



DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG
DECREE OF REDUCTION TO SECULAR USE THE CHURCH EDIFICE OF
SACRED HEART OF JESUS, SPRING GROVE, PENNSYLVANIA

In accord with the norm of the law, particularly, canon 1222, §2, I do hereby decree that the church edifice of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, Spring Grove, be reduced to secular (but not sordid) use. This decision is in accord with the recommendation made to me by the Diocesan Presbyteral Council on December 3, 2025, and contained in the minutes as well as the recommendation of the College of Consultors on November 19, 2025, and contained in the minutes.

The following points summarize the grave reasons which have now led to my decision to reduce to secular use the church edifice of Sacred Heart of Jesus, Spring Grove which was originally purchased in 1903 from the Protestant Reformed Community.

1. The church (and the rectory on an adjoining parcel) is an old structure that continues to demand costly maintenance to remain viable. It is riddled with structural issues. The projected exorbitant costs for the church would have to include restoring deteriorating stained-glass windows, replacing a rotting front door, repainting the outside of the building that currently contains lead paint, replastering the walls, installing railing in the choir loft, and exterior masonry repairs. The building HVAC is failing, as the heating continues to function but the air conditioning has failed. The roof is ageing and will need to be replaced.
2. The financial consequences of properly maintaining and upgrading the worship space would do irreparable harm to the financial stability of the parish and would hinder its ability to provide even the most basic pastoral and spiritual care to the faithful.
3. The seating capacity, while adequate for the Mass of Anticipation, is not sufficient for Sunday Mass, weddings, funerals and other special liturgical events. The parish consists of over two hundred families but has experienced some steady growth in recent years. There is a consistent need to look elsewhere for these liturgies that place a strain and hardship on parish staff and a logistical nightmare.
4. The parking area is extremely limited. This forces parishioners and visitors to park in the nearby lots of businesses and institutions. Current handicapped access does not meet the current code required by law. The parking situation no doubt deters the faithful from Mass attendance at this edifice.

5. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* notes clearly that "Every lawful celebration of the Eucharist is regulated by the bishop, to whom is committed the office of offering to the divine majesty the worship of Christian religion and of administering it in accordance with the Lord's commandments and the Church's laws, *as further specified by his particular judgment for his diocese* (n. 26)." It is an important and essential element of my pastoral plan for the diocese that ecclesial communion be fostered by every means possible, and most especially in the celebration of the Eucharistic mystery. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also reminds us that "the unity of the pilgrim Church" is assured by "visible bonds of communion" in, among other things, a "common celebration of divine worship, especially of the sacraments" (n. 815).
6. In my judgment, maintenance of the decrepit church would do substantial harm to this vision and to parish efforts to build unity. For several years now, the 9:30am Sunday Mass has been held at the parish center just one mile away from the church edifice. This is due to the legitimate concerns above, namely seating, safety and accessibility issues. The center is located on a very large piece of land that can easily accommodate any parish function. The distance between the church edifice and the center makes it extremely difficult to attach any church community event to the Mass schedule. This has ruptured community life and a sense of welcome and family within the parish for some time. Having separate facilities has created what the pastor calls, "a division of loyalties and emotions" among the parishioners.
7. The parish of Sacred Heart would like to alienate the building and utilize the funds from the sale to benefit the needs of the parishioners, the ministries and apostolates of the parish and the maintenance of the parish center where Masses are being said and gatherings are taking place. Furthermore, it is the current vision of the parish community to use the funds from the sale of the church edifice and property toward the construction of a new sacred space on the exiting property at Sprenkle Drive that will adequately provide for the liturgical and spiritual needs of the people at Sacred Heart.
8. Weighing the proportionate value of the aforementioned expenditures against the value of maintaining the church edifice, I am convinced that such grave reasons exist to facilitate parish life and ministries as to warrant the reduction of this church edifice to secular use.

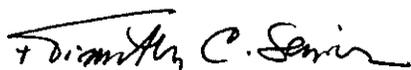
I am assured that the good of souls and the rights of parishioners would not be harmed in any way by reducing the church edifice of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Mission to secular use. In fact, this decision is made precisely in prudence and necessity to enhance the good of souls. It affords the Catholics of the small town of Spring Grove with a single worship site that is more vital, active, financially sound, safe, not burdened by the costs of maintaining an additional church edifice, and equipped with the buildings and temporal facilities most needed for ministry. It is a vision that looks to future possibilities.

This decree is effective, at midnight, exactly one week prior to the alienation of the church property. This is to be promulgated by sending an authentic copy to the Pastor.

All things contrary notwithstanding.

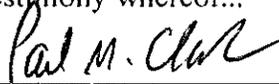
Canonical recourse to this decree must take place with 10 useful days from the first public communication of this decree to the faithful concerned (cf. canon 1734).

Given in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on March 5, 2026.



Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg

In testimony whereof...



Very Reverend Paul M. Clark, J.C.L.
Judicial Vicar and Chancellor