



Decree of Relegation To Profane But Not Sordid Use

Shrine of the Sacred Heart Church, Baltimore City Cathedral of Mary Our Queen Parish

History

The Shrine of the Sacred Heart parish had its beginnings in 1867 when the Sisters of Mercy deeded to the Archdiocese of Baltimore a recently purchased one acre property and church. Archbishop Spaulding directed that the existing church be opened to the public under the title of The Shrine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Rev. Peter Tarro assumed the pastorate in 1908, and anticipating the growth of the Mount Washington area and the need for a larger Church, he negotiated to purchase the Boyden estate and home across the street from the original church. This purchase became the site of the present church and rectory. In 1915 Rev. Francis Craig succeeded Rev. Tarro and began planning to build a new church at the newly acquired location. During this period, the Mount Washington community emerged from its summer resort status and began to grow as the building of more permanent residences in the area took place. With its distinct village atmosphere, improved transportation, and community associations, people were encouraged to settle in Mount Washington.

The new church was officially dedicated on June 24, 1917 with a Solemn High Mass celebrated by Cardinal James Gibbons. More than a thousand people crowded into the church and hundreds more assembled outside. Shortly after the dedication, the stained glass windows created by New York artisans from John Morgan and Sons Inc. were installed. The stained-glass window above the main altar depicts Jesus revealing His Sacred Heart to Saint Margaret Mary Alcoque. The artisans incorporated into the winged cherubs the faces of some of the children of the parish. The cost of the new Church was \$140,000.00 and the debt was retired in eight years. The church seats 260 persons.

Current Situation

The church became a secondary edifice on December 1, 2024, after the extinctive merger of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart parish into the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish. The final Mass at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart was celebrated on December 25, 2024. Since the merger with the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish, the church has remained available for use at baptisms, weddings and funerals, although none has taken place there since the merger. On January 9th of 2025, 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 Sacred Heart church and three other secondary churches in its territory. The pastor and pastoral leadership's concerns are based on the financial realities outlined below.

Even before the Shrine of the Sacred Heart's extinctive merger, the previous parish had struggled to pay for its upkeep and maintenance, given the small number of parishioners who supported its activities. The current deferred maintenance costs for the church building itself are \$176,577, requiring an annual investment of \$162,842 to fund fully this and future required work. The former parish campus also includes a rectory and a school. While deferred maintenance figures are not available for the school building, the church and the rectory building combined have current deferred maintenance costs of \$236,453, requiring \$212,783 in annual investment to fund fully this and future required work. The Shrine of the Sacred Heart campus incurred an additional \$104,727 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.

The Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish campus, which consists of the cathedral, a rectory, a parish office, and a boiler house/power plant, has \$565,642 in current deferred maintenance needs. To fund fully this and future required work requires an annual investment of \$1,685,747. The campus incurred annual carrying costs of \$728,096 during the most recent period for which these figures are readily available. (These figures do not include the corresponding costs associated with the Cathedral School.)

Besides its own campus and the Shrine of the Sacred Heart church campus, the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish is responsible for two other former parish campuses (St. Mary of the Assumption and St. Pius X) which include two churches, two rectories (one of which is attached to the church), and a school with an attached convent. The current deferred maintenance costs among those buildings total \$3,085,508. To fund fully this and future work requires an annual investment \$391,507. The total annual carrying costs for these campuses are \$194,837 for the most recent period for which these figures are readily

The Cathedral of Mary Our Queen has an anticipated offertory income for the current fiscal year of \$1,529,814. 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, the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen has insufficient financial resources to properly support the physical-plant needs of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart church.

It was hoped that the merger of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart parish with the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish would result in better financial health for the parish, but the financial challenges have continued. Thus, the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen 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 of its other church campuses as well as the pastoral needs and outreach. The financial strain is depriving other church campuses from receiving proper support, thereby harming the overall apostolate of the parish.

The current parish church, the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen Church, is 2.3 miles (3.7 kilometers) from Shrine of the Sacred Heart 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 Shrine of the Sacred Heart 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 Sacred Heart church to profane use at their regularly-scheduled meeting on February 12th, 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 Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish, while considering that:

- The Shrine of the Sacred Heart church no longer serves as a parish church;
- The Shrine of the Sacred Heart requires annual expenditure of \$317,510 by the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish;
- The Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish is responsible for two other church campuses, which require an annual expenditure of \$586,344.
- Regularly-scheduled Masses ceased at the parish on December 25, 2024;
- Maintenance of an additional church has placed an unsustainable financial burden on the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen parish;
- The parish lacks the financial means to maintain and provide for the proper upkeep of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart 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 Shrine of the Sacred Heart church of the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen 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 the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen 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 10th day of July, 2026

+ *William E. Lori*

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



Diane L. Barr

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