



## DECREE

In the name of the Lord. Amen.

I, Jeffrey Joseph Walsh, by the grace of God and the favor of the Apostolic See, Bishop of Gaylord, exercising my pastoral office in accord with can. 381 §1 and in virtue of can. 515 §2, and having observed the requirements of cann. 50, 51, 120–123, 127, and 166, hereby issue the following decree.

### **I. Parishes Concerned**

This decree concerns the parishes of:

- St. Helen located in St. Helen and
- St. Joseph located in West Branch,

both of which are public juridic persons in the Church (cf. can. 515 §3).

### **II. Nature of the Canonical Act**

After careful consideration, I hereby decree the extinctive union of these parishes (cf. can. 121), such that:

- St. Helen is united to St. Joseph;
- St. Helen is extinguished;
- St. Joseph remains as the sole juridic person.

### **III. Determination of the Just Cause (ad rem)**

In accord with can. 515 §2, a parish cannot be notably altered except for a just cause. This cause must be specific to the parish in question and not merely general or diocesan in scope.

Having weighed the concrete circumstances of these particular parishes, I determine that a just cause exists, based on the following converging and interrelated factors:

1. Pastoral Care of the Faithful: the current configuration of these two parishes no longer adequately provides for the stable and effective cura animarum, in that:

- The current juridic structure, while historically justified, has become pastorally ineffective in these specific circumstances, and its continuation would impede rather than promote the proper care of souls.
- the availability of clergy is insufficient to ensure consistent pastoral presence and sacramental life in both locations as presently structured.
- The geographic proximity of the parishes, together with patterns of mobility among the faithful, results in a substantial overlap of pastoral activity, such that maintaining separate juridic identities no longer corresponds to the lived ecclesial reality of these communities.

## 2. Objective Condition of the Communities Themselves (ad rem)

These conditions are not abstract or merely diocesan trends, but are verified in these specific parishes, as demonstrated by:

- sacramental registers, financial reports, demographic data, geographic isolation, duplication of services;
- the inability of each parish individually to sustain essential ministries.

## 3. Pastoral Ineffectiveness of the Current Structure

The maintenance of two separate juridic persons in the present circumstances hinders rather than promotes the good of the faithful, leading to:

- fragmentation of limited resources,
- diminished pastoral vitality,
- and instability in leadership and ministry.

## 4. Consideration and Rejection of Less Drastic Alternatives

In accord with ecclesiastical jurisprudence, extinctive union is not undertaken lightly. The following alternatives were examined:

- clustering or shared pastorates,
- reduction of Mass schedules,
- targeted pastoral revitalization efforts.

These measures were either already attempted or judged insufficient to provide a stable, long-term pastoral solution in this specific case.

## 5. Positive Pastoral Benefit

The proposed union is expected to:

- strengthen sacramental life,
- ensure more consistent pastoral leadership,
- and foster a more viable and unified parish community.

Taken together, these factors constitute a true and proportionate just cause, directly related to the parishes in question, and ordered to the *salus animarum*, which is the supreme law of the Church (cf. can. 1752).

## IV. Observance of Procedural Requirements

Before issuing this decree, I have:

1. Gathered the Necessary Information and Proofs (cf. can. 50), including pastoral, sacramental, financial, and demographic data.
2. Heard Those Concerned, insofar as possible, including members of the faithful and others whose rights could be affected.
3. Consulted the Presbyteral Council for Validity:
  - The Council was lawfully convoked (cf. can. 166),
  - Provided with all relevant information in advance,
  - And consulted regarding this specific proposed modification (cf. can. 127).
4. Their counsel was carefully considered.

## V. Juridic Effects

As a result of this extinctive union:

- The juridic person St. Helen is extinguished,
- St. Joseph succeeds to all juridic relations (cf. can. 121).

## VI. Membership and Territory

St. Joseph comprises:

- In addition to its current faithful, all the Christian faithful residing within the territories previously belonging to St. Helen.

The territorial boundaries are therefore altered to include all of the territory that was formerly that of St. Helen.

## VII. Parish Church and Worship Sites

The parish church of St. Joseph is designated as: St. Joseph

St. Helen is therefore designated as a limited-use church within the territory of St. Joseph parish and will follow the Diocese of Gaylord Protocols for a limited-use church.

## VIII. Temporal Goods and Obligations

In accord with cann. 121–123:

- Ownership of all temporal goods, rights, and obligations of the former parish, St. Helen passes to St. Joseph.
- This disposition respects:
  - the principle that goods follow the people,
  - and the intentions of founders and donors, which remain binding.

## IX. Effective Date

This decree takes effect on:  
July 1, 2026

## X. Notification and Right of Recourse

This decree is to be lawfully communicated to all concerned.

In accord with cann. 1734–1739, hierarchical recourse may be made within the peremptory time limits established by law, beginning from the date of lawful notification.

## XI. Publication and Archival Record

This decree shall be published through the website of the diocese and preserved in the diocesan archives.

Given at the Chancery of Gaylord, on this 1st day of June, 2026.



Christina Ihlenfeldt  
Chancellor



Most Reverend Jeffrey J. Walsh  
Bishop of Gaylord