



## **DECREE**

### **RELEGATING**

#### **SAINT MATTHIAS CHURCH FOREST PARK, OHIO**

#### **TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE**

#### *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Originally being the home of the Shawnee Tribe, the lands of present-day Forest Park were purchased from the Native Americans by pioneer families in the nineteenth century. Settlers began to farm the area, and families coalesced into a small community north of the city of Cincinnati. During the post-war era of the mid-twentieth century, these lands were designated as part of the Resettlement Administration during the Roosevelt presidency, and the city of Forest Park was founded as part of this process and began to grow. Among the families taking advantage of the planned suburban community were many Catholics. Saint Matthias Parish was established in 1967 and over eight hundred people were in attendance for the first Masses which took place in Cameron Park on August 6, 1967. It was evident that a formal place for worship was necessary.

Masses began in the Saint Matthias Center on Palm Sunday of 1969. The parishioners continued to worship in this space until 1985 when Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk dedicated the new church, doubling the capacity for worshippers.

Attendance peaked as the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century approached but has steadily declined over the last two decades. By 2018 serious financial concerns began to present themselves, noting especially that as attendance decreased the average age of donors was steadily increasing. Additionally, demographic shifts in the area led to a sizeable increase in Latino Catholic families, requiring adjustments to the ministerial approach.

Beginning in 2014 a single pastor served Saint Matthias Parish, Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, and Saint James of the Valley Parish, uniting the Catholic faithful in this area under his spiritual guidance. In 2018 a pastor with ministerial capabilities in the Spanish language was appointed to better address this growing need in the area. This priest was additionally entrusted with the pastoral care of Our Lady of the Valley Parish beginning in July of 2022. From this time, the parishioners of all four parishes began to work together to fulfill the mandate of the Lord to go out and make disciples of all.

After many discussions had taken place between the pastor, the other clergy and lay staff serving the parishes, the parishioners, and the appropriate archdiocesan offices regarding the best way to meet the needs of the faithful and evangelize in accordance with the mandate of the Lord Jesus, it has been decided to amalgamate Saint Matthias Parish into Our Lady of the Rosary Parish by an extinctive union. This decision has been promulgated by a separate decree.

After careful study and deliberation of the facts, the pastor of Saint Matthias and Our Lady of the Rosary Parishes, with the recommendation of the members of the pastoral council and finance council of both parishes, has proposed to relegate Saint Matthias Church to profane but not sordid use. I have determined that sufficient grave cause exists to relegate Saint Matthias Church to profane but not sordid use.

The following factors contribute to the grave cause which motivates this decision:

- 1) when changes to the Sunday Mass schedules became necessary due to the availability of priests, the recent influx of Latino parishioners moved from worshipping at Saint Matthias Church to Our Lady of the Rosary Church
- 2) the church is no longer necessary for accommodating the number of Catholic worshippers in the area
  - a. estimated capacity of the other churches under the care of the pastor totals 1,800
  - b. Saint Matthias Church estimated capacity is 350
  - c. average total attendance across all Sunday Masses in the neighboring churches is approximately 1,500
  - d. total capacity for worshippers in these churches based on Sunday Mass Schedule is 5,700
- 3) the cost of maintaining the physical property of Saint Matthias Church is unduly burdensome
  - a. costs of maintaining both Our Lady of the Rosary Church and Saint Matthias Church exceed the financial capabilities of these parishes combined
  - b. Saint Matthias Parish had been able to keep maintenance costs low over the years through the work of volunteers; the ability of this group to perform needed work has decreased as the years have passed; the parish has difficulty covering the costs of non-volunteer workers to maintain the physical condition of the church and associated properties
- 4) continued decrease in attendance at Mass and participation in the sacraments
  - a. average Sunday Mass attendance had decreased over 50% between 2001 and 2017; while there had been a recent increase in attendance from the Latino community, these individuals have since joined the Latino community which worships at Our Lady of the Rosary Church
  - b. number of infant baptisms, confirmations, and first communions has decreased steadily over the last several years, with the exception of an increase from 2019 through 2021 among the Latino community; these families have since joined the parish of Our Lady of the Rosary
- 5) proximity to other Catholic churches ensures that the spiritual needs of the local faithful can continue to be met
  - a. 1.9 miles from Our Lady of the Rosary Church
  - b. 2.7 miles from Saint John Neumann Church
  - c. 3.4 miles from Saint Gabriel Church
  - d. 3.9 miles from Corpus Christi Church
  - e. 4.3 miles from Saint Bartholomew Church
  - f. 5.7 miles from Sacred Heart Church, Fairfield
  - g. 6.8 miles from Saint James of the Valley Church.

Taking into account the supreme law of the Church, i.e. the salvation of souls (cf. canon 1752), it is my belief that this action will better serve the Church's mission to evangelize and allow for more efficient administration of the temporal goods of the faithful, while continuing to meet their spiritual needs.

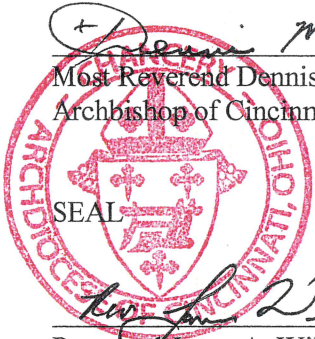
Therefore, in virtue of my office as diocesan bishop, in accordance with canon 1212 and canon 1222 §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*, having consulted with the Presbyteral Council on May 8, 2023, and having verified that there are none who legitimately claim rights for themselves in the church or the adjacent property, I hereby decree that Saint Matthias Church, Forest Park, Ohio, be relegated to profane but not sordid use.


This decree becomes effective as of September 1, 2023, and is to be published immediately such that all members of Saint Matthias Parish and Our Lady of the Rosary Parish will be properly notified.

Given from the Chancery of the Archdiocese,  
Cincinnati, Ohio,  
on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of June in the year of our Lord 2023,  
the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.



Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr, J.C.D.  
Archbishop of Cincinnati





Reverend Jason A. Williams, J.C.L.  
Chancellor