



DECREE

EFFECTING THE RELEGATION OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA CHURCH (CANADOHTA LAKE) TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

History

Our Lady of Fatima church in Canadohta Lake was established as a mission of Saint Teresa of Avila Parish in Union City, to serve the tourists who vacationed at Canadohta Lake every summer. The church was completed around 1950. In 1951, Archbishop John Mark Gannon granted the pastor of Saint Teresa permission to celebrate Mass at Our Lady of Fatima “from the third Sunday of June until Labor Day.” The community was robust at one time, even building a social center where they offered catechism classes for the children. For a short period of time, Mass was offered in Our Lady of Fatima church year-round. In 2017 the church went back to celebrating Mass only in the summer, and regularly scheduled Masses ceased altogether in 2023.

Current Situation

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.

Saint Thomas the Apostle parish is currently responsible for the financial upkeep of three churches (Saint Thomas the Apostle church, Saint Teresa of Avila church and Our Lady of Fatima church), which is creating a financial burden on the parish.

Saint Thomas the Apostle parish does not have the financial resources to maintain all three churches in a manner suitable for the worthy celebration of the sacraments. Saint Teresa of Avila parish, including its secondary church of Our Lady of Fatima, merged into Saint Thomas the Apostle parish on July 9, 2024. In the five years prior, Saint Teresa had an



average annual deficit of (\$2730). Saint Thomas had an average deficit of (\$9172) over the past two years. Saint Thomas was on track to deplete all their unrestricted assets in about 10 years. Saint Teresa did not bring significant financial assets into the merger, having spent them to pay off their debts this spring. Furthermore, in 2023 Saint Teresa lost a long-term renter, resulting in a loss of \$25,000 in annual income.

The cost to maintain Our Lady of Fatima church is projected to be \$5,500 in 2024. Significant repairs are also overdue at all three campuses. The social hall at Our Lady of Fatima needs a new roof, which was estimated in 2002 to cost \$8200. Saint Teresa of Avila and St. Thomas the Apostle churches are in need of significant repairs (roofs, boilers, etc.), and the parish has the care of two cemeteries which are not fully funded.

The general population as well as the Catholic population of the Union City and Corry areas continues to decline. As a result, there is diminished need for multiple churches. Furthermore, smaller weekly offertory collections are resulting in decreased income.

At this time, there is no pastoral need for the church. Our Lady of Fatima church was simply constructed to be used for seasonal Masses only, in particular for use by tourists who did not have personal vehicles. That need no longer exists. The church has no historical, architectural or artistic significance. There is no devotional life attached to the church. For at least the past year, since regularly scheduled Masses ceased, there have been no requests for weddings, funerals, baptisms, or any other liturgical or devotional services. Since no acts of divine worship take place in this church, it will soon be subject to real estate taxation.

The parish finance council voted unanimously on May 21, 2024, to recommend to the pastor that he petition the Bishop to relegate Our Lady of Fatima church to profane but not sordid use. Members of the pastoral council unanimously did the same on May 7, 2024. Being the only person who can legitimately claim rights concerning the church edifice, the pastor has given his consent in his petition of July 29, 2024 (cf. can. 1222 §2). He attests that relegating Our Lady of Fatima church to profane use is not likely to result in any harm to the good of souls (cf. can. 1222 §2). All of the sacraments and devotions are available at Saint Teresa of Avila church (8 miles from Canadohta Lake) and at Saint Thomas the Apostle church (16 miles from Canadohta Lake). The pastor is also aware of the obligation to see to it that Our Lady of Fatima church, if relegated, not be given over to sordid use.

This information was shared with the members of the Presbyteral Council on August 8, 2024. Having considered the matter attentively, the members of the Council unanimously recommended to me that I grant the petition of the pastor to relegate Our Lady of Fatima church in Canadohta Lake to profane but not sordid use.

All of the requirements of canons 50, 51, 127, 166, and 515 have been fulfilled.

Therefore, having first and foremost before my eyes the best possible means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful of Saint Thomas the Apostle parish, while considering that

Our Lady of Fatima church was established as a seasonal church, that regularly scheduled Masses ceased there in 2023; that no funerals and or weddings have been celebrated there in recent years, and there is no request from the faithful to use the church; that the obligation of maintaining three separate church buildings is contributing to an unsustainable financial burden on Saint Thomas the Apostle parish; that there is no pastoral need for the church edifice; that the pastor has petitioned for the relegation of the church with the unanimous support of the members of the pastoral council and the finance council; and that there does not appear to be any probable detriment to the good of souls, I judge that the aforementioned reasons, when considered cumulatively, 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:

Our Lady of Fatima church in Canadohta Lake, being a secondary church of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish in Corry, is relegated to profane but not sordid use, according to the norm of can. 1222 §2.

This decree is effective on August 14, 2024, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Erie
on this 9th day of August, 2024

+Lawrence T. Persico

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of Erie

Christopher J. Singer

The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL
Chancellor