



## DECREE

### RELEGATING HOLY CROSS CHURCH (RASSELAS) TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

#### History

##### A. Holy Cross Church

The present Holy Cross church in Rasselas, Pennsylvania was begun sometime after 1875 and was completed in 1889 as a mission church of Saint Joseph parish in Warren. It replaced the earlier church built in 1854. In 1896, the Catholic community in Rasselas was erected as a parish. Holy Cross church was elevated to the status of a parish church, with its own mission church of Saint Anne in Wilcox.

In 1949, Saint Anne mission church was destroyed by fire. As a result, a new Saint Anne church was constructed in Wilcox and was blessed in 1951. At that same time, due to the shifting of population, the seat of the parish was transferred from Rasselas to Wilcox, so that Holy Cross church once again became a mission church while Saint Anne church in Wilcox was elevated to the status of the parish church.

Due to a diminishing population coupled with a declining number of available priests, the celebration of Sunday Masses was discontinued at Holy Cross church in 2003, and its mission status was withdrawn. Although the decree effecting that decision incorrectly identified Holy Cross church as an oratory, it remained canonically a secondary church of Saint Anne parish, in limited use. Since 2003, there have only been four funerals and two weddings celebrated in Holy Cross church, and Stations of the Cross were last publicly celebrated there during Lent of 2015 when the heating system of the church gave out.

By a decree of September 22, 2016 which was effective as of February 13, 2017, Saint Anne parish in Wilcox was merged into Holy Rosary parish in Johnsonburg, and Saint Anne church in Wilcox became a mission church of Holy Rosary parish. As a result of the merger, Holy Rosary parish now has three churches: the parish church (Holy Rosary in Johnsonburg), a secondary mission (Saint Anne in Wilcox) and a secondary church with no celebration of Sunday Mass (Holy Cross in Rasselas).

### Current Situation

In 2015 there were 108 Catholic households in the Wilcox area, including Rasselas, with an average Sunday Mass attendance at Saint Anne church of 80 persons. Following the merger of Saint Anne parish into Holy Rosary parish, Mass continues to be celebrated weekly at Saint Anne church for the fulfillment of the Sunday obligation. Consistent with the practice since 2003, there is no regularly scheduled Mass at Holy Cross church in Rasselas.

On May 9, 2017, the pastor of Holy Rosary parish in Johnsonburg discussed with the members of the parish Finance Council the possibility of closing Holy Cross church. He did the same with the members of the parish Pastoral Council on May 15, 2017. Both councils considered the various facts, including the total annual income of Holy Rosary parish which is responsible for maintaining three separate churches; estimated costs to make necessary repairs, the annual costs for utilities and insurance, a concern for vandalism, etc. The members of both councils gave their unanimous support to the proposal to relegate Holy Cross church to profane but not sordid use, and on June 6, 2017, the pastor formally petitioned that the church be relegated.

I brought the matter of Holy Cross church in Rasselas before the Presbyteral Council on July 13, 2017, making certain that the council members had all necessary information to provide me with their informed opinion on the matter, including what is understood as a sufficiently grave cause according to the norm of can. 1222 §2. The reasons put forth by the pastor in his petition were all considered, and priests familiar with the parish offered their own insights. After the conclusion of the discussion, I asked the council members for their advice on the aforementioned proposal to relegate Holy Cross church to profane but not sordid use. The unanimously supported the proposal.

All of the requirements of canons 50, 51, 127, 166, and 1222 §2 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 Holy Rosary parish in Johnsonburg together with its community of the faithful in Wilcox and Rasselas, while considering the following: that Holy Cross church has not served as a parish church since 1951; that since 2003 there have been no Sunday Masses and only four funerals and two weddings celebrated there; that occasional public devotions of the *Via Crucis* ceased there in 2015 when the church's heating system gave out; that Holy Cross church is in need of substantial maintenance work including but not limited to the replacement of furnaces, replacement of the roof, and shoring up of the floor; that the parish lacks the means to provide this maintenance together with the annual insurance and utility expenditures for Holy Cross church without taking needed resources from other valuable parish ministries; that there is no pastoral need for the church edifice; that the pastor and members of the finance council 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 do 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 that:

**Holy Cross church in Rasselas, being a secondary church of Holy Rosary parish in Johnsonburg, is relegated to profane but not sordid use, according to the norm of can. 1222 §2.**

I hereby further decree that:

**Prior to any eventual sale of the former Holy Cross church in Rasselas, all sacred objects be removed and, in accord with particular law, the permission of the Most Reverend Bishop be required for the sale of the former church.**

This decree is effective September 7, 2017, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery  
of the Diocese of Erie  
on this 7th day of September, 2017

*+Lawrence T. Persico*

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

*Christopher J. Singer*

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL  
Chancellor