



Decree

Relegating St. Clare Church, Baltimore City Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish To Profane But Not Sordid Use

History

Early in 1956, St. Clare's Parish was established in Essex, Maryland when Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Middle River had grown to a 17,000-member parish, and a new church in the area was needed. The first building was installed on eleven acres of swampy land on Myrth Avenue and housed the school and basement church. In May, 1956, Father Albert T. Stallings was appointed pastor, and the first Mass was celebrated on July 15. In September of the same year, the school opened. In 1970, an unknown arsonist set fire to the basement church. The parish chose to restore and renovate the existing church, rather than to build a new one. The current church seats 604 persons.

Current Situation

The church became a secondary edifice on December 1, 2024, after the extinctive merger of the St. Clare parish into Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish. The final regularly-scheduled Mass at the St. Clare was celebrated on November 24, 2024. Since the merger with Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish, the church has remained available for use for baptisms, weddings and funerals, with one funeral and one Quinceañera Mass held at the church following the final parish Mass. On December 17th of 2024, the pastor and the parish leadership determined that it was appropriate to seek permission to alienate the property and to reduce the church to profane use, given the limited available assets of the parish and the financial challenge of caring for the St. Clare church. The pastor's and pastoral leadership's concerns are based on the financial realities outlined below.

Even before the St. Clare's extinctive merger, the previous parish had struggled to pay for its upkeep and maintenance, given the small number of parishioners. The current deferred maintenance costs for the church building itself are \$1,224,620, requiring an annual investment of \$336,570 to fund fully this and future required work. The former

parish campus also includes a rectory/parish office, a hall, and a convent. The total deferred current deferred maintenance costs for all the buildings on the campus is \$1,709,764, requiring \$610,271 in annual investment to fund fully this and future required work. The St. Clare campus incurred an additional \$93,458 in annual carrying costs (those independent of the staffing or use of the church, e.g., insurance and utilities) during the most recent period for which these figures are readily available.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel church itself has \$548,513 in current deferred maintenance needs. To fund fully this and future required work requires an annual investment of \$417,706. The campus incurred annual carrying costs of \$269,736 during the most recent period for which these figures are readily available.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel has an anticipated offertory income for the current fiscal year of \$724,084. Even with a hoped-for increase in offertory and other income as the merged parishes come together and grow, as is shown by the figures included, Our Lady of Mount Carmel has insufficient financial resources to properly support the physical-plant needs of the St. Clare church.

It was hoped that the merger of the St. Clare parish with Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish would result in better financial health for the parish, but the financial challenges have continued. Thus, Our Lady of Mount Carmel 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 the parish church campus from receiving proper support, thereby harming the overall apostolate of the parish.

The current parish church, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, is 1.7 miles (2.7 kilometers) from St. Clare 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 St. Clare 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. Clare church to profane use at their regularly-scheduled meeting on June 16th, 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 the Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish, while considering that:

- The St. Clare church no longer serves as a parish church;
- The St. Clare campus requires annual expenditure (investment towards deferred maintenance and carrying costs of \$703,819 by the Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish;
- Regularly-scheduled Masses ceased at the parish on November 24, 2024;
- Maintenance of an additional church has placed an unsustainable financial burden on Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish;
- The parish lacks the financial means to maintain and provide for the proper upkeep of the St. Clare 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:

The St. Clare church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel 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 Our Lady of Mount Carmel 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 the 26th day of June, 2026

+ William E. Lori

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



Diane L. Barr

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