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Status of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Oil City to change

The Rev. John Miller, pastor of partnered parishes of St. Stephen and St. Joseph in Oil City, announced on July 20 that the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, after consultation with the presbyteral council, has relegated one of St. Joseph Parish's secondary churches, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to "profane but not sordid use."

The technical designation refers to the canon law process by which a bishop removes the blessing or consecration of a church building. Through that process, the building ceases to be reserved for divine worship, and therefore, can be used for non-religious purposes. The same process is described in England as "reducing a church to secular but not unbecoming use." This language helps clarify that the term "profane" means secular or non-religious, while "sordid" means unbecoming or inappropriate.

The designation is the result of a process that occurs when a pastor, with the support of the parish finance council and the parish pastoral council, determines a church building can no longer be maintained for any of a variety of reasons. A complete history of the church, as well as a detailed narrative of the current situation, is described in the decree announcing the bishop's decision,

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ANNE-MARIE WELSH
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
Office 814.824.1167
Cell 814.746.6889
amwelsh@ErieRCD.org

MARY SOLBERG
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
Office 814.824.1171
Cell 814.969.1844
msolberg@ErieRCD.org



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The most recent change for the building occurred in Feb. 2017, when the Diocese of Erie implemented a series of parish mergers and partnerships as a result of a pastoral planning initiative. At that time, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish and Our Lady Help of Christians Parish, both located in Oil City, were merged into St. Joseph Parish.

By virtue of the merger, St. Joseph Parish was entrusted with the care of three churches: St. Joseph Church, which remains the parish church, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church as well as Our Lady Help of Christians Church, both of which lost their status as parish churches. Sunday Masses have not been celebrated in either church since that time; the churches have largely been used only for personal devotion and for funerals.

The pastoral planning process involving parishes that was completed in 2017 was designed to allow parishes to evaluate their own situations going forward, and to make recommendations at the local level. The pastoral plan also partnered St. Joseph Parish with St. Stephen Parish in Oil City, which had been merged with St. Venantius Parish in Rouseville.

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