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3.8.25

**Saint Joseph Church in Mount Jewett relegated**

The Reverend Joseph Dougherty, pastor of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, Smethport, announced on March 8 that the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, after consultation with the Presbyteral Council, has relegated Saint Joseph Church in Mount Jewett 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. The building then ceases to be reserved for divine worship, and therefore, can be used for non-religious purposes.

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, believes a church building can no longer be maintained for any of a variety of reasons and petitions the bishop to relegate the church.

Mass was first celebrated in the Mount Jewett area in the late 1880’s with priests traveling at times from Smethport, Kane, or Rasselas. Eventually the local Catholic community built Saint Joseph church in Mount Jewett, which was solemnly blessed on May 9, 1897. Records indicate that in 1900 Saint Joseph mission in Mount Jewett was raised to the status of a parish. The last resident pastor departed in 1998. Saint Joseph Parish then shared a pastor with Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Parish in Smethport until 2017, when Saint Joseph merged into Saint Elizabeth Parish. Regularly scheduled Masses ceased at Saint Joseph church in 2023. Since then, apart from one funeral, there have been no requests for sacraments at Saint Joseph church and nearly all active Catholics in the Mount Jewett area have begun attending Mass in Smethport, Wilcox, Johnsonburg or Kane.

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Parish (Smethport) has been responsible for the maintenance of Saint Joseph Church since 2017. Just as significant as the expense and physical condition of the Saint Joseph church building is its

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remote location. The pastor resides at Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Parish in Smethport, which is a 32-mile roundtrip to Mount Jewett.

Recognizing the reality of the situation, the Reverend Joseph Dougherty, with the unanimous support of the parish finance council and the parish pastoral council, petitioned the bishop to request that Saint Joseph Church building be relegated to profane but not sordid use. 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, now available at [www.ErieRCD.org/bishop/decrees.html](http://www.ErieRCD.org/bishop/decrees.html).

The decree is effective March 10, 2025.

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