



Decree

Relegating the St. Thomas More Church, Baltimore City Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish To Profane But Not Sordid Use

History

In 1958, the neighborhoods around Perring Parkway were burgeoning. To help alleviate the crowded conditions in the surrounding parishes of St. Matthew, St. Dominic, St. Ursula and Immaculate Heart of Mary, twelve acres of land were purchased on McLean Boulevard in 1959 for \$108,900. In 1960 architectural plans were drawn up for a school, rectory and convent. In January, 1961 Archbishop Keough appointed Fr. Thomas M. Kelly to serve as pastor and in September of that year, parish boundaries were published in the Catholic Review, and it was announced that the first Masses would be held on Sunday, September 10th in a store front in the Hamilton Park Shopping Center. By July, 1961, when the new rectory was ready, over 1100 families were registered in the parish. The dedication of the new St. Thomas More Church was held on September 15, 1962. Over 1,900 people attended the six masses on that Sunday.

In September of 1961 the school opened, staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill. By 1965, the need for additional classrooms and a parish hall became apparent. After a successful building campaign, Cardinal Shehan gave permission for the new building. The population had peaked at about the time of expansion, and, by 1988, St. Thomas More School had a limited number of students. It merged with St. Matthew's school to form the Cardinal Shehan School, which is located on the campus of St. Matthew parish.

In 2001, the church underwent a renovation and a narthex, where parishioners can gather after Mass, was created in the back of the church. On the 1st of July, 2022, the parish was joined to Immaculate Heart of Mary parish in a pastorate. The current church seats 152 persons.

Current Situation

St. Thomas More church became a secondary edifice on December 1, 2024, after the extinctive merger of St. Thomas More parish into Immaculate Heart of Mary parish. The last regularly-scheduled Sunday Mass at St. Thomas More was celebrated on November 27, 2024. Since the merger with Immaculate Heart of Mary parish, the St. Thomas More church has remained available for use at baptisms, weddings and funerals, although none has taken place there since the final Mass. In October of 2024, the pastor and the parish leadership, anticipating the merger, determined that it was appropriate to seek permission to alienate the property, given the limited available assets of the parish and the financial challenge of caring for St. Thomas More church. The pastor's and pastoral leadership's concerns are based on the financial realities outlined below.

Even before St. Thomas More'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 building that houses the church itself (it is located in a structure that also includes the former convent and school) are \$1,263,451. To fund fully this and future required work requires an annual investment of \$594,021. The St. Thomas More campus also includes a parish center and a garage. The current deferred maintenance costs for all the buildings on the campus total \$1,405,889, necessitating \$652,601 in annual investment. Additionally, the St. Thomas More's campus incurs \$92,012 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.

Immaculate Heart of Mary's offertory income for the recently-completed fiscal year is estimated to be \$791,051, with its own campus incurring annual carrying costs of \$201,158 and deferred maintenance needs requiring \$532,470 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, Immaculate Heart of Mary parish has few resources to spare to support the physical-plant needs of a secondary church.

It was hoped that the merger of St. Thomas More parish with Immaculate Heart of Mary parish would result in better financial health for the parish, but the financial challenges have continued. Thus, Immaculate Heart of Mary 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, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, is 2.3 miles (3.7 kilometers) from St. Thomas More 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. Thomas More 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. Thomas More 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 Immaculate Heart of Mary parish, while considering that:

- St. Thomas More church no longer serves as a parish church;
- St. Thomas More requires annual investment of \$744,613 (carrying costs plus investment for deferred maintenance) by Immaculate Heart of Mary parish;
- Regularly scheduled Masses ceased at the parish in November, 2024;
- Maintenance of an additional church has placed an unsustainable financial burden on Immaculate Heart of Mary parish;
- The parish lacks the financial means to maintain and provide for the proper upkeep of St. Thomas More 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.

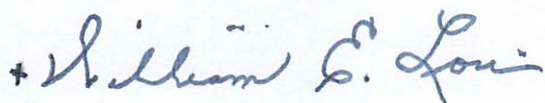
I do hereby judge based on the aforementioned reasons, considered cumulatively, that they constitute the grave cause required by the law (cf. can. 1222 §2) for the relegation of the church to profane but not sordid use, and I hereby decree the following:

St. Thomas More church of Immaculate Heart of Mary parish in Towson 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 Immaculate Heart of Mary 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 9th day of October, 2026.



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



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