



## DECREE

### EFFECTING THE RELEGATION OF SAINT ELIZABETH CHURCH (CORRY) TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

#### History

In response to a petition for a German-speaking parish in Corry Pennsylvania, the Bishop of Erie appointed the first pastor of Saint Elizabeth parish in Corry on August 23, 1874. The present Saint Elizabeth church, replacing the original, was dedicated on August 27, 1950. It served as the parish church until February 13, 2017 when, due to a number of factors, including a declining number of parishioners and clergy and the absence of a continued pastoral need for a German speaking parish, Saint Elizabeth parish was merged into Saint Thomas the Apostle parish. At that time, Saint Elizabeth church became a secondary church without mission status of Saint Thomas the Apostle parish, resulting in the end of regularly scheduled Sunday Masses. Since then, the only regularly scheduled Masses have been for the annual titular solemnity of the church. There have been fifteen (15) funerals, one (1) wedding, and no baptisms in the church since February 13, 2017.

#### Current Situation

According to the law, in order to relegate a church to profane use or even to close it permanently, it is necessary that there be some grave reason(s) suggesting that the church no longer be used for divine worship. Often the gravity of the cause becomes evident when a number of factors are considered together. Can. 1222 §2 states:

*Where other grave causes suggest that a church no longer be used for divine worship, the diocesan bishop, after having heard the presbyteral council, can relegate it to profane but not sordid use, with the consent of those who legitimately claim rights for themselves in the church, and provided that the good of souls suffers no detriment thereby.*

Since February 13, 2017, Saint Thomas the Apostle parish in Corry has been responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of two church edifices: the parish church of Saint Thomas the Apostle as well as the former parish church – now secondary church without mission status – namely, Saint Elizabeth church.



Since February 2017, the parish church has adequately served to meet the pastoral needs of the parish. As such, the Reverend G. Dilworth Davis, pastor, attests to the fact that there is no pastoral need for Saint Elizabeth church.

Furthermore, Saint Thomas the Apostle parish does not have the financial resources to adequately maintain both churches. The parish is currently spending an average of approximately \$60,000 per year in excess of income. Of that, approximately \$18,000 per year is required for the regular maintenance of Saint Elizabeth church.

If the current rate of spending were to remain constant, the unrestricted reserves of the parish would be depleted in approximately seven (7) years. Beginning next year, however, the parish will lose \$29,000 in annual rental income due to the loss of a renewed contract with the Head Start program. The situation will worsen in 2023 when expenses for Saint Thomas cemetery (\$12,000 annually) will begin to be paid from the operational budget when funds set aside for the cemetery are depleted. It is likely that a significant part of the remaining parish reserves will be needed to establish an endowment for the perpetual care of the cemetery. The result of these additional factors is that the parish's unrestricted reserves are likely to be exhausted in fewer than five (5) years rather than seven (7).

The number of area Catholics continues to decline. The parish hopes to redirect assets which would otherwise be spent to maintain St. Elizabeth church toward efforts for evangelization, life-long faith formation, and youth outreach, in the hope of furthering the mission of the parish and reversing the current negative demographic trend.

The pastor attests that relegating Saint Elizabeth church to profane use is not likely to result in any harm to the good of souls (cf. can. 1222 §). All of the sacraments and devotions are available at the parish church, only a few blocks away. The pastor is also aware that Saint Elizabeth church, if relegated, cannot be given over to sordid use.

In May of 2018, the Presbyteral Council had earlier considered the pastor's first request for relegation of Saint Elizabeth church, but the members had determined at that time that they did not have enough information to offer an informed opinion on the matter. A more complete understanding of the situation was provided by the pastor and shared with the parish finance council and the parish pastoral council. At a joint meeting but by separate vote on August 5, 2019, those councils – fully aware of the additional information – unanimously asked the pastor once again to petition that Saint Elizabeth church be relegated to profane but not sordid use.

Being the only person who can legitimately claim rights concerning the church edifice, the pastor has given his consent (cf. can. 1222 §2).

The new information and revised petition were shared with the members of the Presbyteral Council on October 3, 2019. Having considered the matter attentively on this second occasion, the members of the Council unanimously recommended to me that I grant the revised petition of the pastor to relegate Saint Elizabeth church in Corry to profane but not sordid use.

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

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Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the best possible means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of Saint Thomas the Apostle parish, while considering that Saint Elizabeth church no longer serves as a parish church, that regularly scheduled Masses ceased there in 2017; that the church has been only used for only fifteen (15) funerals and one (1) wedding since February of 2017; that the obligation of maintaining two separate church buildings is contributing to an unsustainable financial burden on Saint Thomas the Apostle parish; that anticipated additional losses of revenue and increase in expenses are likely to reduce significantly the parish's unrestricted assets; that the parish could redirect to other purposes – e.g., to the promotion of pastoral life, ministry toward the young, family-oriented ministries, life-long faith formation, and evangelization – resources currently used to maintain Saint Elizabeth church; that there is no pastoral need for the church edifice; that the pastor and members of the pastoral council 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:

**Saint Elizabeth church of Saint Thomas the Apostle parish in Corry is relegated to profane but not sordid use, according to the norm of can. 1222 §2.**

This decree is effective on the First Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2019 anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery  
of the Diocese of Erie  
on this 30th day of October, 2019

*+Lawrence T. Persico*

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

*Sr. Kathleen Dietz, FSO*

Sister Kathleen Dietz, FSO, STD  
Vice-Chancellor