



## **Decree**

### **Relegating the St. Mary Star of the Sea Church, Baltimore City Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish To Profane But Not Sordid Use**

#### **History**

Saint Mary Star of the Sea Parish was erected in 1868. That fall, Father McCoy, the founding pastor of the parish, purchased the present site of Star of the Sea from a Mrs. Arnold. The cornerstone of the church was laid on May 9, 1869. On March 26, 1871, the church was dedicated by the Most Reverend John Martin Spalding. As the parish grew, supported by a large influx of Irish immigrants, a tall spire with a light at the top was added to the church. Originally illuminated by candles and mirrors, and later by electricity, this light served as a beacon to ship traffic in the Inner Harbor and as an official landmark on mariners' maps of the Port of Baltimore. The parish featured a school that was eventually clustered with the schools of two adjacent parishes, Holy Cross and Our Lady of Good Counsel, to form the Catholic Community School in 1972. The three parishes themselves (St. Mary Star of the Sea, Holy Cross, and Our Lady of Good Counsel) were merged by extinctive union into the Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018.

#### **Current Situation**

The church became a secondary edifice following this extinctive merger, remaining a worship site, with the last regularly-scheduled weekend Mass occurring on November 23, 2024. Since then, there have been four baptisms and three funerals held at the church. Even prior to the last weekend Mass, the pastor and the parish leadership determined in August 2024 that it was appropriate to seek permission to alienate the property and reduce the church to profane use, given the limited available financial assets of the parish and the financial challenge of caring for St. Mary Star of the Sea Church. The pastor's and pastoral leadership's concerns are based on the financial realities outlined below.

The current deferred maintenance costs for the church are \$1,813,380. To fund fully this and future needed work requires an annual investment of \$136,910. In addition to the church, the St. Mary Star of the Sea campus also includes a convent. The total deferred maintenance for both structures on the campus is \$2,147,685, requiring an annual investment of \$197,888 for this and future needed work. In addition, the St. Mary Star of the Sea campus incurs \$19,877 in annual carrying costs (those independent of the staffing or use of the church, e.g., insurance and utilities).

Besides St. Mary Star of the Sea, the Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish contains two actively-used worship sites, at Holy Cross and Our Lady of Good Counsel. These two separate campuses consist of two churches, two offices/rectories, a school, and a retreat house. The buildings on these campuses have \$4,996,273 in current deferred maintenance needs, requiring an annual investment of \$694,257 for this and other future needed work. The campuses incur annual carrying costs of \$275,855.

The Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish has an anticipated offertory income for the current fiscal year of \$668,154. The parish has insufficient financial resources to support properly the physical-plant needs of St. Mary Star of the Sea and to maintain the 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 obligations. The financial strain is depriving the other church campuses of receiving proper support and necessary resources, thereby harming the overall apostolate of the parish.

The remaining churches of the Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish are both within 1.5 miles (1.8km) of St. Mary Star of the Sea 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 with parishioners 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 St. Mary Star of the Sea 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 St. Mary Star of the Sea Church to profane use at their regularly scheduled meeting on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026. 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 Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish, while considering that:

- St. Mary Star of the Sea Church no longer serves as a parish church;
- St. Mary Star of the Sea campus requires annual expenditure (investment for deferred maintenance and carrying costs) of \$185,965 by Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish;
- Regularly scheduled Masses ceased at the church in November of 2024;
- Maintenance of an additional church has placed an unsustainable financial burden on Catholic Community of South Baltimore Parish;
- The parish lacks the financial means to maintain and provide for the proper upkeep of the St. Mary Star of the Sea 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 other churches 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:

**St. Mary Star of the Sea Church of the Catholic Community of South Baltimore 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, 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 noted above, anything to the contrary notwithstanding. It is to be communicated to the pastor of Catholic Community of South Baltimore 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 22<sup>nd</sup> day of May 2026.



Most Reverend William E. Lori, S.T.D.  
Archbishop of Baltimore



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

