



Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Office of the Archbishop
222 North 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299

DECREE

OF THE RELEGATION OF

SAINT PETER CLAVER CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE

Saint Peter Claver Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was formerly the parish church for Saint Peter Claver Parish and then subsequently the location of the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization as well as the site of the Shrine of Our Lady of Victories. Saint Peter Claver Parish was canonically suppressed in 1985, and the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization was closed on October 31, 2014. Saint Peter Claver Church is no longer needed by the Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics or the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Consideration, therefore, must be given as to whether sufficient grave causes exist for the relegation of Saint Peter Claver Church to profane but not sordid use.

The following grave causes suggest that Saint Peter Claver Church be so relegated and no longer be used for divine worship:

- 1) Saint Peter Claver Church is no longer needed by the Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics. On October 31, 2014, the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization was closed. Saint Peter Claver Church has not been used as a worship site since that date. Fewer than fifteen members of the Christian faithful had been attending the monthly Mass in the church building at the Center for Evangelization prior to its closure. The Center for Evangelization was itself underutilized prior to October 2014;
- 2) In response to demographic changes over time, ministry to Black Catholics has been taking place at other parishes throughout the Archdiocese. Since ministerial outreach to the Black Catholic community has evolved in this way to meet demographic changes, the closure of Saint Peter Claver Church would not result in undue harm to ministerial outreach to Black Catholics;
- 3) Besides the church building of Saint Peter Claver Church, there is the former parish rectory building on the property that once was the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization as well as the former parish school building which is used by Catholic Social Services for the Women of Hope program. While the Women of Hope program is not terminating, it is being discontinued at this location. These buildings are no longer needed for ministry by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

- 4) The deed restrictions on part of the property have been adjusted by a civil court ruling to allow for its sale, provided that a certain amount of the proceeds be used to benefit the Black Catholic Apostolate of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The Petition initiating this action was filed with the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia Orphans Court Division on October 29, 2015 on behalf of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Certain unnamed advocates for preservation of the legacy of the Saint Peter Claver Parish Property objected to the sale of the property by the Archdiocese in a letter written to the judge but never filed an answer to the petition or filed an appearance in the action. The Court then appointed the Honorable Russell M. Nigro (retired PA Supreme Court Justice) to act as *Trustee Ad Litem* on behalf of a group of individuals from the general public who had objected to the sale. Notwithstanding these actions, on December 12, 2017 the Court rendered its decree allowing for the sale of the property free and clear of the recorded restrictions noting “no answers/responses in opposition to the said Petition having been filed of record, nor appearances been entered on behalf of any person(s) alleging an interest in this matter...” The Archdiocese of Philadelphia may well wish to sell the entire property in order to support further its ministry to Black Catholics;
- 5) The Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics has striven to maintain Saint Peter Claver Church and the other buildings on the property in good repair. However, the costs of maintaining Saint Peter Claver Church have placed a significant strain upon the Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics and are not conducive to the office’s present or future financial stability. The Center for Evangelization formerly headquartered at Saint Peter Claver Church had been able to meet the financial needs for its outreach programs through a grant from the Black and Indian Missions. However, it could not financially meet the costs of the deferred maintenance on the buildings. Further, funds for the needed maintenance cannot be supplied by the Archdiocesan Secretariat for Evangelization, which oversees the Office for Black Catholics, since such an outlay would jeopardize the stability of all ministerial outreach programs entrusted to its pastoral care. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia itself is in the process of stabilizing its own finances, and so cannot bear the additional costs associated with repair to Saint Peter Claver Church.

It should be noted that the Saint Peter Claver Church building does have significant historical value, as it is one of the “mother churches” for Black Philadelphians. The church building has been historically designated since April 5, 1984, and its façade cannot be altered without the approval of the city historical commission.

Nevertheless, because of the financial strain that would be placed upon not only the Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics but also other Archdiocesan entities if the required repairs were to be completed at Saint Peter Claver Church and adjacent buildings, in virtue of the precepts of canon 1212 and canon 1222 §2 of the Code of Canon Law, having judged that sufficient grave causes are present and that the good of souls will not thereby be impaired, and having consulted with the Council of Priests on September 17, 2018, I hereby **DECREE** that Saint Peter Claver Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, be relegated to profane but not sordid use.

This Decree is effective as of April 8, 2019 and is to be communicated to the faithful of the Archdiocese in an appropriate manner. Canonical recourse to this Decree is to be sought according to the norms of canon law. All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

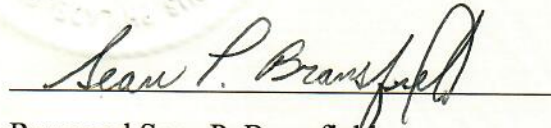
Given at the Curia of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, on the 1st day of March, 2019.



Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.

Archbishop of Philadelphia


SEAL



Reverend Sean P. Bransfield

Vice-Chancellor