



DECREE

EFFECTING THE RELEGATION OF SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH (DUBOIS) TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

History

Saint Joseph parish in DuBois was established in 1893 as a personal parish for Catholics in the DuBois area of Lithuanian or Polish descent. The original Saint Joseph church was dedicated in 1894. Even with the 1912 creation of a separate parish in DuBois for Catholics of Polish descent, the number of Saint Joseph parishioners was still significant. A larger church was needed, and the present church was constructed in 1924. It served as the parish church until February 13, 2017 when, due to a number of factors, not the least of which were a declining number of parishioners and a declining number of clergy, Saint Joseph parish was merged into Saint Michael the Archangel parish. At that time, Saint Joseph church became a secondary church without mission status of Saint Michael the Archangel parish. Since then, the church has been open daily to the faithful for personal prayer, but the only regularly scheduled Masses have been for the annual titular solemnity of the church on March 19. There have been six (6) 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 Michael the Archangel parish in DuBois has been responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of two church edifices: the parish church of Saint Michael the Archangel as well as the former parish church – now secondary church without mission status – namely, Saint Joseph church.



Since February 2017, the parish church has adequately served to meet the pastoral needs of the parish. As such, the Reverend Monsignor Richard Siefer, pastor, attests to the fact that there is no pastoral need for Saint Joseph church. He does acknowledge that the church has strong connections to the Lithuanian heritage in DuBois, but is also aware that the serious responsibility for the preservation of that spiritual patrimony has been entrusted by decree of the Diocesan Bishop to Saint Michael the Archangel parish.

Furthermore, Saint Michael the Archangel parish does not have the financial resources to maintain both churches in a manner suitable for the worthy celebration of the sacraments. The parish is currently operating in deficit spending, with an average deficit of slightly over \$45,000 per year in the last two years. This figure itself is mitigated by the recent acquisition of a significant bequest, without which the average deficit would be nearer to \$70,000 per year. Of that, approximately \$12,500 per year is required for the regular maintenance of Saint Joseph church.

Even if no additional financial burdens were to be added to Saint Michael the Archangel parish's operational budget, the unrestricted reserves would be depleted in about ten years. There will, however, be additional financial burdens. The roof of Saint Joseph church will soon be in need of repair or replacement, with cost estimates ranging from \$75,000 to \$150,000. These repairs would significantly reduce the unrestricted assets of the parish. Furthermore, following the merger and the acquisition of financial obligations from the former Saint Joseph parish, Saint Michael the Archangel parish is now responsible for an increased annual assessment for Catholic education, currently at \$142,000 annually. The upkeep of two parish cemeteries annually costs \$30,000. Funds reserved for that purpose will soon be depleted, after which care will need to be provided from the operating budget.

The general population of the DuBois area, along with the number of area Catholics continues to decline. This in turn has led to less need for multiple churches and to smaller weekly offertory collections to support those same structures. Since the merger in 2017, parish offertory income has decreased by 10%. In an attempt to reverse or at least slow down this rate of demographic decline, the parish desires to redirect resources currently dedicated to maintaining Saint Joseph church. These funds could help support youth ministry, religious education, and life-long faith formation.

Both the parish finance council and the parish pastoral council, at a joint meeting but by separate vote on July 9, 2019, unanimously asked the pastor to petition that Saint Joseph 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 pastor 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 §). All of the sacraments and devotions are available at the parish church, seven blocks away. In addition, Saint Catherine of Siena church, which is the parish church of the territorial parish, is only one block away. 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 October 3, 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 DuBois 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 Michael the Archangel parish, while considering that Saint Joseph 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 six (6) 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 Michael the Archangel parish; that the anticipated repairs to the structure 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 Joseph 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 Joseph church of Saint Michael the Archangel parish in DuBois 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 23rd day of October, 2019

+Lawrence T. Persico

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

Christopher J. Singer

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor