

**DISPOSITION OF LITURGICAL AND
NON-LITURGICAL PARISH ASSETS**

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REVISED POLICY¹

A church is the place where the Christian community is gathered to hear the word of God, to offer intercession and praise to him, and above all to celebrate the holy mysteries, and it is the place where the holy sacrament of the Eucharist is kept. Thus it stands as a special kind of image of the Church itself, which is God's temple built from living stones. And the altar of a church, around which the holy people of God gather to take part in the Lord's sacrifice and to be refreshed at the heavenly meal, stands as a sign of Christ himself, who is the priest, the victim, and the altar of his own sacrifice.²

Shifting demographics, economics and declining numbers of clergy have necessitated the closure of parish churches in many parts of the Diocese of London. Regardless of how well organized past dissolutions have been handled, clergy and laity alike have experienced a wide variety of emotions at the time of closure, ranging from a spirit of thankfulness for the witness that was provided to feelings of anger and a sense of grief.

There are families which have been associated with particular parish churches for well over a hundred years. The closure of a church is not simply the closing of a building but a tangible break with that place where children were baptized, marriages were celebrated and from where the dead were buried. Pastors should therefore be very concerned with the careful and correct distribution of the many articles founding a church. By way of analogy, liturgical and devotional items have the sentimental value of old family photographs and heirlooms which have been passed from generation to generation.

Of foremost consideration are the questions how best to deal with items that have been set aside for worship.

The following norms and directives provide an outline for the distribution of parish assets which had formerly been used for worship.

¹ Provision for the disposition of liturgical and non-liturgical assets was included in *Parish Reorganization Policy: Implementation Phase. Parish Closing Guidelines and Procedures*. However, in light of further directives given in the document *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* issued by the Congregation for the Clergy on April 30, 2013 it was determined that the diocesan policy in this regard needed to be revised.

² Decree, *Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, May 29, 1977

General Norms

1. Within thirty days of the announcement of the closure of a church, an inventory of all the sacred objects is to be taken by the pastor or parish administrator and at least two other parishioners. These items should be recorded manually as per the “Liturgical Inventory”.³ A digital photograph should also be taken of each object. A copy of the completed inventory, along with the digital photographs, is to be provided to the Director of Liturgy.
2. It is preferable to find a new home for these items at another parish, mission, hospital or school chapel, or some other place where the Eucharist is celebrated.
3. It is quite acceptable, indeed charitable, to provide vessels, vestments and other liturgy artifacts to communities in the diocese in the Canadian north or to other needy areas in Canada or overseas mission territories.
4. When items cannot be gifted, they may be sold to other Catholic bodies outside of the Diocese of London. The diocese has had success with ‘Fynders Keepers Brokerage’ (www.fynderskeepers.com), a company in the United States. This body helps to pair churches in need with available objects. Of greatest benefit is the fact that they provide a written record of where objects have been reincorporated for worship.
5. All liturgical items are to remain in the church until after the final Mass.
6. Within the week of the final Mass the team which carried out the liturgical inventory will meet to review its completeness and accuracy.
7. Items of an artistic or historical significance will be determined by the Director of Liturgy, in consultation with recognized experts. If any liturgical items or furnishings are determined to be of artistic or historical significance, they will be preserved in the Archives of the Diocese of London or, if need be, in another diocesan church.
8. For a one month period following the closure, pastors and parish administrators from the neighboring parishes will be allowed to remove items for use in their own community. After the one month period has expired, requests for objects may be made by other parishes, Catholic communities or institutions, in writing, to the Director of Liturgy. The recipient parish is responsible for all the financial costs of removing the pieces.
9. Items which are no longer suitable for sacred use are to be either buried or burned. It is very fitting to bury these items in an adjacent cemetery or to provide these items to one of the diocesan cemeteries, who will from time to time, bury a large number of items together. Pastors and those responsible for the disposal of Church goods must be pastorally sensitive to various cultures and peoples who, for one reason or another, find burning disrespectful.

³ Appendix I of this document.

Liturgical Items of Particular Concern

1. Particular attention should be given to those items which reflect the manifold presence of Christ in the liturgy.⁴ These items include seating for the assembly, the ambo, the altar, the tabernacle and the baptismal font, where we are provided our Christian identity, becoming children of God and coheirs with Christ.
2. On April 30, 2013, the Congregation for the Clergy issued a document entitled *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*. This document directs that:

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. Because altars can never be turned over to profane use, if they cannot be removed, they must be destroyed (cf. canons 1212 and 1238).⁵

3. More than any other item, the altar must be given particular attention. In the *Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, the altar is first washed, anointed with Sacred Chrism and clothed with linens prior to the celebration of the Eucharist.⁶ The model follows the Order of Christian

⁴ 35 All of us realize that there is more than one way in which Christ is present in His Church. We want to go into this very joyful subject, which the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy presented briefly, at somewhat greater length. Christ is present in His Church when she prays, since He is the one who “prays for us and prays in us and to whom we pray: He prays for us as our priest, He prays in us as our head, He is prayed to by us as our God”, and He is the one who has promised, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them.” He is present in the Church as she performs her works of mercy, not just because whatever good we do to one of His least brethren we do to Christ Himself, but also because Christ is the one who performs these works through the Church and who continually helps men with His divine love. He is present in the Church as she moves along on her pilgrimage with a longing to reach the portals of eternal life, for He is the one who dwells in our hearts through faith, and who instills charity in them through the Holy Spirit whom He gives to us. ³⁶ In still another very genuine way, He is present in the Church as she preaches, since the Gospel which she proclaims is the word of God, and it is only in the name of Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, and by His authority and with His help that it is preached, so that there might be “one flock resting secure in one shepherd.” ³⁷ He is present in His Church as she rules and governs the People of God, since her sacred power comes from Christ and since Christ, the “Shepherd of Shepherds,” is presenting the bishops who exercise that power, in keeping with the promise He made to the Apostles. ³⁸ Moreover, Christ is present in His Church in a still more sublime manner as she offers the Sacrifice of the Mass in His name; He is present in her as she administers the sacraments. On the matter of Christ’s presence in the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass, We would like very much to call what St. John Chrysostom, overcome with awe, had to say in such accurate and eloquent words: “I wish to add something that is clearly awe-inspiring, but do not be surprised or upset. What is this? It is the same offering, no matter who offers it, be it Peter or Paul. It is the same one that Christ gave to His disciples and the same one that priests now perform: the latter is in no way inferior to the former, for it is not men who sanctify the latter, but He who sanctified the former. For just as the words which God spoke are the same as those that the priest now pronounces, so too the offering is the same.” No one is unaware that the sacraments are the actions of Christ who administers them through men. And so the sacraments are holy in themselves and they pour grace into the soul by the power of Christ, when they touch the body. The Highest Kind of Presence. These various ways in which Christ is present fill the mind with astonishment and offer the Church a mystery for her contemplation. But there is another way in which Christ is present in His Church, a way that surpasses all the others. It is His presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is, for this reason, “a more consoling source of devotion, a lovelier object of contemplation and holier in what it contains” than all the other sacraments; for it contains Christ Himself and it is “a kind of consummation of the spiritual life, and in a sense the goal of all the sacraments.” This presence is called “real” not to exclude the idea that the others are “real” too, but rather to indicate presence par excellence, because it is substantial and through it Christ becomes present whole and entire, God and man. And so it would be wrong for anyone to try to explain this manner of presence by dreaming up a so-called “pneumatic” nature of the glorious body of Christ that would be present everywhere; or for anyone to limit it to symbolism, as if this most sacred Sacrament were to consist in nothing more than an efficacious sign of the spiritual presence of Christ and of His intimate union with the faithful, the members of His Mystical Body. Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter on the Holy Eucharist, Mysterium Fidei*, September 3, 1965.

⁵ No. 3, g)

⁶ See nos. 63-70.

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Initiation. As we become “other Christs” through our initiation into the life of Christ, the altar becomes that which represents Christ in the midst of the assembly.

4. An altar loses its dedication or blessing if it suffers major destruction, or by a decree of the component authority, or if through inadvertence or neglect it has, in fact, been given over to profane use. However, given its sacred character and its specific designation as symbolizing Christ’s presence in a sacred space, the latter is not an acceptable option in the disposition of an altar. Nor does its secularization by decree permit that it may then be used for a profane or sordid purpose. As with the decree closing a church as a place of worship does not then permit the building to be used for an inappropriate or sordid purpose, so with an altar. In such instances, it would be best if the altar is destroyed and the remnants buried.⁷
5. Ideally, altars will be reincorporated into other worship spaces.
6. The sale of churches with altars intact will be provided to other Catholic Churches *sui iuris*⁸ and to communities of the Orthodox faithful.
7. Relics and altar stones are always to be removed prior to the sale of a church, unless the church is being sold to another Catholic Church *sui iuris* or a community of the Orthodox faith. Relics, the mortal remains of the Church’s “great cloud of witness”,⁹ are to be returned to the Archives of the Diocese of London for the safe keeping and future distribution. In accordance with the laws of the Universal Church, relics are not to be kept for the private devotion of either the clergy or the laity.¹⁰
8. Protestant ecclesial communities requesting that altars and liturgical items be kept intact will have their application reviewed on a case by case basis by the Director of Liturgy.
9. If a church is sold to a non-Christian faith community, all liturgical items need to be removed from the building.¹¹
10. If an altar cannot be reincorporated into a place of worship, then the loss of its dedication or blessing is to be established by a decree of the diocesan bishop¹² and the altar is then to be destroyed and the remnants buried. There are no exceptions to this rule.
11. In a similar manner, particular care is to be taken in reference to the disposition of the ambo, tabernacle and baptismal font, as these items speak about those areas in our liturgical and sacramental worship which identify things which are core to Christian and Catholic sentiment.
12. The transfer of Stations of the Cross, statues, icons and other devotional items to another church, chapel, or to a hospital, school or other Catholic institution is the preferable means of

⁷ See canons 1212, 1238 and 1239.

⁸ The Eastern Catholic Churches, namely, the Churches of the Alexandrian, Antiochian, Armenian, Byzantine and Chaldean rites.

⁹ Hebrews 12:1

¹⁰ See canon 1190.

¹¹ In some dioceses, closed church buildings have been repurposed for Jewish and Muslim communities or as centres for traditional Native Spirituality.

¹² Canon 1238.

disposing of these items. However, it is possible to return any of these to the original donor or donor family if they wish it and are able to use it as a devotional item in their home.

13. Chalices, patens and ciboria are blessed in order to reserve their use to sacred purposes. “The chalice and paten in which the wine and bread are offered, consecrated and received, since they are intended solely and permanently for the celebration of the Eucharist, become ‘sacred vessels’”.¹³ Chalices and ciboria should be provided to a neighboring parish or to a community in need. If they are so badly damaged, so as to be irreparable, they ought to be buried. Ceramic and glass vessels which have been used as chalices and ciboria should also be buried, as legislation indicates that they are not appropriate for the celebration of Mass.¹⁴
14. There is no need to keep Missals, Lectionaries and ritual texts which are no longer current. Likewise, vestments and linens which are worn, threadbare or beyond repair should be disposed of in a proper manner.
15. Weather conditions in Canada make the removal of stained-glass windows and bells very expensive and threatening to the structured integrity of many older buildings; however, the removal of these items is not always entirely impossible. Parishes wishing to obtain stained-glass windows or bells are to make a request in writing to the Director of Liturgy. The recipient parish is responsible for all the financial costs of removing these items, replacing the window opening with clear glass, and for making a financial contribution to the parish in whose territory the closed church is located. Parishes seeking stained-glass windows or bells from a closed church need to keep in mind the depreciation of the value of the church building if it is to be sold without these articles. Therefore the need for a financial contribution to defray this loss of market value. The determination of the amount of this financial contribution is to be made in consultation with the Financial Administrator of the Diocese of London.
16. Pews, or the seating provided the assembly, need to be tended to in an appropriate manner. Their sale or relocation should take into consideration the avoidance of scandal. For example, while it would be acceptable for a pew to be provided through gift or sale to a school or an individual’s home, it would be inappropriate to furnish a pew to a building used for gambling or the consumption of alcohol. In those instances where a church is sold to another Christian community or where the church building will be used for worship, it is permissible that the pews remain in the building.
17. Though not specified in the documents, church organs are also of particular spiritual and cultural significance in the Catholic community. Wherever possible, the desire of the diocese is to have a church organ in a closed church moved to another place of worship. Again, the recipient community is responsible for all of the financial costs of removing, transporting and reinstalling the instrument.

February 11, 2014

¹³ “Rite of Blessing a Chalice and Paten” in *Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, chapter VII, no. 1.

¹⁴ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, nos. 328, 329 and 332.

Appendix I: Liturgical Inventory

Hymnals

Title	Edition	Number

Altar

Description	Number
Altar(s) The bishop can decree the loss of its dedication or blessing if it has been in large measure destroyed (canon 1212). Altars, whether fixed or movable, do not lose their dedication or blessing as a result of a church or other sacred place being made over to secular usage (see canon 1238, '2). An altar, whether fixed or movable, is to be reserved for divine worship alone, to the exclusion of any secular usage (see canon 1239, '1).	
Altar Cloths Consistent with the disposal of all things blessed for use in the liturgy, it is appropriate that altar linens, which show signs of wear and can no longer be used, should normally be disposed of either by burial or burning. <i>(BCL: US) Care and Cleansing of Altar Linens [1] (U.S.) (Prot. 0)</i> March 19, 2001	
Candle Stands	
ProceSSIONal Cross	
Tabernacle(s)	

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Credence Table

Description	Number
Water Vessels / Sprinklers	
Large Cups	
Palls	
Veils	
Purificators	
Corporals	
Book Stands	
Cruets	
Basins, Water Pitchers, Towels	
Cups	
Trays	
Patens	
Pyx	
Ciborium (kind, ex. glass, pewter)	

Texts

Description	Number
Roman Missal	
Lectionary	

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Miscellaneous

Description	Number
Music Stand	
Microphones	
Microphones (Lavalier)	
Processional Candlesticks	
Collection Baskets	
Eucharistic Reservation lamp	
Eucharistic Reservation tabernacle	

Vestments

Description	Colour	Number
Chasubles		
Dalmatics		
Albs		

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Statues

[illegible]