



DIOCESE OF YOUNGSTOWN

David J. Bonnar

By the Grace of God and the Apostolic See

BISHOP OF YOUNGSTOWN

Prot. N. B15-2026

DECREE

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” (Second Vatican Council, decree, *Christus Dominus*, October 28, 1965, n. 11);

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, in order to provide for the exercise of divine worship, the diocesan bishop directs or consents to the building of churches (cf. c. 1215 §1), and whereas a church is a “sacred building designated for divine worship to which the faithful have the right of entry for the exercise, especially the public exercise, of divine worship” (c. 1214);

WHEREAS, it pertains to the ecclesiastical authority to regulate the exercise of divine worship in a church, to determine the days and hours in which the church is to be open to the faithful, or even temporarily to suspend entry into it for a just reason (Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, decree, prot. no. 46628/12 CA, May 25, 2012: “ad auctoritatem vero ecclesiasticam competentem pertinent exercitum cultus divini in ea moderari, decernere dies et horas quibus ecclesia fidelibus pateat vel immo adytum ad eam ad tempus suspendere iustam ob rationem”);

WHEREAS, charity and other assistance to be bestowed on the poor and other things of this kind cannot be neglected in order to preserve a sacred building (Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic

Signatura, decree *coram* Agustoni, May 4, 1996: “Praeterea ut salvetur aedificium sacrum negligi haud queunt elemosyna ceteraque subsidia pauperibus praesertim elargienda et alia huiusmodi”);

WHEREAS, when “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 thereby” (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 (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, in the past few decades, there have been radical changes and shifts in the demographics throughout the region in which the Diocese of Youngstown lies, including within our own boundaries, and these changes have impacted the Catholic community in substantial ways;

WHEREAS, the number of Catholics residing within the Diocese of Youngstown has significantly diminished, and the number of active clergy in the Diocese has been greatly reduced in recent years;

WHEREAS, as a result of the pressing realities facing the Diocese of Youngstown a Pastoral Plan was developed which implemented structural changes aimed at developing effective ministries and supporting missionary activity, based on certain criteria, including the number of parishioners and worshippers, parish finance, population shifts within the region, effective use of buildings and effective use of limited number of priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers;

WHEREAS, in response to pastoral needs, and after consultation with the Presbyteral Council, the parishes’ Pastoral and Finance Councils along with the votum of the Pastor, I established Saint Carlo Acutis Parish as a territorial parish, effective January 1, 2026; and whereas the establishment of the parish consisted of the merger (extinctive union) of the parishes of Saint Jude in Columbiana, Saint Patrick in Leetonia, and Our Lady of Lourdes in East Palestine;

WHEREAS, in order more effectively to structure the merged parish of Saint Carlo Acutis Parish, I also directed that sacramental ministry, pastoral care and Christian formation be centralized in the Parochial Church of Saint Jude in Columbiana;

WHEREAS, I further decreed that Our Lady of Lourdes Church in East Palestine would be used as a secondary site for the celebration of Holy Mass on the Patronal Feast and on the anniversary of its dedication, and for Baptisms, Marriages, and Masses of Christian Burial;

WHEREAS, Our Lady of Lourdes was established in 1881 and the present church was dedicated in 1940; over those many years the parish and church adapted in response to the pastoral needs of the times;

WHEREAS, since the time of the merger of Saint Carlo Acutis Parish, the Christian faithful in the territory of Northern Columbiana County have heard the Word of God, have worshiped, have received the Sacraments in the parish, and have worked more and more closely, enabling them to continue to give an effective witness of what it is to live out the Catholic faith;

WHEREAS, even before the merger, the parishes had experienced great decline in the number of parishioners attending Mass and receiving the sacraments, necessitating the merger of the parishes and the change of the status of Our Lady of Lourdes Church to secondary use;

WHEREAS, Father Chad Johnson, Pastor of Saint Carlo Acutis Parish, with the members of the parish's Finance Council and Pastoral Council, has requested by letter of August 10, 2026 that I relegate the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in East Palestine to profane but not sordid use, commenting that "Concentrating parish life at the principal church will permit a more effective use of parish resources while preserving access to the Sacred Liturgy, the sacraments, and pastoral care. The good of souls will therefore suffer no detriment";

WHEREAS, in this case of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, it is established that: 1) the church building imposes an intolerable burden on Saint Carlo Acutis Parish from a financial point of view; 2) due to the decrease in the overall Catholic population, the church is no longer of service to the current parishioners of the new parish; 3) the current heating and cooling systems are in need of replacement, which would impose a financial burden upon the parish; 4) the sale of the church building and the other buildings on the church campus would prevent the parish from incurring debt and enable the parish to carry out its apostolic mission; 5) the principal church of Saint Carlo Acutis Parish, that is, Saint Jude Church, is sufficient to support the pastoral needs of the parish; 6) continuing to preserve this sacred building would prevent the parish from engaging in important ministries to promote the Gospel, to form disciples, and to minister to the needs of the poor and marginalized;

WHEREAS, after a time of consultation and discernment it has been determined that Our Lady of Lourdes Church in East Palestine can no longer be designated for divine worship, and that it is reasonable and prudent to relegate the church to profane but not sordid use, in order more effectively to fulfill the mission of the Church in the given territory of the Diocese of Youngstown;

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

WHEREAS, having convened the Diocesan Presbyteral Council on September 21, 2026, which gave unanimously favorable advice for the relegation of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes in East Palestine to profane but not sordid use;

WHEREAS, after careful examination, it was established that no one could legitimately claim rights for themselves in the church, understood primarily as patrimonial rights (cf. Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, Decree, November 21, 1988, *Communicationes* 20 [1988] 93);

WHEREAS, it has been established that the good of souls will suffer no detriment as a result of the proposed relegation of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in East Palestine, Ohio to profane but not sordid use (c. 1222 §2);

THEREFORE, I, the undersigned Bishop of Youngstown have decided as follows, and I hereby

DECREE

That Our Lady of Lourdes Church in East Palestine be relegated to profane but not sordid use, and is no longer to be used for sacred functions, in accordance with canon 1222 §2 and with proper consultation of the Presbyteral Council on September 21, 2026, as well as proper consultation with members of the parish council and finance council.

This decree is effective October 16, 2026. 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 Diocese of Youngstown. This publication on the website will serve as the legitimate notification. Furthermore, a notarized copy of this decree will be sent to the pastor, who will make it available to the faithful in the parish bulletin and on the parish website.

All those who claim to have been aggrieved by this decree are herewith notified that, if they desire to file recourse against this 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 Youngstown, Ohio this Sixteenth day of October in the Year of Our Lord 2026.



Most Reverend David J. Bonnar
Bishop of Youngstown



Joan Lawson
Chancellor



Carolyn Wooten
Notary