



Prot. N. 2020 RPU-7

## DECREE

### IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

On November 19, 2019, following consultation with the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago, I issued a decree establishing, through extinctive union of St. Columba Parish, St. Florian Parish, both in the Hegewisch neighborhood of the City of Chicago, and Mother of God Parish in Burnham, Illinois, a new territorial parish which was known, *ad interim*, as Mother of God and SS. Florian and Columba Parish. The union was effective from April 13, 2020. On August 7, 2020, the new parish received the name Christ Our Light Parish.

On July 28, 2020, after consulting with parish leadership, the Rev. David Simonetti, pastor of the new parish, determined the continued use of all three churches of his parish was not feasible. Consequently, he wrote to me and the Episcopal Vicar of his region of the archdiocese, asking that Mother of God Church of Christ Our Light Parish be relegated to profane but not sordid use (CIC c. 1222 §2).

A church may be relegated to profane but not sordid use when, after hearing the presbyteral council, the diocesan bishop determines there are “grave causes” suggesting a church no longer be used for divine worship and the good of souls suffers no detriment from the relegation. A Definitive Sentence of the College of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura given May 4, 1996, illuminates what constituted grave causes required for the relegation to profane but not sordid use of a church belonging to a parish formed from the union of parishes (*Ministerium Iustitiae: Jurisprudence of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura*, Montreal: W & L (2011): Prot. N. 24388/93 CA, pp. 526-527).

As related in the Definitive Sentence, a new parish formed from the extinctive union of five parishes sought to relegate three of its five churches to profane but not sordid use. Faithful who worshipped at one of these churches took recourse against the relegation of their church. The Supreme Tribunal found that the following conditions together constituted the grave causes required for relegation: (1) preservation of all the churches would impose an intolerable burden on the new parish; (2) the church in question was no longer of service to the pastoral care of the faithful due to changed circumstances; (3) the new parish was burdened from the beginning by a huge debt; (4) sale of the church would offer ready and effective assistance, otherwise lacking, to the urgent needs of the new parish; (5) the number of faithful contributing to the support of the parish was diminishing; and (6) charity and other assistance to the poor should not be neglected in order to preserve a sacred building.

In this case it is established that (1) Retaining Mother of God Church as a place of divine worship, imposes a financial burden on the new parish from operational and maintenance expenses associated with the church and other buildings on the church campus. If maintained,



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for parish use, the campus of Mother of God Church needs more than \$100,000.00 in repairs.

(2) Mother of God Church is no longer needed for divine worship for the approximately 98 Sunday worshippers attending there before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of churches in the State of Illinois. This number of worshippers is well accommodated in the nearby parish church of St. Florian, a church that seats 700 persons.

(3) The total debt of the new Christ Our Light Parish is \$1,726,538.00, all carried over from church and parochial school expenses at the former St. Florian Parish. Income from Mother of God Church will not help in servicing this debt or in sustaining the new parish.

(4) Sale or rental of real property of the former Mother of God Parish campus, including Mother of God Church, will benefit the mission of Christ Our Light Parish through ready cash proceeds. Moreover, there will be immediate additional savings of \$7,500.00 to \$10,000.00 annually from unspent maintenance expenses, and more from unspent capital repairs.

(5) The total number of faithful regularly worshipping on Sundays at Mother of God Church was less than 100 in the last Fiscal Year. Indeed, the combined weekly Sunday Mass attendance at the three churches of the parish was less than 700 in October 2019. This total includes at least a 55% decrease in attendance at Mother of God Church over the last 20 years.

(6) Preserving Mother of God Church for worship or for any other parish use will result in continued unneeded and unnecessary operational and maintenance costs that will cripple the ability of Christ Our Light Parish to serve the poor, enhance its evangelical mission, and remain viable.

Finally, since March 2020, the arrival of the novel coronavirus pandemic of COVID-19 has substantially diminished the United States economy, materially and negatively changing the financial well-being of the archdiocese, Christ Our Light Parish, and many of our poor and middle- and working-class families. This is a real concern regarding the long-term economic survival of our institutions.

It is unreasonable to expect a parish formed from the extinctive union of three parishes to maintain a church it cannot afford, does not need, and is no longer useful for divine worship. Furthermore, there are no parochial, archdiocesan, or other known sources of funds available to keep and maintain Mother of God Church as a place of Catholic worship. One must also be mindful that there is no governmental financial support for building or maintaining churches in the United States of America.

The reasonable and safe solution for the parish is to relegate Mother of God Church to profane but not sordid use, allowing it and the rest of the church's campus to be sold or otherwise developed for the benefit of the new parish, its ministries, and the work of charity. In addition to the financial relief provided by a sale of the church campus, such a sale would also





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result in an immediate annual savings of wasteful maintenance costs and further capital expenditures.

THEREFORE, know that I, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, according to the norms of the Code of Canon Law, electronically convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago *via* the Internet on August 4, 2020, and again on August 28, 2020. Hearing the council's deliberations and its August 28<sup>th</sup> vote of 35 for and 1 against the proposal to relegate Mother of God Church of Christ Our Light Parish to profane but not sordid use; invoking the Holy Spirit; and satisfying myself that the good of souls will suffer no detriment as the parish church of St. Florian is sufficient for the needs of the new Christ Our Light Parish, I

***decree the following:***

1. Effective October 1, 2020, Mother of God Church of Christ Our Light Parish in Chicago and Burnham, Illinois, is relegated to profane but not sordid use;
2. Officials of the Archdiocese of Chicago, cooperating with the Pastor of Christ Our Light Parish, will assure the real property and other assets of the former Mother of God Parish, including Mother of God Church, are secure for the benefit of Christ Our Light Parish;
3. The real property assets of the former Mother of God Parish are to provide Christ Our Light Parish proceeds from alienation of the property or income from rental under lease;
4. The reports given to the Presbyteral Council on this matter, together with the minutes of the council meetings on August 4, 2020, and August 28, 2020, are to be attached to this decree and available upon request from eligible parties; and
5. Notification of this decree is to be made to the Pastor of Christ Our Light Parish and to his parishioners through publication on the archdiocesan website and the parish bulletin.

*Before hierarchical recourse (appeal) may be taken against this decree, a written, signed, and dated petition to reconsider or amend the decree must be sent to me within ten (10) useful days from notification of the decree (CIC cc. 1734, 1735, 1737).*

Given this 18<sup>th</sup> day of September, A.D. 2020.  
From Holy Name Cathedral,  
Chicago, Illinois

*Blase J. Cupich*  
Archbishop of Chicago



*Rev. Robert Fede*  
Ecclesiastical Notary

Attachments

ONCE AVAILABLE, DATA PERTAINING TO THIS DECREE AND SUBMITTED TO THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO AND MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETINGS OF AUGUST 4, 2020, AND AUGUST 28, 2020, MAY BE REQUESTED BY ELIGIBLE PARTIES FROM THE OFFICE FOR CANONICAL AFFAIRS