



## DECREE

### EFFECTING THE RELEGATION OF SAINT JOSEPH HUSBAND OF MARY CHURCH (ANITA) TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

#### History

Saints Cosmas and Damian parish in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania was established in 1885 as the territorial parish for the Punxsutawney area and has continued to serve the Latin Rite Catholics of that locale. Shortly after the parish's establishment, various other Catholic communities in that same area began to be erected for immigrant groups.

In 1886, the community at Saint Adrian church in Delancey was established as a mission of Saints Cosmas and Damian parish to serve Catholics in Delancey, Walston, and Anita. Eleven years later, in 1897, the community at Saint Anthony church in Walston was erected as a separate and distinct parish, which it remained until 1922. The community at Saint Joseph Husband of Mary church in Anita was separated in 1903 from Saint Adrian mission. It was rejoined to Saint Adrian in 1911, was separated again in 1947, and joined once again to Saint Adrian in 1966.

All three of these communities functioned occasionally as parishes and at other times as missions. Throughout much of their history, their canonical status had been unclear. In 1966, the last resident priests left Delancey and Anita and those communities came under the care of the priest in Walston. The last resident priest left Walston in 2006. After that, all three communities were placed under the care of the pastor of Saints Cosmas and Damian parish in Punxsutawney. In a May 31, 2010 decree of the then-Bishop of Erie, the juridic status of all three communities was finally and definitively clarified: the faithful are all parishioners of Saints Cosmas and Damian parish in Punxsutawney, and each of the churches in turn is a secondary church belonging to and under the pastoral care of Saints Cosmas and Damian parish.

The current Saint Joseph Husband of Mary church [hereafter, Saint Joseph church] was constructed in Anita in 1953. No longer served by a resident pastor since 1966, the regular celebration of Sunday Masses there ceased in 2006. By virtue of the aforementioned decree of May 31, 2010 (effective July 1, 2010), its status was lawfully clarified to be a mission church belonging to Saints Cosmas and Damian parish. Since 2010, the church has seldom been used except for an annual Mass on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Since 2017, there have been no funerals, weddings, or baptisms in the church.



## 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 July 1, 2010, Saints Cosmas and Damian parish has been responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of four church edifices: the parish church of Saints Cosmas and Damian as well as the three mission churches of Saint Adrian, Saint Anthony, and Saint Joseph.

Saints Cosmas and Damian parish does not have the financial resources to maintain all four churches in a manner suitable for the worthy celebration of the sacraments. The parish is currently operating in deficit spending, with an average deficit in the last three years of slightly over \$25,000 per year. If all were to remain the same, the projected deficit for the fiscal year 2019-2020 would increase to \$50,100. The parish has a substantial reserved fund which is restricted for the parish school, but the parish's unrestricted funds available for maintaining church edifices are actually rather limited. At the projected rate of deficit spending, those unrestricted reserves would be depleted in slightly more than two years.

Approximately \$19,000 per year is required for the regular maintenance of Saint Joseph church. The building is also in need of a new boiler, with cost estimates around \$30,000. These repairs would further reduce the unrestricted assets of the parish.

The general population as well as the Catholic population of the Punxsutawney area continues to decline. As a result, there is diminished need for multiple churches. Furthermore, smaller weekly offertory collections are resulting in decreased income.

The parish finance council voted unanimously on October 30, 2019 to recommend to the pastor that he petition the Bishop to relegate Saint Joseph church to profane but not sordid use. The members of the parish pastoral council unanimously recommended the same on November 4, 2019.

Being the only person who can legitimately claim rights concerning the church edifice, the pastor has given his consent (cf. can. 1222 §2). He attests that relegating Saint Joseph church to profane use is not likely to result in any harm to the good of souls (cf. can. 1222 §2). All of the sacraments and devotions are available at the parish church. The pastor is also aware of the obligation to see to it that Saint Joseph church, if relegated, not be given over to sordid use.

This information was shared with the members of the Presbyteral Council on November 7, 2019. Having considered the matter attentively, the members of the Council unanimously recommended to me that I grant the petition of the pastor to relegate Saint Joseph church in Anita 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 Saints Cosmas and Damian parish, while considering that Saint Joseph church no longer serves as a parish church, that regularly scheduled Masses ceased there in 2006; that no funerals or weddings have been celebrated there in recent years; that the obligation of maintaining four separate church buildings is contributing to an unsustainable financial burden on Saints Cosmas and Damian parish; that the needed replacement of the building's boiler will further reduce the parish's unrestricted assets; that there is no pastoral need for the church edifice; that the pastor has petitioned for the relegation of the church with the unanimous support of the members of the pastoral council and the finance council; 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 Joseph Husband of Mary church in Anita, being a secondary church of Saints Cosmas and Damian parish in Punxsutawney, is relegated to profane but not sordid use, according to the norm of can. 1222 §2.**

This decree is effective on January 26, 2020, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery  
of the Diocese of Erie  
on this 15th day of January, 2020

*+Lawrence T. Persico*

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

*Christopher J. Singer*

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL  
Chancellor