard Parish was included in Family #32 as part of the Road to Renewal program.

The Road to Renewal has allowed the diocese to gain a more realistic picture of the financial and sacramental situations in its parishes. St. Bernard Parish has been identified as a community that could benefit by being joined with the community of believers who worship at Our Lady of Czestochowa just over the boarder in Cheektowaga. Additionally, due to our need to amass a substantial sum of money to settle numerous civil claims in Federal Bankruptcy Court, the possibility of alienating this property has also been suggested. This was discussed with members of the Chancery and especially with the Reverend Bryan Zielenieski, Vicar for the Renewal. As a result of these conversations, I hereby issue the following decree.

THE LAW

Because a parish is a public juridic person (cc. 116, 515 §3) and therefore established perpetually (c. 120), it can only be extinguished by legitimate authority according to the norm of law. Canon 515 §2 states, "It is only for the diocesan bishop to erect, suppress, or alter parishes. He is neither to erect, suppress, nor alter notably parishes, unless he has heard the presbyteral council."

Unstated in this norm is the requirement for at least a just cause in augmenting the structure of a parish. As a parish is defined in law as "a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (c. 515 §1), the focus of such augmentation is primarily concerned with the pastoral care of a group of people and only secondarily interested in specific worship sites. Thus, a merger of parishes falls under the governing authority of the diocesan bishop in accord with canon 374 §1.