

## Diocese of Sioux City Policy on the Administration and Physical Care of Oratories



The churches, oratories, and chapels of the Diocese of Sioux City are set apart by a rite of blessing or a solemn dedication marking them out as places for divine worship, most specifically the celebration of the Eucharist. It is only the diocesan bishop who can erect, suppress or alter parishes (Canon 515.2) after consulting the presbyteral council.

### Definitions

*Church:* A sacred building set aside for public worship which the faithful have a right of access (the cathedral and parish churches).

*Oratory:* A place set aside by permission of the bishop for divine worship for the benefit of some community or assembly of the faithful who gather there. All sacred celebrations may take place in an oratory unless otherwise excluded by the law, by particular provision of the bishop or by liturgical norms.

*Chapel:* A place set aside by permission of the bishop for divine worship for the benefit of one or more persons. Special permission over and above that given to establish the chapel is required for the celebration of Mass or other sacraments in a chapel (e.g., chapels in schools, nursing homes, hospitals).

### Closed Parishes/Oratories

1. The parish ceases to exist as a canonically established parish and its territory is subsumed by the designated parish. Thus,
  - a. The pastor is responsible for the spiritual needs of all who reside in his territory (Canon 519).
  - b. Parishioners of the merged parish shall be registered in the successor parish, respective to their territory. However, they may be provided with the opportunity to register membership to a parish of their choosing.
2. The Church building (hereafter identified as an oratory) remains standing as a place of occasional worship. This means,
  - a. Sunday Mass (which includes the Vigil Mass on Saturday evening) and the sacraments of initiation are to be celebrated in the principal parish church, and are not permitted in the oratory.
  - b. The oratory may be used for weddings and funerals, always at the discretion of the pastor.

- c. Use of the oratory for devotions, private prayer and Masses on feast days proper to the oratory is permitted.
  - d. The Blessed Sacrament is not be reserved in the oratory without the permission of the local ordinary (Canon 934, § 1, 2).
- 3. The contents of the oratory are to be upheld with the utmost esteem and respect. In respect to such items,
  - a. The ownership of sacred vessels, vestments, relics, and objects of artistic or historic value become the property of the successor parish. However, such articles may remain in the oratory and may not be sold or given to individuals for personal use (Canon 1269).
  - b. If the oratory is closed, the Policy on Sacred Patrimony for the Diocese of Sioux City is to be followed.
  - c. Other articles of value that are not consecrated or directly used in Divine Worship may be sold, with the proceeds to be allocated to the territorial parish.
  - d. The sacramental and financial records of the parish are to be transferred to the receiving parish.
  - e. Minute books, record books, the parish seal, copies of bulletins, digital documents and any other items of historical value are to be transferred to the receiving parish.
- 4. The pastor of the parish to which the community of the oratory is merged administrates the oratory and any associated cemeteries. With regard to administration and finance of the oratory and cemeteries,
  - a. The parish civil corporation will be merged into the corporation of the receiving parish unless particular circumstances warrant otherwise.
  - b. The restructuring of any and all civil corporations requires the consent of the local ordinary.
  - c. It is recommended, when possible, that cemetery boards be combined for ease of administration and that the board include trustees from each of the cemeteries under the parochial authority of the pastor. There should be an annual meeting to review the finances and maintenance of the cemeteries.
    - i. The cemetery funds for each cemetery should be maintained as separate accounts on the receiving parishes financial records (checking/savings). The parish bookkeeper should manage these bank accounts.
    - ii. The cemetery boards would work within the parish budget process and parameters.
    - iii. Any monuments constructed in the cemetery that once belonged to the now closed parish will not include the use of sacred or consecrated items. The primary reason is to prevent profanation in the event that a cemetery would be turned over to a local government or non-ecclesial organization.

- d. Having met all diocesan fiscal obligations up to the moment of the merger, all future diocesan obligations shall cease for the parish as it is moved to oratory status.
- e. With regard to the allocation of parish assets, primary consideration is to be given to cemetery perpetual care, then final disposition of parish buildings, then ordinary and maintenance expenses. There is to be a budget for ordinary and regular maintenance. This annual budget must provide assurance that all fiscal needs for the oratory are met (i.e., insurance, maintenance, utilities, etc.). Designated members of the faithful who once comprised the merging parish, in collaboration with the Pastor, assume responsibility for sustaining the oratory building, in addition to the support of their new parish community. With regard to the annual budget and physical condition of the oratory,
  - i. The budget will be reviewed annually.
  - ii. If the oratory does not have resources to continue maintenance, liability insurance, and other ordinary expenses, the building is to be razed or requests can be brought to the Pastoral Planning Office of the Diocese of Sioux City to consider other options for the church building.
  - iii. There will be an annual review of the physical condition and fiscal vitality of each oratory. When the physical or fiscal operational needs of the oratory building are deemed disproportionate, the building is to be razed, or permission to examine other options can be presented to the Pastoral Planning Office of the Diocese of Sioux City.
- f. Insurance to cover demolition of the building in case of unintended damage will be maintained through the Diocese of Sioux City.
- g. A separate fund/budget line is to be established at the receiving parish for maintenance of each oratory, including costs related to the possible sale and/or demolition of the oratory's buildings.
- h. All gifts, bequests, endowments and other restricted funds of the closed parish now placed in oratory status are to be administered by the receiving parish maintaining the intention of the donors. If that is not possible, the conditions for those funds must be renegotiated or repatriated.
- i. All gifts or bequests designated for an oratory are to be accepted or refused by the pastor according to the norm of law.
  - i. If the gift or bequest is without condition, the sum may be divided between the cemetery association and the receiving parish.
  - ii. If there are any conditions attached to the gift or the bequest that will alter the condition of the oratory building, the local ordinary's permission is required before the gift is to be accepted.
- j. The assets of the oratory are not to be distributed in a manner or for the purpose of benefiting private individuals, but always in a manner that respects the intentions of donors to the Church that is to benefit the Church and her proclamation of the Gospel.
- k. It is not permissible to turn over governance or ownership of an oratory to lay associations, museums, or other such organizations.

1. The proper canonical procedures must be adhered to prior to the razing of the oratory building.

Approved and promulgated for the Diocese of Sioux City on the 26 day of October, 2015.

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Most Reverend R. Walker Nickless  
Bishop of Sioux City

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Reverend Brent C. Lingle  
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