

## ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

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OFFICE of the ARCHBISHOP

# 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. The Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia no longer require the use of Saint Peter Claver Church, as the pastoral activities previously based at the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization have since moved to parishes throughout the Archdiocese. 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) On October 31, 2014, the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization was closed. Prior to the Center for Evangelization's closure, fewer than fifteen members of the Christian faithful had been attending the monthly Mass being held at Saint Peter Claver Church, while the Center for Evangelization was itself underutilized prior to October 2014. Saint Peter Claver Church therefore has not been used for worship since that date, and no situation has arisen during the intervening period that would have required the use of this church;
- 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 over time, the closure of Saint Peter Claver Church would not result in undue harm to ministerial outreach to Black Catholics;
- 3) In addition to the Saint Peter Claver church building, the property contains the former parish rectory building that once was the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization as well as the former parish school building which continues to be used by Catholic Social Services for the "Women of Hope" program. While the Women of Hope program is not terminating, it will be discontinued at this location in the future and moved to another location. These buildings are therefore no longer needed for ministry by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia;

- 4) Saint Peter Claver Church was previously relegated to profane but not sordid use in a Decree promulgated in March 2019. While that Decree was ultimately revoked by a subsequent Decree issued in May 2019, the reasons that prompted the initial Decree of Relegation not only remain valid, but also have become more pronounced since that time;
- 5) Deed restrictions on a portion of the property have been removed and stricken by a civil court ruling to allow for the sale of the Saint Peter Claver property, provided that one-third of the proceeds be restricted for the purpose of evangelization to Black Catholics in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The Petition initiating this action was filed with the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County, 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 presiding judge, but no answer to the petition or entry of appearance on behalf of these individuals were filed in the action. The Court then appointed the Honorable Russell M. Nigro (retired Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice) to act as *Trustee ad litem* to represent the unidentified individuals from the general public who had objected to the sale. On December 12, 2017 the Court rendered its decree allowing for the sale of the property free and clear of the recorded deed 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 on which Saint Peter Claver Church is located. If this were to happen, one-third of the proceeds of any such sale must be restricted for uses that serve as near as possible to the original transferor’s charitable intent of benefitting Black Catholics within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The Archdiocese intends to propose to the Court that the funds be allocated to evangelization and ministry of the Office for Black Catholics of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and the same above-referenced Court must first approve the Archdiocese’s proposal of how this one-third of the sale proceeds would be allocated;
- 6) Saint Peter Claver Church and the former Saint Peter Claver Rectory, which is attached to the church, are in need of significant repair, and the costs of performing these repairs would prove burdensome and detract from resources that could otherwise be applied to pastoral care. An assessment of needed repairs was undertaken by the Archdiocese in August 2022. This process noted that both the interior and exterior of the church and rectory are in poor condition. This assessment estimated that the costs of repairing the buildings so as to render them functional would be upwards of \$1,350,000. In addition, since 2010, the Archdiocese has spent over \$500,000 to cover necessary ongoing maintenance expenses for the two buildings. These costs have proven significant to the Archdiocese, and the costs of undertaking the repairs needed for the church and rectory, which have been needed for some time now, would impede the Archdiocese from allocating its resources in ways that can more directly impact its current ministries and evangelization efforts. Furthermore, as already noted, with the Court’s approval, any future potential sale of the Saint Peter Claver property would directly benefit the Archdiocese of Philadelphia’s Office for Black Catholics, thereby positively impacting the Archdiocese of Philadelphia’s outreach efforts towards Black Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

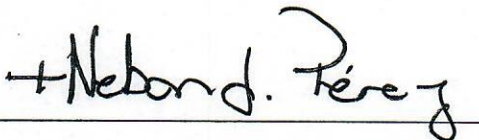
It should be noted that the Saint Peter Claver Church building does have significant historical value, as it is considered the “mother church for Black Catholics of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.” In fact, it was one of four churches designated for Black Catholics to worship at one time. As an act of pastoral care by the Archbishop of Philadelphia for Black Catholics and addressing the sin of racism, all parishes in the Archdiocese welcome Black people. Furthermore, all of the significant sacred items that were once in Saint Peter Claver Church have been distributed to parishes within the Black Apostolate.

The church building has also been historically designated since April 5, 1984, and its exterior cannot be altered without the approval of the city historical commission. The historical marker will remain in place as a testimony to the history of the building as many markers are displayed within the City of Philadelphia.

The financial strain that would be placed upon the Archdiocese of Philadelphia if the required upkeep was to be continued and future repairs were to be completed at Saint Peter Claver Church and its adjacent buildings, combined with the loss of potential income that would greatly benefit the Archdiocese’s outreach and ministerial efforts towards Black Catholics, render it best to relegate Saint Peter Claver Church to profane but not sordid use. Therefore, in virtue of the prescripts 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 8, 2022, I hereby **DECREE** that Saint Peter Claver Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, be relegated to profane but not sordid use.

This Decree is effective as of January 23, 2023 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.

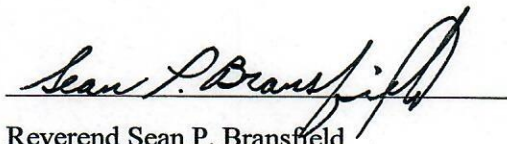
Given at the Curia of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of December, in the Year of Our Lord 2022.



Most Reverend Nelson J. Pérez, D.D.

Archbishop of Philadelphia

**SEAL**



Reverend Sean P. Bransfield

Chancellor