



7.4.2020

Status of Our Lady Help of Christians Church in Oil City changes

The Rev. John Miller, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Oil City, announced July 4 that the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, after consultation with the diocesan priests' council, has relegated one of St. Joseph Parish's three remaining secondary churches, Our Lady Help of Christians, to "profane but not sordid use." As part of a diocesan-wide pastoral planning process implemented in February 2017, Our Lady Help of Christians Parish was merged into St. Joseph Parish, at which time the church became a secondary church of St. Joseph Parish.

The technical designation refers to the canon law process by which a bishop removes the blessing or consecration of a church building. Through that process, the building ceases to be reserved for divine worship, and therefore, can be used for non-religious purposes. The same process is described in England as "reducing a church to secular but not unbecoming use." This language helps clarify that the term "profane" means secular or non-religious, while "sordid" means unbecoming or inappropriate. The designation is the result of a process

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that occurs when a pastor, with the support of the parish finance council and the parish pastoral council, determines a church building can no longer be maintained for any of a variety of reasons and petitions the bishop to declare such. A complete history of the church, as well as a detailed narrative of the current situation, is described in the decree announcing the bishop's decision, and is available at www.ErieRCD.org/bishop/decrees.html.

Sunday Masses have not been celebrated in Our Lady Help of Christians Church since early 2017. Other than for occasional Masses which ceased in early 2019, the church has been used for just six funerals and one baptism since the parish was merged with St. Joseph Parish.

The diocesan pastoral planning process involving parishes completed in 2017 was designed to allow parishes to evaluate their own situations going forward, and to make recommendations at the local level. St. Joseph Parish is now the only remaining Catholic parish in Oil City. St. Stephen Church, also in Oil City, remains as a secondary mission church of St. Joseph, meaning Masses are still regularly celebrated there. St. Venantius Church in Rouseville also remains as a secondary church of the parish, but without mission status. This means that the church can be used for funerals, baptisms, weddings and private worship, as well as for Mass on the annual patronal feast day.

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