



## DECREE

### EFFECTING THE RELEGATION OF SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA CHURCH (WALSTON) 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. The Catholic community in nearby Walston was organized in 1897 as Saint Anthony of Padua parish, with its parish church bearing the same name.

At various times, the community in Walston functioned as an independent parish and at other times as a mission, switching back and forth between the two. It remained a separate parish until 1922, when it seems to have again become part of Saints Cosmas and Damian parish. Some time after 1922, the community at Walston began to function again as a parish in its own right. Eventually, by 1966 the last resident priests left Delancey and Anita, and those faithful were placed under the care of the priest at Walston. When the last resident priest left Walston in 2006, all three communities were placed under the care of the pastor of Saints Cosmas and Damian parish in Punxsutawney, with their exact juridic status remaining largely unclear.

On May 31, 2010, the then-Bishop of Erie issued a decree clarifying the juridic status of all three communities: 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 Saints Cosmas and Damian parish. All of the temporal goods, liabilities, and assets were definitively transferred to Saints Cosmas and Damian parish, including ownership of all of the secondary churches.

Two of the parish's secondary churches were relegated to profane but not sordid use early in 2020. The parish's only remaining secondary church is Saint Anthony of Padua church in Walston. The regular celebration of Sunday Masses there ceased in 2006, and the church has seldom been used since. In the last seven years, there were five (5) funerals and no weddings or baptisms, and the only Mass regularly celebrated there was for the annual solemnity of the church's title.

#### Current Situation

According to the law, 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.*

Although the parish has a substantial reserved fund, it is restricted for the parish school. The parish's unrestricted funds available for maintaining church edifices, on the other hand, are actually rather limited. If nothing changes, at the projected rate of deficit spending, those unrestricted reserves would be depleted in approximately two years. The average annual costs of maintaining Saint Anthony church are almost \$22,000 per year, which form a significant part of the parish's average annual deficit of nearly \$45,000. The relegation of Saint Anthony church would provide some financial relief to the parish by decreasing the deficit, and the funds currently used to maintain Saint Anthony church could be redirected to support other pastoral initiatives.

The general population as well as the Catholic population of the Punxsutawney area continue to decline. As a result, there is diminished need for secondary churches, and the short distance between Walston and the parish church in Punxsutawney is no longer a burden with modern transportation.

Members of the parish pastoral council voted unanimously on January 5, 2021 to recommend to the pastor, Msgr. Joseph Riccardo, that he petition the Bishop to relegate Saint Anthony of Padua church to profane but not sordid use. Members of the finance council unanimously did the same on February 11, 2021. On February 15, 2021, the pastor formally presented his petition.

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 Anthony church to profane use is not likely to result in any harm to the good of souls (cf. can. 1222 §2), since the sacraments and devotions are available at the parish church only two miles away, and for years the faithful of Walston have worshipped weekly at the parish church. The pastor is also aware of the obligation to see to it that Saint Anthony of Padua church, if relegated, not be given over to sordid use.

This information was shared in advance with the members of the Presbyteral Council, which met on February 23, 2021. 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 Anthony of Padua church in Walston 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 Anthony of Padua church no longer serves as a parish church, that regularly scheduled Masses ceased there in 2006; that only five (5) funerals and no weddings or baptisms have been celebrated there in recent years; that the obligation of maintaining Saint Anthony church is contributing to an unsustainable financial burden on Saints Cosmas and Damian parish; that the funds used to maintain Saint Anthony church are needed to support other pastoral initiatives; 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.

Therefore, I hereby decree the following:

**Saint Anthony of Padua church in Walston, 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 May 3, 2021, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery  
of the Diocese of Erie  
on this 20th day of April, 2021

*+Lawrence T. Persico*

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

*Christopher J. Singer*

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL  
Chancellor