

MOST REVEREND DOUGLAS J. LUCIA
BISHOP OF SYRACUSE

DECREE
ON THE REDUCTION OF THE
CHURCH OF SAINT AGNES, AFTON, NEW YORK
TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

Whereas Saint John the Evangelist, Bainbridge, New York, was established as a mission of Saint Paul, Binghamton, New York, and the church was dedicated in 1914, and then was established as a parish in 1928;

Whereas Saint Agnes, Afton, New York, was established as a mission of the parish of Saint John the Evangelist, Bainbridge and the church was dedicated in 1949, and has remained a “mission” or auxiliary church of the parish (e.g., shared clergy, trustees, bulletin, finances, etc.);

Whereas various factors (i.e., changing demographics of the village and the parish, a shortage of people in the parish, a shortage of clergy in the Diocese of Syracuse, etc.) necessitated the placement of a share of the exercise of the pastoral care of the parish under the direction of a deacon in 2017 (can. 517 §2);

Whereas the current administrator to whom the parish is entrusted, Deacon Thomas Picciano, reviewed with the parish trustees, finance council, and pastoral council the sacramental statistics, Mass attendance, vitality, and limited financial situation of the parish;

Whereas the status of the parish and its two churches (demographics, finances, maintenance, etc.) was presented at a town hall meeting with parishioners, which resulted in a consensus to petition me to relegate the church of Saint Agnes to profane but not sordid use for the purpose of alienating the property in order to ensure the existence and vitality of the parish;

Whereas the pastor of the parish, the Reverend James Serowik, petitioned me to relegate the church of Saint Agnes to profane but not sordid use because: (1) there is a decline in the number of people attending Mass and celebrating the sacraments at the parish, (2) the needs of the parish for worship can be adequately met at the church of Saint John the Evangelist, and (3) the financial resources of the parish are limited and diminishing.

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 (can. 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, having examined the facts of the present case, it has been well 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;

Whereas 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);

Whereas, I convoked the Presbyteral Council on 9 June 2025 and presided over it according to the norm of law (cans. 127 §1, 166 §1, and 500 §1), placing the relegation of the church of Saint Agnes on the agenda ahead of time, ensuring that a summary of its status was provided to the members of the Council (can. 50), proposing the relegation, seeking the informed and free counsel of the members concerning each individual proposed action (can. 515 §2), listening to arguments both for and against the proposed relegation, and receiving unanimous support for the proposed relegation;

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

DECREE

1. The church of Saint Agnes of the parish of Saint John the Evangelist – Saint Agnes 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 begin, following the proper procedures for alienation.

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 cans. 1212 and 1238).

This decree is effective immediately and hereby revokes and replaces any decrees issued by my predecessor, the Most Reverend Robert J. Cunningham.

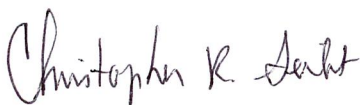
I further order this decree to be made public to all the faithful through its publication on this day, 26 June 2025. The publication on the diocesan website (www.syrдио.org), on the website of the local diocesan newspaper (thecatholicsun.com), and in the parish bulletin will be the legitimate notification. A notarized copy of the decree will be sent to the pastor.

This decree may be challenged by anyone who feels aggrieved by it within the peremptory time limit of ten useful days from the legitimate notification of the decree, that is, on 26 June 2025, by seeking its revocation or emendation directly from me (can. 1734 §2).

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Syracuse on this twenty sixth day of June in the year of our Lord, two-thousand twenty-five.



Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse



Rev. Christopher R. Seibt
Vice Chancellor