



Decree

Relegating the Shrine of the Little Flower Church, Baltimore City St. Matthew Parish To Profane But Not Sordid Use

History

The Shrine of the Little Flower Parish was erected in 1926, largely to serve second- and third-generation Irish and German families moving into the city's northeast corridor. During the period from 1948 to 1961, the parish grew from 5,900 parishioners to 12,200 parishioners, but suffered significant later decline as much of the Catholic population continued moving towards or into the suburbs in subsequent decades, replaced by mostly non-Catholic residents within the parish's territory. The existing stone masonry church was built in 1950 and replaced a wooden chapel built near the same site at the parish's founding. The current church seats 633 persons.

Current Situation

The church became a secondary edifice on December 1, 2024, after the extinctive merger of the Shrine of the Little Flower Parish into St. Matthew Parish. The last regularly scheduled Sunday Mass at the Shrine was celebrated on October 13th, 2024. Since the merger with St. Matthew Parish, the church has remained available for use at baptisms, weddings and funerals. In July of 2024, the pastor and the parish leadership determined that it was appropriate to seek permission to alienate the property and reduce the church to profane use, given the limited available assets of the parish and the financial challenge of caring for the Shrine of the Little Flower Church. The pastor's and pastoral leadership's concerns are based on the financial realities outlined below.

Even before the Shrine of the Little Flower's extinctive merger, the former parish had struggled to pay for its upkeep and maintenance, given the small number of parishioners. The current deferred maintenance costs for the church are \$375,224. To

fund fully this and future needed work requires an annual investment of \$373,074. In addition to the church, the Shrine of the Little Flower Campus also includes a rectory. The total deferred maintenance for both buildings on the campus is \$409,595, requiring an annual investment of \$489,938 for this and future needed work. In addition, the Shrine of the Little Flower Campus incurs \$102,699 in annual carrying costs (those independent of the staffing or use of the church, e.g., insurance and utilities).

The St. Matthew Parish Campus, which consists of the parish church, a rectory and a convent, has \$365,416 in current deferred maintenance needs, requiring an annual investment of \$571,249 for this and other future needed work. The campus incurs annual carrying costs of \$459,932.

Besides its own campus and the Shrine of the Little Flower Campus, St. Matthew Parish is responsible for four other church campuses from former parishes (Blessed Sacrament, St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony of Padua), which include four churches, three rectories, two convents, a parish center, three garages, and a carport. The current deferred maintenance costs among those buildings total \$8,786,648 and require an annual investment of \$1,206,159. The total projected annual carrying costs for these campuses are \$270,064.

St. Matthew has an anticipated offertory income for the current fiscal year of \$419,038. Even with a hoped-for increase in offertory and other income as the merged parishes come together and grow, St. Matthew has insufficient financial resources to properly support the physical-plant needs of the Shrine of the Little Flower Church.

It was hoped that the merger of the Shrine of the Little Flower Parish with St. Matthew Parish would result in better financial health for the parish, but the financial challenges have continued. Thus, St. Matthew Parish does not have the financial ability to support an additional church in a manner suitable for the worthy celebration of the sacraments. The attempt to do so is impeding the parish's ability to support other pastoral needs and outreach. The financial strain is depriving other church campuses from receiving proper support and restricting pastoral programs of their necessary resources, thereby harming the overall apostolate of the parish.

The current parish church, St. Matthew Church, is 3.6 miles (5.8 kilometers) from Shrine of the Little Flower Church.

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.

The pastor and parish leadership held meetings and discussions regarding the potential future of the church before the submission of their request to reduce the church to profane but not sordid use to allow for the marketing and potential alienation of the property. 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 the relegation of the Shrine of the Little Flower Church will not result in any harm to the good of souls (cf. can. 1222 §2).

In accordance with the requirements of canon 1222 §2, the Presbyteral Council carefully considered the proposal to reduce the Shrine of the Little Flower Church to profane use at their regularly scheduled meeting on February 18th, 2025. Members received pertinent information regarding this request prior to the meeting. After carefully considering the facts of the matter, the members voted unanimously to recommend that the Archbishop of Baltimore approve the request given the financial situation in the parish.

All the requirements of canons 50, 51, 127, 166, and 515 have been fulfilled.

Therefore, having first and foremost before me the best possible means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of St. Matthew Parish, while considering that:

- Shrine of the Little Flower Church no longer serves as a parish church;
- Shrine of the Little Flower Campus requires annual expenditure (investment for deferred maintenance and carrying costs) of \$592,637 by St. Matthew Parish;
- St. Matthew Parish is responsible for four other church campuses, which require an annual expenditure of \$1,476,223.
- Regularly scheduled Masses ceased at the parish in October 2024;
- Maintenance of an additional church has placed an unsustainable financial burden on St. Matthew Parish;
- The parish lacks the financial means to maintain and provide for the proper upkeep of the Shrine of the Little Flower Church since its income is insufficient to continue supporting the church in a manner befitting a Catholic place of worship;

- There is no pastoral need for the church edifice in this parish, given the availability of another church within its boundaries and the number of parishioners;
- The pastor and members of the parish leadership have petitioned for the relegation of the church; and,
- There does not appear to be any probable detriment to the good of souls.

I do hereby judge based on the aforementioned reasons, considered cumulatively, that they 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:

Shrine of the Little Flower Church of St. Matthew Parish in Baltimore is to be relegated to profane but not sordid use, according to the norm of can. 1222 §2. Relegation will occur as of the date of this decree. At that time, it will herewith lose its blessing and consecration. It will no longer be used for divine worship.

I also decree that prior to the final alienation of this property that the altar, sacred objects, and religious artifacts are to be removed from the church in accordance with the law.

This decree is to be promulgated immediately and will take effect as of the date of this decree, anything to the contrary notwithstanding. It is to be communicated to the pastor of St. Matthew Parish, who is to inform the parishioners regarding this decree. It may be challenged within the peremptory time limit of ten days in accordance with the norm of law (canon 1734 §2).

Given at the Chancery in Baltimore, Maryland on this 15th day of January 2026.

+William E. Lori

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore

Diane L. Barr

Dr. Diane L. Barr, JD, JCD, PhD
Chancellor

