



**MOST REVEREND DANIEL E. THOMAS
BISHOP OF TOLEDO**

DECREE

ON THE REDUCTION OF THE CHURCH OF SACRED HEART, TOLEDO, OHIO TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

WHEREAS in 1883, Sacred Heart Church was built and dedicated and Sacred Heart Parish was established in 1885, which was originally part of the Diocese of Cleveland;

WHEREAS in 1900, the church building was destroyed by a fire and rebuilt in 1906. That church sustained a fire in 1975. The parishioners at that time were able to salvage most of the building, however, there was a serious need for restoration;

WHEREAS in 2013, Most Reverend Leonard Blair, then Bishop of Toledo, modified three parishes (Sacred Heart Parish, Saint Stephen Parish and Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish, all in East Toledo) by way of decree. The three parishes underwent an extinctive—union merger to form Epiphany of the Lord Parish, Toledo;

WHEREAS between 2020-2021, Father Eric Mueller, Pastor, consulted parish staff and leadership committees concerning the viability and sustainability of the multiple buildings of the three former parish campuses. A joint meeting between the finance committee and pastoral council was held in October 2020 to consider consolidation of the campuses. In spring 2021, Father Mueller contacted the Diocesan Intentional Planning office. In May 2021, a parish Facilities and Mission Task Force was formed;

WHEREAS RCM Architects were invited to and assessed all three campuses of Epiphany of the Lord Parish. They confirmed overwhelming, burdensome repair costs particularly for Sacred Heart Church, including a new roof, needed repair of a basement masonry wall (work which could lead to additional costs and risks related to the foundation), as well as

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other costly repairs. The estimate for Sacred Heart Church alone was over 1.5 million dollars;

WHEREAS September 2022-March 2023, meetings were held with parishioners to present the facilities assessment from RCM and to receive input and feedback from members of the parish;

WHEREAS In September 2023, Father Mueller, with the support of his finance council, pastoral council and the parish Facilities and Mission Task Force, as well as with the consensus of parishioners at large, petitioned the undersigned to relegate Sacred Heart Church given the result of the RCM Architects findings, the decrease in overall membership of the parish, the decline in Mass attendance and the undue financial burden of Sacred Heart Church on the parish;

WHEREAS Father Mueller petitioned the undersigned to relegate the church of Sacred Heart to profane but not sordid use because: (1) there is a steady decline in the number of people attending Mass and celebrating the Sacraments at the parish, (2) the spiritual needs of the parish may be adequately met at Saint Stephen Church and Saint Thomas Aquinas Church, (3) the church of Sacred Heart is in need of substantial repairs and continual burdensome maintenance which would deplete the limited financial resources of the parish, (4) the parish funds are being severely diminished through building maintenance for Sacred Heart Church, both ordinary and capital, which could otherwise be used to intensify ministry and evangelization efforts, (6) the needs of the diocese have changed since the founding of Sacred Heart Church in 1869, such that this church is no longer necessary to serve the people of God, (7) there are no alternative funding methods to restore and renovate Sacred Heart Church, (8) the closure of the church of Sacred Heart will further promote the unity and continued vibrancy of the parish and its mission to the people, (9) it will assist with the simplification of administration of Epiphany of the Lord Parish, permitting the parish priest to focus on pastoral ministry rather than building maintenance;

WHEREAS when 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 hereby (cf. can. 1222 §2);

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WHEREAS to assess the gravity of a cause, each case must be considered individually, weighing the whole context of the situation. At times, the gravity of a cause will arise only from a combination of just causes, each insufficient in itself, but which together manifest the seriousness of the situation (cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes, the Closure or Relegation of Churches to Profane but not Sordid Use, and the Alienation of the Same*, April 30, 2013, Prot. No. 20131348);

WHEREAS after a careful examination, it was established that no one is legitimately able to claim rights for themselves regarding Sacred Heart Church, understood primarily as patrimonial rights or those rights associated with patrimonial rights (cf. Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, Final Decree of the College of Judges, 21 November 1988, *Communicationes* 20 [1988] 93);

WHEREAS the undersigned convoked the Presbyteral Council on 27 September 2023 and presided over it according to the norm of law (cf. cann. 127 §1, 166 §1, and 500 §1), placing the relegation of the church of Sacred Heart on the agenda ahead of time, ensuring that a summary of its status was provided to the members of the Council (cf. can. 50), proposing the relegation, seeking the informed and free counsel of the members concerning the proposed modification (cf. can. 515 §2), listening to arguments either for or against the proposed relegation, and receiving support for the proposed relegation;

WHEREAS having examined the facts of the present case, the undersigned has determined that it has been well established that grave reasons required by canon 1222 §2 are present, even if some of the reasons invoked may not in themselves constitute a grave cause, however, when combined together they manifest the seriousness of the situation;

Therefore, the undersigned Bishop of Toledo, after prayerful consideration, having weighed all of reasons to relegate Sacred Heart and after having heard the Presbyteral Council, hereby issues the following

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1. The church of Sacred Heart in the Parish of Epiphany of the Lord, Toledo, is hereby reduced to profane but not sordid use according to the prescripts of canon 1222, §2 for the grave causes heretofore mentioned.

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2. Initial planning and negotiations that may lead to the razing of Sacred Heart Church building may now begin, while continuing to collaborate with the General Counsel of the Diocese.

3. Prior to any potential of razing the building, all sacred objects, relics, sacred furnishings, stained-glass windows, bells, confessionals, altars, etc. are to be removed in accord with the diocesan policy regarding such matters. Altars may never be relegated to profane but not sordid use, thus, if they cannot be removed, they must be destroyed (cf. cann. 1212 and 1238).

This decree is effective upon its legitimate publication to all the faithful (cf. can. 54 §1). Within the peremptory period of ten useful days from the legitimate notification of this decree, the faithful may seek in writing from its author the revocation or emendation of this decree before proposing hierarchical recourse (cf. can. 1734 §§1-2).

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Toledo on this fourth day of October in the year of our Lord, two thousand twenty-three.



Sister Rose Marie Timmer, RSM
Chancellor



Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas
Bishop of Toledo