



7-11-25

**Final Decision on the Relegation of St. Stephen Church, Oil City**

The Diocese of Erie today reaffirms the final decision by Bishop Lawrence T. Persico regarding the status of St. Stephen Church building in Oil City as relegated to “profane but not sordid use.” The decree was issued on March 11, 2024, and has now been upheld by the *Apostolic Signatura* on May 30, 2025, and received on June 27, 2025.

“The Diocese of Erie wants to emphasize that relegating the church to profane but not sordid use is not a criticism of St. Stephen’s legacy, but a responsible action taken to preserve the safety of the community and properly allocate parish resources,” said Father Christopher J. Singer, JCL, Chancellor for the Diocese of Erie. “The building, which is owned by St. Joseph Parish, may now be used for non-religious purposes that are respectful and in keeping with its dignity.”

Beginning in May of 2024, a hierarchical recourse (similar to an appeal) had been lodged to the Vatican in response to Bishop Persico’s decree of relegating (or closing) St. Stephen Church in Oil City, which is a part of the Catholic Church’s canon law structure. In December 2024, after a review of the case, the Vatican *Dicastery for the Clergy* rejected the appeal as having no merit, upholding Bishop Persico's decree of March 11, 2024. The recurrences, or those who lodged the appeal, then appealed that decision to the *Apostolic Signatura* – which is the supreme court of the Catholic Church. The recurrences did not appoint an advocate to represent them to the Signatura or pay the filing fee within the required time period. Therefore, the *Apostolic Signatura* rejected the appeal, upholding Bishop Persico’s decree of March 11, 2024.

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This decision to relegate St. Stephen Church was the result of a thorough, multi-step process involving:

- Formal petition by Father John L. Miller, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in 2024, supported unanimously by the parish finance and pastoral councils.
- Evaluation of grave structural deficiencies, including falling stones from the steeple towers since 2018, and an estimated \$3.4 million in necessary repairs.
- A formal review and unanimous recommendation by the Presbyteral Council.

“We remain deeply grateful for the dedication of Father Richard Allen, the parish councils and the members of the Presbyteral Council involved in discerning this decision,” said The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie. “Most importantly, parishioners should be assured that their pastoral care will continue uninterrupted at St. Joseph Parish.”

While St. Stephen Church is no longer reserved for divine worship, the Diocese of Erie is committed to honoring its history and legacy.

For further inquiries or media interviews, please contact the Diocese of Erie’s Office of Communications.

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