



Decree Of Parish Merger
St. Francis–St. Mary Parish, Petersville
Holy Family Catholic Community Parish, Middletown
July 1, 2026

Beginning on February 11, 2026, the parish leadership of Holy Family Catholic Community of Middleton Parish and St. Francis-St. Mary Parish began a process to consider whether the two parishes would ask to be merged into a single parish entity. The parishes have shared a pastor and expenses since July of 2016. In 2020, because of the COVID epidemic, the number of parishioners in St. Francis-St. Mary Parish severely declined. Even after the end of the epidemic, the numbers did not increase and as a result, St. Francis-St. Mary parishioners have continued to share expenses and staff with Holy Family Catholic Community Parish. The two parish churches are within nine miles (14.5 km) of one another. Parishioners of both parishes have successfully cooperated in a variety of ministry efforts led by their common pastor. However, St. Francis-St. Mary Parish is now facing severe financial difficulties despite good faith efforts to engage new parishioners, increase income, and reduce parish costs.

After consultation with the Vicariate Delegate, Deacon Christopher Yeung, the pastor, Father Michael Rubeling, received permission to begin public consultation with the parishioners of both parishes to determine whether the two parishes should enter a merger. Beginning on April 22, 2026, the pastor and members of the parish leadership met with parishioners of St. Mary-St. Francis Parish on eight separate occasions and invited all parishioners to participate in considering the possibility of a parish merger. Parishioners were also invited to provide feedback during these sessions. The parish leadership used this information to craft a plan to address concerns presented by the parishioners. The parishioners expressed some sorrow

about the loss of the parish name of St Mary's due to the merger. However, these same parishioners understood the reasons for the parish merger and were grateful for the clarity this decision provided. Nevertheless, most of the parishioner concerns centered around what should be done with St. Mary's church building after the merger was completed rather than the question of merging the parishes themselves.

Currently, the building and campus costs for St. Mary's Church continue in the amount of \$98,679 per year. The cemetery at St. Mary's campus is 5.3 acres and requires \$5,779 per year for perpetual care. Currently the amount of money in the perpetual care fund is \$80,800. The buildings are in poor condition and have \$643,071 in immediate capital needs. This amount will increase to \$901,577 in five years. The annual capital reserve funding requirement is \$66,625. The number of parishioners attending Mass at St. Francis-St. Mary Parish has declined from 292 in 2011, to 104 in 2019. The offertory of the parish has declined from \$266,000 to \$166,000 during that same period. Since 2016, the parishioners of St. Mary and St. Francis have shared in the pastoral care, formation, and sacraments with Holy Family Parish, which has resulted in Holy Family Parish being responsible for an increasing share of these expenses.

On April 1, 2026, the pastor, with the full support of parish leadership, requested that the Archbishop of Baltimore merge the two parishes. Specifically, that St. Francis-St. Mary Parish enter into an extinctive merger with Holy Family Catholic Community Parish.

The Presbyteral Council received information about the proposed merger prior to their discussion on the matter at their regularly scheduled meeting on June 16, 2026. In accordance with canons 50, 120 §1, 121, and the requirements of canon 515 §2, the proposal to canonically merge St. Francis-St. Mary Parish into Holy Family Catholic Community Parish was formally presented to the Presbyteral Council on June 16, 2026, for the required canonical consultation. After carefully reviewing and discussing the materials related to the merger, the members gave their unanimous support for the proposal. The Regional Delegate for the area, Deacon Christopher Yeung, also indicated his complete support for the proposed merger.

The following facts regarding St. Francis-St. Mary Parish constitute the reasons, in summary, for the extinctive merger of St. Francis-St. Mary Parish into Holy Family Catholic Community Parish (canon 51):

- The number of registered Catholic households within the boundaries of St. Francis-St. Mary Parish has declined from 325 in 2010, to 193 households in 2025;

- The number of persons attending Mass at St. Francis-St. Mary Parish has declined from 366 in 2004, to around 85 in 2024;
- The number of sacraments received at St. Francis-St. Mary Parish has declined from 16 baptisms in 2010, to 2 in 2019, with the number of confirmations and being 30 and the number of weddings being 28 during the same 10-year period;
- Parish income has continued to decline despite sharing expenses for a pastor and staff with Holy Family Catholic Community Parish since 2016. Operating income has declined from \$307,718 in 2010, to \$209,109 in 2019, a decrease of 32%;
- The parish needs all its current offertory to meet the costs of building operations and the annual recommended facilities reserve, leaving no funds available to support ministry;
- The remaining unrestricted assets for St. Francis-St. Mary Parish now total less than \$48,632 and are insufficient to meet the needs of current operations;
- The parish is 5 miles (8 kilometers) from Holy Family Catholic Community Parish; and
- Holy Family Catholic Community Parish has sufficient facilities to accommodate the parishioners and ministries of St. Francis-St. Mary Church.

From these facts, considered as a whole, it is my opinion that left to itself, St. Francis-St. Mary Parish will only continue to decline with the resultant diminishing of pastoral ministry and sacramental life. Merging with Holy Family Catholic Community Parish will allow the greatest opportunity to continue and even strengthen the ministries which are presently offered for the parishioners of St. Francis-St. Mary Parish.

Having heard all who have an interest in this matter, including the opinion of the Presbyteral Council who were properly convened according to law and voted on this matter in my presence, I believe the reasons listed above in this decree, taken together, establish a just cause for the extinctive merger of the St. Francis-St. Mary Parish into Holy Family Catholic Community Parish. As a result, I do hereby decree that St. Francis-St. Mary Parish is to be merged into Holy Family Catholic Community Parish, Baltimore, effective July 1, 2026.

Boundaries

The Boundaries of Holy Family Catholic Community Parish shall reflect the current outside boundaries of the two parishes into the merged parish.

Assets and Liabilities

Until the issuance of a subsequent decree, the temporal goods, assets, and liabilities under civil law of the civilly incorporated St. Mary-St. Francis Parish and the civilly incorporated Holy Family Catholic Community Parish, all under the canonical administration of the pastor of Holy Family Catholic Community Parish, shall nonetheless remain separate and distinct. Furthermore, I order the sequestration pro tempore of the temporal goods and assets of each civil corporation for the exclusive use of meeting the debts and liabilities of their respective civil corporations (cf. can. 1496 §1).

Status of Churches

While St. Mary Church remains a sacred edifice to which the faithful have the right of entry under canon 1214, Holy Family Catholic Community Church will continue its designation as the parish church for the merged parishes.

Sacramental Registers and Other Parish Records

The parish registers for St. Francis-St. Mary Parish are to be closed as of July 1, 2026. Any entries after that date in the registries of Holy Family Catholic Community Parish must indicate at which church the sacramental event took place. All closed registers shall be kept and maintained by Holy Family Catholic Community Parish or sent to the Archdiocesan Archives in accordance with Archdiocesan policy. The parish records (financial, etc.) of the merging parishes will become the property and responsibility of Holy Family Catholic Community parish on July 1, 2026.

Parish Seal

All parish seals shall be the property of Holy Family Catholic Community Parish beginning July 1, 2026.

Effective Date and Publication of this Decree

This decree is effective July 1, 2026. Its official notification is its publication on the website of the Archdiocese of Baltimore on Sunday, June 21, 2026.

I direct that the Pastor of St. Francis-St. Mary Parish and Holy Family Catholic Community Parish announce at all Masses on the weekend of June 20-21, 2026, that this Decree has been published on the website of the Archdiocese of Baltimore (www.archbalt.org). I ask all the faithful of the new parish to work together to build a thriving, evangelizing community reflective of their rich histories in the years ahead.

Any member of St. Francis-St. Mary Parish who claims to have been aggrieved by this Decree has the right to seek its revocation or emendation (canon 1734). This request must be made in writing and postmarked no later than July 3, 2026, to the Most Reverend Archbishop of Baltimore, Catholic Center, 320 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, MD 21201.

Given at the Curia of the Archdiocese of Baltimore on this 17th day of June, in the Year of Our Lord, 2026.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William E. Lori". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend William E. Lori, S.T.D.
Archbishop of Baltimore

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Diane L. Barr". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dr. Diane L. Barr, JD, JCD, PhD
Chancellor