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Prot. N. 2024 RPU-4

## DECREE

### IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

On March 3, 2022, following consultation with the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago, I issued a decree establishing a new parish through the extinctive union of two neighboring parishes in the southwest suburban community of Evergreen Park, Illinois: Queen of Martyrs Parish and St. Bernadette Parish. Extinguished as separate juridic persons in the Church, these two parishes were united *ad interim* under the name of Queen of Martyrs and St. Bernadette Parish, effective July 1, 2022. Hierarchical recourse against the decree was rejected by the Dicastery for the Clergy on June 30, 2022 (Prot. N. 2022-1380). Further recourse to the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura was rejected *in limine* on October 10, 2022 (Prot. n. 56324/22 CA). By my decree of May 16, 2023, the new parish was renamed St. Gianna Molla Parish.

On February 26, 2024, after consulting with the parish pastoral council and finance council, the pastor of St. Gianna Molla Parish, the Reverend Benedykt Pazdan, came to the opinion that continued use of St. Bernadette Church of St. Gianna Molla Parish for divine worship was no longer feasible. Consequently, he wrote to me and the Episcopal Vicar of his region of the archdiocese, asking that St. Bernadette Church 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 is a "grave cause" indicating a church should no longer be used for divine worship and that 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, considered what constituted the 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. The 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 cause 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) from the beginning, the new parish was burdened 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 to preserve a sacred building.

In this case it is established that (1) Retaining St. Bernadette Church of St. Gianna Molla Parish as a place of divine worship, imposes a financial burden on the parish due to operational and maintenance expenses associated with the church. If maintained for parish use, the St. Bernadette Church campus would require \$539,150.00 in capital repairs, \$442,150.00 for the church alone. These figures are extrapolated from the June 15, 2021, facility assessment conducted by third-party engineering firms. The figures are in addition to the \$1,057,550.00 required for capital repairs at the campus of the parish church, Queen of Martyrs, including \$87,000.00 for the parish church alone (based on the assessment conducted for Queen of Martyrs Parish, also on June 15, 2021). The actual costs to complete necessary repairs have undoubtedly risen since 2021.

(2) St. Bernadette Church is not needed for divine worship by St. Gianna Molla Parish. Seating capacity at the parish church, Queen of Martyrs, is 700, located two miles from St. Bernadette Church, and sufficient to accommodate the total weekend Mass attendance of the united parish, which was 782 across six Masses in October 2023.

(3) When the new parish was formed from the union of two parishes, it acquired operating deficits from St. Bernadette Parish totaling \$130,575.00 for the Fiscal Years 2020 through 2022. These deficits precluded investment in needed preventive maintenance in the year preceding the union. Recent revenue from offerings given at St. Bernadette Church have steadily decreased between 2009 and 2021, as has the regular Sunday Mass attendance at the church, from 676 in 2009 to 300 in 2021. In Fiscal Year 2022 (October 2023) the attendance was 259.

(4) Sale or rental of St. Bernadette Church will benefit the mission of St. Gianna Molla Parish with ready cash proceeds. Furthermore, there will be immediate annual savings of more than \$100,000.00 from unspent regular maintenance expenses, and more from the unspent capital repairs once the church is sold or leased.

(5) The total number of faithful regularly worshipping on Sundays at St. Bernadette Church was 259 in October 2022 (Fiscal Year 2023), a more than 43% decline from the last pre-COVID-19 count of 455 regular worshippers in October 2019 (Fiscal Year 2020), and a near 52% decline from a count of 531 in October 2014 (Fiscal Year 2015)

(6) Preserving St. Bernadette Church for worship will result in continued and unnecessary operational and maintenance costs that will cripple the ability of St. Gianna Molla Parish to serve the poor, enhance its evangelical mission, and remain viable.

It is unreasonable to expect a parish formed from the extinctive union of two parishes to maintain a church it cannot afford and that is no longer needed for the divine worship of the new parish. Furthermore, there are no parochial, archdiocesan, or other known sources of funds available to keep and maintain St. Bernadette Church as a place of Catholic worship. There is

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no governmental assistance for building or maintaining churches in the United States of America. The reasonable course is to relegate St. Bernadette Church of St. Gianna Molla Parish to profane but not sordid use, selling or developing the property for the benefit of the new parish, its ministries, and charity.

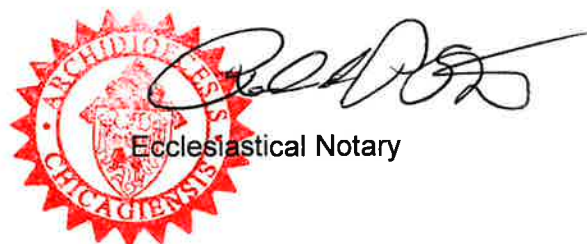
THEREFORE, know that I, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, according to the norms of the Code of Canon Law, convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago at the St. Bernardine campus of St. Luke and St. Bernardine Parish, Forest Park, Illinois, on March 5, 2024, and again at the St. Giles campus of St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy and St. Giles Parish, Oak Park, Illinois, on May 7, 2024. Hearing the council's deliberations and the council's May 7<sup>th</sup> vote of 33 yes and none against the proposal to relegate to profane but not sordid use St. Bernadette Church of St. Gianna Molla Parish; invoking the Holy Spirit; and satisfying myself that the good of souls will suffer no detriment, and that the parish church of Queen of Martyrs is sufficient for the needs of St. Gianna Molla Parish,

***I decree the following:***

1. Effective today, July 1, 2024, St. Bernadette Church of St. Gianna Molla Parish, Evergreen Park, Illinois, is relegated to profane but not sordid use;
2. Officials of the Archdiocese of Chicago, cooperating with the pastor of the St. Bernadette Church of St. Gianna Molla Parish, will assure the real property associated with the St. Bernadette Church campus is secure for the benefit of St. Gianna Molla Parish;
3. If alienated, St. Bernadette Church is to provide St. Gianna Molla Parish with proceeds from sale of the property or rental under lease;
4. The reports given to the Presbyteral Council on this matter, together with the minutes of the council meetings on March 5, 2024, and May 7, 2024, are confidential documents and will be appended to this decree upon approval and made available upon the request of eligible parties; and
5. Notification of this decree is to be made immediately through publication on the Archdiocesan Website. It is then to be sent to the pastor of St. Gianna Molla Parish for communication to parishioners through the parish bulletin or other suitable means.

Given this 1<sup>st</sup> day of July, A.D. 2024.  
From Holy Name Cathedral,  
Chicago, Illinois

  
Archbishop of Chicago



*Attachments*

*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 by mail or delivered to the Archbishop of Chicago within ten (10) useful days from notification of the decree (CIC cc. 1734, 1735, 1737). The address is Office of the Archbishop, Archdiocese of Chicago, 835 North Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611.*

ONCE APPROVED, CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS DECREE AND SUBMITTED TO THE PRESBYTERAL COUNCIL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO AND THE CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETINGS OF MARCH 5, 2024, AND MAY 7, 2024, WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE UPON THE REQUEST OF ELIGIBLE PARTIES TO THE OFFICE FOR CANONICAL AFFAIRS