



## NOTICE OF COMMUNICATION TO PARISHIONERS OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL PARISH, PLAINS, PA

MAY 22, 2022

For the last several years, the Diocese of Scranton has been working proactively to address the realities of our local church while striving to meet the opportunities and challenges of the coming decade. Acknowledging that fewer parishioners are supporting the mission of the church, in addition to a diminishing number of ordained priests and many parishes facing financial challenges and infrastructure issues, the Diocese created its *Vision 2030 Pastoral Planning Process*.

This planning process addresses the ongoing needs of parishes through the lens of four distinct priority drivers:

- Vibrancy of Parish Life (Sunday Mass Attendance and other aspects of Sacramental Life)
- Condition of Facilities
- Financial Viability of a Parish
- Distribution and Availability of Clergy

When a concern regarding one or more priority drivers are present in a parish, or deemed critical by the needs of the diocese overall, the Diocese of Scranton looks to make modifications to parishes in a proactive way so that the Gospel can be announced and the Church's sacraments celebrated in vibrant parish communities.

In 2020, the **Church of Saint Dominic**, 155 Austin Street, Wilkes-Barre, became a secondary worship site of Saints Peter and Paul Parish, Plains. In recent years, demographic changes have resulted in a sustained decrease in Mass attendance and sacramental participation at the Church of Saint Dominic. Due to these changing circumstances - and the fact that Saints Peter and Paul Church has been demonstrated to be more than adequate to serve the liturgical and sacramental needs of the entire parish - Saint Dominic Church is no longer required for the pastoral care of the faithful.

In an effort to expand the charity outreach to those in need in the community, Saints Peter and Paul Parish, through its pastor and with the consent of both the Parish Pastoral and Parish Finance Councils, requested permission from the Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, to permanently stop the one weekend Mass that is currently held at the church and relegate the church to profane but not sordid use (closed for liturgical worship). Saints Peter and Paul Parish would continue to maintain the property to expand its food and clothing ministries.

In the spirit of the Vision 2030 process, which requires conversation and consultation within the parish community, the following have taken place:

- On **April 24, 2022**, Rev. John C. Lambert, pastor, Saints Peter and Paul Parish, communicated to the entire parish community at weekend Masses via bulletin insert the desire for change and how the parish community's charity and other assistance to those in need would be advanced by the change.
- On **May 4, 2022**, Father Lambert held a Town Hall Meeting attended by several dozen people where the desired changes was further communicated and questions from parishioners were taken.

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MAY 22, 2022

(Continued from Front Page)

- On **May 5, 2022**, the Saints Peter and Paul Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils held a Joint Meeting regarding the proposal and signed a letter of approval regarding the change.
- On **May 10, 2022**, Bishop Bambera consulted the Diocesan Presbyteral Council (a consultative body of priests from throughout the Diocese) regarding this important matter. The question before the Presbyteral Council was whether Saint Dominic Church should be closed for liturgical worship (defined in canon law as the “relegation of a church to profane but not sordid use”). Following a presentation of data, the Presbyteral Council voted in unanimous agreement on the measure.

As a result of this conversation and consultation, on **May 11, 2022**, Bishop Bambera signed a formal decree (which is a document that formalizes a decision within the Church) to best address the spiritual needs of the faithful as well as the needs of the Diocese of Scranton. The information from the decree is:

1. The Church of Saint Dominic, 155 Austin Street, Wilkes-Barre, will be closed for liturgical worship (defined in canon law as “relegated to profane but not sordid use”) on Saturday, June 11, 2022. **Clergy and parishioners of Saints Peter and Paul Parish will celebrate a final Mass at the Church of Saint Dominic at 5:30 p.m. on that date.**

According to Church law, diocesan bishops alone have the power to “erect, suppress or alter parishes” but can only do so after speaking to the Presbyteral Council and consulting parishioners. Throughout this process, the diocesan bishop needs to be certain that people will have access to another nearby place of worship. In this case, Bishop Bambera has determined that Saints Peter and Paul Parish has more than adequate resources to serve the liturgical and sacramental needs of the faithful from the Church of Saint Dominic.

While change is never easy, the People of God know that a parish is not just a building or piece of real estate, it is the community of people. Let us hold fast to the Lord’s promise that He is with us always, and trust in the fact that He is at work in a special way within our faith community and is creating something new for all of us.

Any parishioner of Saints Peter and Paul Parish who wishes to read the official decree regarding the relegation to profane but not sordid use of the Church of Saint Dominic may do so by contacting Father John C. Lambert, Pastor, Saints Peter and Paul Parish, Plains.

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# Joseph Charles Bambera

DEI ET APOSTOLICAE SEDIS GRATIA  
EPISCOPUS SCRANTONENSIS



## DECREE

In the name of God. Amen.

WHEREAS, the parish church of Saints Peter and Paul Parish, a territorial parish in Luzerne County, is Saints Peter and Paul Church, located at 13 Hudson Road in Plains; and,

WHEREAS, the Church of Saint Dominic, located at 155 Austin Street in Wilkes-Barre, had been the parish church of Saint Benedict Parish, which was suppressed in 2020, and as a result of the suppression Saint Dominic Church became a secondary worship site of Saints Peter and Paul Parish; and

WHEREAS, utilizing the Diocese of Scranton's *Vision 2030: Creating Parish Communities Rooted in the Life of Jesus Christ* process, a pastoral planning process addressing the long-range needs and challenges of the Diocese of Scranton that aims to look proactively at the realities of our local church in the present moment while striving to meet the opportunities and challenges of the coming decade; and

WHEREAS, the Reverend John C. Lambert, Pastor of Saints Peter and Paul Parish, with the consent of both the Saints Peter and Paul Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils and in consultation with the affected parishioners, and with the recommendation of the clergy of the Wilkes-Barre Deanery, has petitioned the undersigned to relegate Saint Dominic Church to profane but not sordid use; and

WHEREAS, in accord with the norm of canon 1222 §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*, on May 10, 2022 I consulted with the Diocesan Presbyteral Council on the question of the relegation of Saint Dominic Church to profane but not sordid use; and

WHEREAS, in consideration of the question of the reduction of Saint Dominic Church to profane but not sordid use, I evaluated the following motivating just causes:

- The demographic changes have resulted in a sustained decrease in Mass attendance and sacramental participation
- Saints Peter and Paul Church, the parish church of Saints Peter and Paul Parish, is more than adequate to serve the liturgical and sacramental needs of Saints Peter and Paul Parish



WHEREAS, the law requires a grave cause or causes to justify the relegation of a church to profane but not sordid use (canon 1222, §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*), and the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura held a grave cause was entirely apparent when there were these factors: (1) a financial burden in preserving a church imposed on a parish from the union of several parishes; (2) a church no longer of service to the pastoral care of the faithful due to changed circumstances; (3) new parish burdened from the beginning by a huge debt; (4) ready and effective assistance available to the new parish from the sale of a church; (5) a diminishing number of faithful whose donations principally sustain the new parish; and (6) charity and other assistance to the poor being neglected to preserve a sacred building (*Ministerium Iustitiae: Jurisprudence of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura*, Montreal, W&L (2011): Prot. N. 24388/93 CA, pp. 526-527).

WHEREAS, in consideration of the question of the reduction of Saint Dominic Church, I have identified and evaluated the following grave causes:

- The financial burden of preserving a church imposed on a parish (namely, Saints Peter and Paul Parish) through the suppression of a former parish (namely, Saint Benedict Parish).
- Due to changing circumstances, Saint Dominic Church is no longer required for the pastoral care of the faithful of the newly-structured Saints Peter and Paul Parish community
- The parish community's charity and other assistance to the poor would be advanced by the relegation of Saint Dominic Church

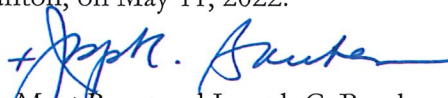
WHEREAS, I have concluded there is grave cause sufficient in law to support the relegation of Saint Dominic Church to profane but not sordid use; and

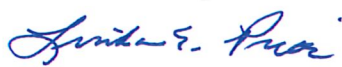
WHEREAS, according to the norm of canon 1222, §2, having heard the Diocesan Presbyteral Council, which voted unanimously and favorably that Saint Dominic Church be relegated to profane but not sordid use;

THEREFORE, I, the Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L., Bishop of the Diocese of Scranton, having in mind my responsibility to best address the spiritual needs of the Christian Faithful of the Saints Peter and Paul Parish specifically and the needs of the Diocese of Scranton generally, and after invoking the Holy Spirit and satisfying myself that the good of souls will suffer no detriment, I hereby decree the following:

- The Church of Saint Dominic, located at 155 Austin Street in Wilkes-Barre, is hereby relegated to profane but not sordid use
- This is to be published to the Pastor and the parishioners of the Parish of Saints Peter and Paul through notification in the Saints Peter and Paul Parish bulletin on the weekend of May 21-22, 2022, and a notice included that same weekend in the bulletins of the parishes of the Wilkes-Barre Deanery.
- On June 11, 2022, a final Mass will be celebrated at the Church of Saint Dominic, officially marking the relegation to profane but not sordid use of Saint Dominic Church

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Scranton, on May 11, 2022.

  
+ Joseph C. Bambera  
Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.  
Bishop of Scranton

  
Linda E. Price, J.C.L.  
Chancellor