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By the Grace of God and the Apostolic See

ARCHBISHOP OF NEW YORK

DECREE ON THE RELEGATION OF THE CHURCH OF SAINT MARGARET MARY, STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

Whereas bishops “feed their sheep in the name of the Lord by fulfilling their office of teaching, sanctifying and governing them” and “pursue their apostolic work as witnesses of Christ to all people” (see Vatican II, Decree on the pastoral office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, October 28, 1965, n. 11);

Whereas the Church is not an archeological museum but rather the old well of the village that gives water to the generations of today as it did to those of the past (see Pope Saint John XXIII, Homily during the solemn liturgy in Byzantine-Slavic rite in honor of Saint John Chrysostom, November 13, 1960: AAS 52 [1960] 963: “La Chiesa Cattolica non è un museo di archeologia. Essa è l'antica fontana del villaggio che dà l'acqua alle generazioni di oggi, come la diede a quelle del passato.”);

Whereas church buildings are not simply meeting places for the faithful but the dwelling place of God and a symbol of the Church present in the locality and permanently designated for the worship to God, and whereas only those things which serve the exercise or promotion of worship, piety or religion are permitted in a sacred place (Congregation for Bishops, *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* “*Apostolorum Successores*”, February 22, 2004, n. 154 ; see canon 1210);

Whereas the diocesan bishop has the duty to exercise careful vigilance over the administration of all the goods which belong to public juridic persons subject to him (c. 1276 §1), and whereas the diocesan bishop, in the administration of goods, concerns himself first of all with providing for divine worship, charity, the apostolate and the support of the clergy, these ends always being given precedence over all others

(Congregation for Bishops, *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops "Apostolorum Successores"*, February 22, 2004, n. 188);

Whereas the diocesan Bishop is to protect the unity of the universal Church and therefore is bound to promote the common discipline of the whole Church and to urge the observance of all ecclesiastical laws, and whereas the diocesan Bishop is to exercise vigilance so that abuses do not creep into ecclesiastical discipline, especially regarding the ministry of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and sacramental, the worship of God and the veneration of the saints, and the administration of goods (see canon 392);

Whereas charity and the other assistance to be bestowed on the poor and other things of this kind cannot be neglected in order to preserve a sacred building (see Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, Final Decree of the College of Judges *coram Agustoni*, May 4, 1996: "Praeterea ut salvetur aedificium sacrum negligi haud queunt eleemosyna ceteraque subsidia pauperibus praesertim elargienda et alia huiusmodi.");

Whereas where 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 (canon 1222 §2);

Whereas the grave cause of relegation to profane but not sordid use may exist not in one obvious grave cause but may arise from a combination of many just causes which combined together manifest a grave cause (see Congregation for 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 the gravity of the reason results from the sum of the circumstances which show that the reason is of great importance in the concrete case (see Nicholas Schöch, "Relegation of Churches to Profane Use (C. 1222, §2): Reasons and Procedure," *The Jurist* 67 [2007] 491);

Whereas Father Michael Cichon, Pastor of the Parish of Saint Christopher - Saint Margaret Mary, Staten Island, New York, has requested by letter of January 23, 2023 to relegate the church of Saint Margaret Mary, Staten Island, to profane but not sordid use, because of the immense financial burden on the parish, the required financial resources needed to maintain nine (9) buildings, and the (financial) challenges, challenges that were further increased by the COVID-19 pandemic;

Whereas we should always go first, not so much to our friends and wealthy neighbors, "but above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked, 'those who cannot repay you' (Lk 14:14). There can be no room for doubt or for

explanations which weaken so clear a message. Today and always, 'the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel', and the fact that it is freely preached to them is a sign of the kingdom that Jesus came to establish. We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them." (Francis, apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, n. 48);

Whereas, having examined the facts of the present case, we have abundantly established that grave reasons required by canon 1222 §2 are present, even if some of the reasons invoked may not by themselves constitute a grave cause, they do so when taken together;

After a careful examination, it was established that nobody could legitimately claim rights for themselves in the church, understood primarily as patrimonial rights or rights associated with patrimonial rights (see Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, Final Decree of the College of Judges, 21 November 1988, *Communicationes* 20 [1988] 93: "Iura de quibus sermo fit in canone sunt praesertim iura patrimonialia vel eis assimilata, quae magna ex parte e fundatione vel aedificatione ecclesiae exsurgunt."), rights that are not presumed, but must be proven (Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, Decree of the Congresso, 5 May 1995: "Iura, de quibus sermo, non praesumuntur, sed de eorum concessione vel admissione ex parte competentis auctoritatis ecclesiasticae legitime constare debet." and "Non demonstratur haberi personas quae vera iura in ecclesia E. sibi legitime vindicant.");

Furthermore, it was established that the good of souls suffers no detriment as a result of the proposed relegation (see canon 1222 §2 *in fine*);

After having heard the presbyteral council on February 23, 2023, and, after having exposed the motives for the relegation of the church, the presbyteral council gave favorable advice for the relegation of the church of Saint Margaret Mary, Staten Island, in the Parish of Saint Christopher - Saint Margaret Mary, Staten Island, New York;

Therefore, I, the undersigned Archbishop of New York, after prayerful consideration, having weighed all the reasons and causes, have decided as follows:

DECREE

1. The church of Saint Margaret Mary, Staten Island, in the Parish of Saint Christopher – Saint Margaret Mary, Staten Island, New York, is hereby reduced to profane but not sordid use according to the prescripts of canon 1222 §2 for the grave causes mentioned above.
2. Negotiations that may lead to the sale of the property can start, notwithstanding the need to follow the proper procedures when it comes to effectively alienate the property.
3. Prior to alienation, all sacred objects, relics, sacred furnishings, stained-glass windows, bells, confessionals, altars, etc. are to be removed for use in other sacred edifices or to be stored in ecclesiastical custody. In case the altars cannot be removed, they must be destroyed (see canons 1212 and 1238).

This decree is effective immediately. At the same time, I order this decree to be made public to all the faithful through its publication on this day on the website of the Archdiocese. This publication on the website will be the legitimate notification. A notarized copy of the decree will be sent to the pastor, and an announcement will be made in the Archdiocesan digital newsroom.

All those who claim to have been aggrieved by this decree are herewith notified that, if they desire to file recourse against our decree, they are required, *ad validitatem*, to submit a petition in the sense of canon 1734 §1 to us within ten useful days from the legitimate notification of this decree.

Given at the Chancery, New York, NY, this 10th day of May 2023, Optional Memorial of Saint Damien De Veuster, priest.



Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York



John P. Cahill
Chancellor