



DECREE

EFFECTING THE RELEGATION OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP CHURCH (LEWIS RUN) TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

History

On April 26, 1946, Bishop John Mark Gannon split the territory of St. Bernard of Clairvaux Parish, Bradford; thereby creating the two new parishes of St. Francis of Assisi in Bradford and Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Lewis Run. Masses in Lewis Run were initially held on the upper floor of a barn, which also functioned as a dance hall, and later in a little theater on Main Street. A parish church was finally constructed in 1951. On February 13, 2017, Bishop Lawrence Persico merged Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish into St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Bradford. The former parish church became a secondary church with mission status, so that weekend Masses continued to be celebrated there.

Current Situation

The local community in the Bradford area has been engaged in regional pastoral planning since 2021. As a result of that process, on March 1, 2023, St. Francis of Assisi Parish merged back into St. Bernard of Clairvaux Parish. At that time permission for weekend Masses at Our Mother of Perpetual Help church was revoked. The regular 11:30 am Mass was moved to St. Francis of Assisi church. Our Mother of Perpetual Help church has not been used for Mass since that date.

At a meeting on April 20, 2023, the Finance Council of St. Bernard of Clairvaux Parish consented to a proposal from the pastor to petition for the relegation of Our Mother of Perpetual Help church to profane but not sordid use. The Pastoral Council did the same on April 25, 2023. Being the only person who can legitimately claim rights concerning the church edifice, the pastor has given his consent (cf. can. 1222 §2) and on May 5, 2023 the pastor formally petitioned me to relegate Our Mother of Perpetual Help church in Lewis Run to profane but not sordid use.

The required grave cause suggesting that the church no longer be used for divine worship (cf. c. 1222 §2) arises from the cumulative effect of the following factors:

- St. Bernard of Clairvaux parish is currently responsible for the financial upkeep of three churches (St. Bernard of Clairvaux church, St. Francis of Assisi church, and Our Mother of Perpetual Help church). In the last year, the parish has seen a net loss of nearly \$600,000.

Although much of this is due to the loss of market value of investments, these losses are not expected to recover quickly.

- The annual cost to maintain Our Mother of Perpetual Help church is \$7700, including utilities and insurance but not including missalettes and organist. Being relieved of this annual expense will be of some benefit, but the greater benefit will be in reducing the amount of maintenance work by eliminating one of three properties that require upkeep.
- The population of the Bradford area in general and Lewis Run in particular continues to decline.
- St. Bernard of Clairvaux parish will need to invest significantly in the renovation of the parish church. The cost is expected to approach \$2 million. Any expenses from the upkeep of Our Mother of Perpetual Help church that can be eliminated will provide resources that can be directed back to the renovation of the parish church and the promotion of the pastoral life of the parish.
- There is no pastoral need for Our Mother of Perpetual Help church. All of the sacraments and devotions are available at the parish church.

The pastor attests that relegating Our Mother of Perpetual Help church to profane use is not likely to result in any harm to the good of souls (cf. can. 1222 §). All of the sacraments are readily available at the parish church in Bradford.

The pastor is aware of the obligation to see to it that Our Mother of Perpetual Help church, if relegated, not be given over to sordid use.

This information was shared with the members of the Presbyteral Council on May 10, 2023. Having considered the matter attentively, the members of the Council unanimously recommended to me that I grant the petition of the pastor to relegate Our Mother of Perpetual Help church in Lewis Run to profane but not sordid use.

All of the requirements of canons 50, 51, 127, 166, and 515 have been fulfilled.

Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the best possible means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux parish, while considering that regularly scheduled Sunday Masses have not been celebrated in the church since March of 2023; that the obligation of the parish to maintain three separate buildings for divine worship is simply unsustainable; that the anticipated renovations of the parish church are expected to significantly deplete the parishes reserves; that the population of the Bradford area and Lewis Run in particular continues to decline; that there is no pastoral need for the church in Lewis Run; that the pastor and members of the pastoral and finance councils have petitioned for the relegation of the church; and that there does not appear to be any probable detriment to the good of souls, I judge that the aforementioned reasons, when considered cumulatively, constitute the grave cause required by the law (cf. can. 1222 §2) for the relegation of the church to profane but not sordid use, and I hereby decree the following:

Our Mother of Perpetual Help church in Lewis Run is relegated to profane but not sordid use, according to the norm of can. 1222 §2.

This decree is effective on Saturday, July 1, 2023, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Erie
on this 14th day of June, 2023

+Lawrence T. Persico

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of Erie

Christopher J. Singer

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor