DECREE

EFFECTING THE RELEGATION OF SAINT FRANCIS CHURCH, BRADFORD
TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

History

Immediately following the Second World War, Bishop John Mark Gannon decided to erect Saint Francis Parish for those Catholics living in the sixth ward of Bradford. After celebrating parochial Masses at various locations in the city, enough funds were finally raised to begin building the church on February 26, 1950. The first Mass in the church was celebrated on Christmas Eve in 1950. The Parish continued as a standalone community through the recent and significant population decline of Bradford until February 1, 2023, when Bishop Lawrence Persico decreed the merger of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and Saint Francis of Assisi, both in Bradford, citing a need to create a stronger and more sustainable means to provide for the care of souls in the whole Bradford area. Following an extensive renovation to Saint Bernard church, Saint Francis was designated a secondary church without mission status on August 7, 2025.

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.*

Following the diocesan-wide efforts to provide a pastoral plan initiated by Bishop Lawrence Persico in 2015, the Catholic community in Bradford has undertaken an extensive period of self-study and planning to best provide the full care of souls to the faithful in their city. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux Parish is currently responsible for two church buildings, one standalone social hall, and a former school building that serves as the parish office, rectory, and social hall. Significant investment is required in the Saint Francis church campus, including a new boiler system, asbestos remediation, parking lot repair, and a new security system because the church is not used except as required by law. These repairs would cost the parish an estimated $351,698.

The parish also has a parochial cemetery that requires significant investment in its perpetual care fund, which has been underfunded for many years. It requires repairs to the road within the cemetery and has an annual maintenance cost of $5,000 to remove the trees which fall on the road and gravestones. Spending the money required to repair Saint Francis and its related properties would be an unsustainable drain on the parish resources, prohibit the parish from adequately supporting the parish cemetery, and potentially leave little for the parish to fulfill its mission in Bradford.

Furthermore, the Bradford Regional Medical Center was the largest single employer in Bradford. Because of the shrinking demographics, the hospital determined that it was no longer viable and closed operations, requiring citizens to travel 22 miles to Olean, NY, to acquire medical services. This is also worsened by the fact that other major employers, Case and Zippo, also recently had significant layoffs of their employees. This has trapped the city in a negative cycle of losing employers, lowering population as people leave to seek work, and making remaining in Bradford unsustainable for other businesses as their clientele leaves.

In addition to the aforementioned parish expenses required, the annual expenses of maintaining the Saint Francis church campus have averaged $52,275.75. This is a significant drain of the assets of the parish for a building that is not regularly used and actively prohibits parish money from being used for evangelization and pastoral care. Any attempt to lease the property would change its tax-exempt status, which will immediately and significantly increase the annual tax bill of the parish.

Recognizing that the care of the Saint Francis church building will cause financial hardship as the parish continues to adapt to changing ministry requirements, on June 16, 2026, Father Jacquel, pastor, obtained the unanimous support of the parish pastoral council to petition for relegation; on June 18, 2026, the parish finance council also unanimously voted to petition that Saint Francis church be relegated to profane but not sordid use. Being the only person who can legitimately claim rights concerning the church edifice, Father Jacquel has given his consent (cf. can. 1222 §2). In his letter to Bishop Persico dated September 9, 2026, Father Jacquel petitioned the Bishop as such.

Father Jacquel attests that relegating Saint Francis church to profane use is not likely to result in harm to the good of souls (cf. can. 1222 §2). The parish church, Saint Bernard, is approximately 1.6 miles away, and is of sufficient size to accommodate the parishioners of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux Parish. Father Jacquel is also aware of the obligation to see to it that the church, if relegated, not be given over to sordid use.

The above information was shared with the members of the Presbyteral Council on September 16, 2026, at their regularly scheduled meeting held at Immaculate Heart of Mary in Mercer. Having considered the matter attentively, the members of the Council voted on whether to recommend to me that I grant the petition of the pastor to relegate Saint Francis church to profane but not sordid use. The vote was 12 members in favor and 2 opposed, with no abstentions.

All 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 Bernard of Clairvaux Parish, while considering that Saint Francis church no longer serves as a parish church; that there are several maintenance projects required to protect the safety of people who would attend Saint Francis; that the parish has a significant financial obligation to maintain the local cemetery; that the recent demographic decline in Bradford is expected to worsen due to the major employer closing; that there is no pastoral necessity for the church edifice; that the pastor and members of the finance and pastoral 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:

> **Saint Francis church of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux Parish in Bradford is relegated to profane but not sordid use, according to the norm of can. 1222 §2.**

This decree is effective November 20, 2026, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Erie
on this 23rd day of October, 2026

+Lawrence T. Persico

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

Joseph A. Petrone, Jr.

The Reverend Joseph A. Petrone, Jr., JCL
Assistant Chancellor