



Decree

Relegating the St. Edward Church, Baltimore City St. Bernardine Parish To Profane But Not Sordid Use

History

St. Edward parish was founded in 1878 as a mission of St. Peter parish in a section known in those days as Calverton, outside the western boundaries of Baltimore City. The mission was established by Father Owen B. Corrigan, who later became an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. He supervised the building of the first church, opening its doors on September 19, 1880. The mission later was put under the jurisdiction of St. Agnes parish, Catonsville. From 1881 to 1886, Father Thomas E. Stapleton, pastor of St. Agnes parish, and Father Elias McKenzie, his assistant, alternated in the care of the small mission until the building of the rectory in 1886, at which time Father McKenzie became the first pastor of St. Edward parish. He had previously established the parish school in a house on Franklintown Road in 1882. A new parish school opened on September 17, 1923, with an enrollment of 224 children in grades 1-5.

The old St. Edward parish church became inadequate to accommodate the increasing number of parishioners. The congregation had grown to 5,000, requiring nine masses every Sunday. A campaign was begun in 1938 to build a new church at its present location, 901 Poplar Grove Street. The new St. Edward Church was dedicated on March 9, 1941, by Bishop John M. McNamara. Parish operations involved a number of changes in the 1960s starting with the clustering of the school and the reduction of the clergy staff to one priest. In 1967, St. Edward Parish School merged with St. Bernardine Parish School under the title "John XXIII Center." After six years, the Center was absorbed into the Charles A. Hall Cluster School. In 1979, the first African-American pastor in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Father Maurice Blackwell, was appointed to lead the community. In July, 2005 the Congregation of the Holy Spirit came to Baltimore to take pastoral care of St. Edward's parish. The number of parishioners and sacramental activity continued to decline until the parish was merged with another. The current church seats 352 persons.

Current Situation

St. Edward church became a secondary edifice on December 1, 2024, after the extinctive merger of St. Edward parish into St. Bernardine parish. The last regularly-scheduled Sunday Mass at St. Edward was celebrated on November 24, 2024. Since the merger with St. Bernardine parish, the church has remained available for use at baptisms, weddings and funerals. No Masses or other sacraments have occurred in the church since the merger. Early in December of 2024, the pastor and the parish leadership determined that it was appropriate to seek permission to alienate the property, and in July of 2026 the pastor and parish leadership sought to reduce the church to profane use, given the limited available assets of the parish and the financial challenge of caring for St. Edward church. The pastor's and pastoral leadership's concerns are based on the financial realities outlined below.

Even before St. Edward'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 itself are \$448,920. To fund fully this and future required work requires an annual investment of \$175,085. The St. Edward campus also includes a rectory and a school building. The current deferred maintenance costs for all the buildings on the campus total \$2,008,654, necessitating \$333,726 in annual investment. Additionally, the St. Edward's campus incurs \$48,601 in annual carrying costs (those independent of the staffing or use of the church, e.g., insurance and utilities), based on the most recent available information.

St. Bernardine parish, besides its own parish church and St. Edward church, is responsible for an additional former parish campus, St. Peter Claver, which includes a church, convent, school, hall, and rectory. Current deferred maintenance among these buildings totals \$2,770,825, and requires an annual investment of \$459,828. The annual carrying costs for this campus are \$68,618, based on the most recent available information.

St. Bernardine's offertory income for the recently-completed year is estimated to be \$917,553, with its own campus incurring annual carrying costs of \$260,412 and deferred maintenance needs requiring \$471,095 in annual investment. 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, St. Bernardine has few resources to spare to support the physical-plant needs of a secondary church.

It was hoped that the merger of St. Edward parish with St. Bernardine parish would result in better financial health for the parish, but the financial challenges have continued. Thus, St. Bernardine 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 pastoral programs of their necessary resources and thereby harming the overall apostolate of the parish.

The current parish church, St. Bernardine Church, is 1.1 miles (1.8 kilometers) from St. Edward 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. Edward 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 St. Edward 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. Bernardine parish, while considering that:

- St. Edward church no longer serves as a parish church;
- St. Edward requires annual investment of \$582,327 (carrying costs plus investment for deferred maintenance) by St. Bernardine parish;
- Regularly scheduled Masses ceased at the parish in November, 2024;
- Maintenance of an additional church has placed an unsustainable financial burden on St. Bernardine parish;

- The parish lacks the financial means to maintain and provide for the proper upkeep of St. Edward church since its income is insufficient to continue supporting the parish 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:

St. Edward church of St. Bernardine 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 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 noted above, anything to the contrary notwithstanding. It is to be communicated to the pastor of St. Bernardine 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 28th of August, 2026.

+ William E. Lori

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

+ Adam J. Parker

Most Reverend Adam J. Parker
Vicar General

