



Office of the Archbishop
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Prot. N. 2022 RPU-5

DECREE

IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

On December 10, 2020, following consultation with the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago, I issued a decree extinguishing Ascension-St. Susanna Parish and St. John the Baptist Parish, both in South Suburban Harvey, Illinois, and St. Gerard Majella Parish in the neighboring suburb of Markham, Illinois. Effective April 5, 2021, these three parishes were united to form one new juridic person, a territorial parish called, *ad interim*, Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish, with St. John the Baptist Church designated the parish church.

On October 11, 2021, during a vacancy in the parochial office, the Most Reverend Joseph Perry, Auxiliary Bishop and Episcopal Vicar for Vicariate VI of the Archdiocese of Chicago, after consulting with lay leadership of Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish, wrote to me requesting that Ascension Church, the former parish church of the extinguished Ascension-St. Susanna 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 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 cause 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) 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 to preserve a sacred building.

In this case it is established that (1) Retaining Ascension Church of Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish as a place of divine worship, imposes a

financial burden on the parish from operational and maintenance expenses associated with the church. If maintained for parish use, the Ascension Church campus will require more than \$569,975.00 in capital repairs, \$217,100.00 the church/school building alone. Moreover, the parish will have the burden of unnecessary administrative costs for maintaining a church it does not need.

(2) Ascension Church is not needed for divine worship for the average of 66 Sunday worshippers regularly attending there in FY 2020 (before COVID-19). This number of worshippers is well accommodated in the nearby parish church of St. John the Baptist.

(3) On July 31, 2021, the combined debt of Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish was \$2,953,918.00, with \$1,520,976.00 of the debt associated with the extinguished Ascension-St. Susanna Parish. Prior to the extinctive union, Ascension-St. Susanna Parish had accumulated a debt of more than \$1,300,000.00 due to a history of operating incomes insufficient to meet current expenses. Proceeds from the Fiscal Year 2020 regular offertory collections at the former Ascension-St. Susanna Parish were \$96,648.00.

(4) Sale or rental of Ascension Church and the other real property of the church campus will benefit the mission of Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish with ready cash proceeds. There will be immediate additional savings of \$50,000.00, based on maintenance expenditures in Fiscal Years 2019 and 2020, and more from the \$659,975.00 in unspent capital repairs.

(5) The average number of faithful regularly worshipping on Sundays at Ascension Church was 66 in October 2019 (Fiscal Year 2020), a 65% decline over 15 years, from the average of 180 attending regularly in October 2004 (Fiscal Year 2005). Over the same period, the offertory collections decreased by nearly 7%, from \$103,745.00 to \$96,648.00.

(6) Preserving Ascension Church for divine worship will result in continued and unnecessary operational and maintenance costs that will cripple the ability of Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish to serve the poor, enhance its evangelical mission, and remain viable.

One should not expect a parish formed from the union of three parishes to maintain a church it cannot afford, does not need, and which is no longer useful for divine worship. Moreover, there are no parochial, archdiocesan, or other known sources of funds available to keep and maintain Ascension Church as a place of Catholic worship. There is no governmental assistance for building or maintaining churches in the United States of America. The reasonable course is to relegate Ascension Church to profane but not sordid use, allowing it to be sold or otherwise developed for the benefit of the new parish, its ministries, and the work of charity.

THEREFORE, know that I, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, according to

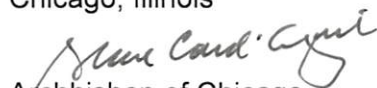
the norms of the Code of Canon Law, convened the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese Chicago electronically *via* the internet on October 14, 2021, and again on November 9, 2021, at St. Giles Parish, Oak Park, Illinois. Hearing the council's deliberations and the council's November 9th vote of 35 for and one against the proposal to relegate Ascension Church of Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish to profane but not sordid use; invoking the Holy Spirit; and satisfying myself that the good of souls will suffer no detriment,

I decree the following:


1. Effective immediately, Ascension Church of Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish, is relegated to profane but not sordid use;
2. Officials of the Archdiocese of Chicago, cooperating with the administrator of the parish will assure the real property associated with Ascension Church is secure is secure for the benefit of Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish;
3. Alienation of the real property associated with Ascension Church is to provide Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish with the proceeds from sale or rental under lease;
4. When approved, the reports given to the Presbyteral Council on this matter, together with the minutes of the council meetings of October 14, 2021, and November 9, 2021, are to be attached to this decree and available upon request to 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 administrator of Ascension and SS. John the Baptist, Susanna, and Gerard Majella Parish for communication to parishioners through publication in the parish bulletin or other suitable means.

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 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.

Given this 11th day of January, A.D. 2022.
From Holy Name Cathedral,
Chicago, Illinois


Archbishop of Chicago




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 OCTOBER 14, 2021, AND NOVEMBER 9, 2021, MAY BE
REQUESTED BY ELIGIBLE PARTIES FROM THE OFFICE FOR CANONICAL AFFAIRS**