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Prot. N. 2022 RPU-1

## DECREE

### IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

On February 25, 2021, following consultation with the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Chicago, I issued a decree extinguishing Holy Angels Parish, St. Elizabeth Parish, St. Ambrose Parish, St. Anselm Parish, and Corpus Christi Parish, five predominantly African American parishes located in the Bronzeville, Kenwood, and Washington Park neighborhoods of the Southside of the City of Chicago. Pursuant to the decree and effective July 1, 2021, the parishes were united to form one juridic person, a territorial parish called, *ad interim*, Corpus Christi, Holy Angels, and SS. Elizabeth, Ambrose, and Anselm Parish. By decree dated May 6, 2021, the new parish was renamed Our Lady of Africa Parish.

On August 25, 2021, after consulting with the parish pastoral council and other members of the new parish, the pastor of Our Lady of Africa Parish, the Reverend Robert J. Kelly, SVD, discerned that continued use of St. Ambrose Church for divine worship was not feasible. Consequently, he wrote to me and the Episcopal Vicar of his region of the archdiocese, asking that St. Ambrose Church of Our Lady of Africa 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 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) 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 St. Ambrose Church of Our Lady of Africa Parish as a place of divine worship, imposes a financial burden on Our Lady of Africa Parish

from operational and maintenance expenses associated with the church. If maintained for parish use, the St. Ambrose Church campus will require more than \$1,162,650.00 in repairs, \$200,250.00 for the church alone. Moreover, Our Lady of Africa will continue to have the burden of unnecessary administrative costs for maintaining a church it does not need.

(2) St. Ambrose Church is not needed for divine worship for the average of 137 Sunday worshippers regularly attending there in FY 2020 (before COVID-19). This number of worshippers is well accommodated in Holy Angels Church, the parish church of Our Lady of Africa Parish.

(3) On July 31, 2021, the combined debt of the new Our Lady of Africa Parish was \$6,600,000.00, partially offset by cash assets of \$926,604.00 on deposit. Of this debt, \$1,658,204.00 was derived from the former St. Ambrose Parish. Prior to the extinctive union, St. Ambrose Parish was unable to service its debt, incurring more than \$100,000.00 in unpaid bills each year since Fiscal Year 2017. The Fiscal Year 2020 regular offertory collections of the former St. Ambrose was \$115,718.00, well below what was needed for current operations.

(4) Sale or rental of St. Ambrose Church and the other real property of the church campus will benefit the mission of Our Lady of Africa Parish with ready cash proceeds. There will be immediate additional savings of at least \$100,000.00 annually from unspent maintenance expenses, and more from the \$1,162,650.00 in unspent capital repairs.

(5) The total number of faithful regularly worshipping on Sundays at St. Ambrose Church was 137 in October 2019 (Fiscal Year 2020), a 39% decline over 10 years from an attendance of 222 in October 2009.

(6) Preserving St. Ambrose Church for divine worship will result in continued and unnecessary operational and maintenance costs that will cripple the ability of Our Lady of Africa 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 diminished large parts of the United States economy, materially and negatively changing the financial well-being of the archdiocese, some of our parishes, and many poor and middle-class families. There is concern for the long-term economic survival of some institutions.

It is unreasonable to expect a new parish formed from the union of five small parishes to maintain a church they cannot afford, do 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 St. Ambrose 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 and safe course is to relegate St. Ambrose Church of Our Lady of Africa Parish 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 of Chicago at St. Giles Parish, Oak Park, Illinois, on September 7, 2021, and again on November 9, 2021. Hearing the council's deliberations and the council's November 9<sup>th</sup> vote of 35 for and one against the proposal to relegate St. Ambrose Church of Our Lady of Africa Parish to profane but not sordid use; invoking the Holy Spirit; satisfying myself that the good of souls will suffer no detriment, and that Holy Angels Church, the parish church of Our Lady of Africa Parish is sufficient for the needs of the faithful,

***I decree the following:***


1. Effective immediately, St. Ambrose Church of Our Lady of Africa Parish on the Southside of the City of Chicago, is relegated to profane but not sordid use;
2. Officials of the Archdiocese of Chicago, cooperating with the pastor of Our Lady of Africa Parish will assure the real property associated with St. Ambrose Church is secure for the benefit of Our Lady of Africa Parish;
3. If alienated, the alienation of St. Ambrose Church is to provide Our Lady of Africa Parish the proceeds from sale of the real property 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 September 7, 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 Pastor of Our Lady of Africa 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 SEPTEMBER 7, 2021, AND NOVEMBER 9, 2021, MAY BE REQUESTED BY ELIGIBLE PARTIES FROM THE OFFICE FOR CANONICAL AFFAIRS**