



SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE

CATHOLIC PARISH

Frequently Asked Questions

Decree Merging St. Stephen Parish into St. Thomas the Apostle Parish

Introduction

This FAQ is meant to help answer common questions about the decree merging St. Stephen Parish into St. Thomas the Apostle Parish. The decree formally aligns the canonical structure of the parish with the pastoral reality we have already been living as one parish family. If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact the parish office.

1. What did the bishop's decree do?

The decree issued by Bishop Walkowiak formally **merges St. Stephen Catholic Parish into St. Thomas the Apostle Parish**. This means that St. Stephen Parish is no longer a separate parish, and its parishioners, territory, and resources are now part of **St. Thomas the Apostle Parish**.

2. Why is this happening?

This merger follows the **Rooted in Christ pastoral planning process** in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, which asked parishes to consider how best to strengthen the Church's mission for the future. Over the past year, St. Stephen and St. Thomas have already been walking together in faith. We now share staff, councils, ministries, and a common mission. The bishop's decree simply ensures that our **canonical structure reflects the reality we are already living as one parish family**.

3. Does this mean St. Stephen Church is closing immediately?

No. The decree concerns the **parish community**, not the immediate use of the church building. Because the parish still owns the property, **Mass will continue to be celebrated at St. Stephen Church on Thursdays at 7:00 PM**, with confessions from **5:45–6:45 PM**, as has been our current practice.

4. What will eventually happen to the St. Stephen property?

No final decision has been made yet. The decree leaves the **use of St. Stephen Church to the discretion of the pastor**. At some point in the future, the parish and the diocese will determine the best path forward for the property. Here is what the Rooted In Christ plan specifically says about the property:

The parish of St. Stephen in Grand Rapids will merge with St. Thomas the Apostle in Grand Rapids... The buildings at St. Stephen will continue to be used for religious purposes until other arrangements are made (RIC, 23).

When decisions are made, they will be communicated openly to the parish.

5. Are St. Stephen parishioners now parishioners of St. Thomas?

Yes. As part of this process, parishioners from St. Stephen have already been invited to **register at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish**, and many have done so. Those who have not yet registered are warmly invited to do so so that the parish can better serve them pastorally.

6. What happens to the history of St. Stephen Parish?

The history of St. Stephen Parish remains an important part of the life of the Church in our community. Sacramental records from St. Stephen Parish will be preserved and maintained at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, while continuing to be identified historically as records of St. Stephen Parish.

Fr. Stephen and the Welcome & Transition Team have also been working with the diocesan archives to determine which important historical items from St. Stephen should be preserved by the diocesan archives and which will be housed at St. Thomas. In some cases, certain sacred items may find a new home in other parishes within our diocese so they can continue to be used in the life and worship of the Church.

7. How will the legacy of St. Stephen be honored?

As our parish moves forward together, we are hopeful that some elements from St. Stephen will be incorporated into the St. Thomas sanctuary, helping ensure that the sacrifices and faith of that community continue to bear fruit in the life of our united parish. We also continue to entrust our parish to the intercession of St. Thomas the Apostle and St. Stephen, namely, as our patrons are mentioned during the Eucharistic Prayer.

8. Why wasn't a new parish name created?

Because St. Thomas is the parish that is canonically continuing, the bishop determined that the parish would remain **St. Thomas the Apostle Parish**. At the same time, the legacy of St. Stephen Parish will remain an important part of the history and identity of our parish community.

9. Who made this decision?

The decision was made by **Bishop Walkowiak**, who has the authority in canon law to establish, merge, or alter parishes in the diocese. The process followed the [Rooted in Christ](#) pastoral planning process and was formally requested by Fr. Stephen in January 2026 after careful pastoral discernment. The request was made with the recommendation of both the Pastoral Council and the Finance Council of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish. Each of these councils includes members who were formerly parishioners of St. Stephen Parish.

10. What does this mean for the future of our parish?

The merger allows us to move forward **clearly as one parish family**, focused on the mission of the Church: proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and forming disciples of Jesus Christ. We are grateful for the faith of the generations who built both St. Stephen and St. Thomas, and we look forward to continuing that mission together.