



Archdiocese *of* Philadelphia

December 11, 2022

Archdiocese of Philadelphia Announces Relegation of Worship Sites in Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties

Sacred Heart Church (Phoenixville), will no longer serve as a worship site of Saint Ann Parish (Phoenixville) and will close as a Roman Catholic church.

The original Saint Philip Neri Church (East Greenville) will close as a Roman Catholic church.

Holy Trinity Church (Old City), will no longer serve as a worship site of Old Saint Mary Parish and will close as a Roman Catholic church.

The Saint Peter Claver Church building, which has not been a parish church since 1985, and has not served as an active worship site since 2014, will close as a Roman Catholic church.

Contextual Background

Sacred Heart Parish Merges with Saint Ann Parish (July 2012)

In July 2012, Sacred Heart Parish (Phoenixville) merged with Saint Ann Parish (Phoenixville).

Both parishes merged at the location and retained the name of Saint Ann Parish. At the time, the Sacred Heart church building became a worship site of Saint Ann Parish.

Additional information regarding the merger can be found at the following link:

<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2012.html> (<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2012.html>)

Saint Philip Neri Parish Builds a New Church to Accommodate Growing Parish Community (1968)

The original Saint Philip Neri Parish church (East Greenville) was built in 1919 to serve that newly formed parish. In 1968, a new church building was constructed nearly two-miles away in Pennsburg with the same name to accommodate the growing parish community.

Shortly after the new church was built, the original Saint Philip Neri church building was converted into a hall and cafeteria for the parish school. In 2012, the parish school was closed. Since that time, the building has been used infrequently for a limited number of non-liturgical events.

Holy Trinity Parish Merges with Old Saint Mary Parish (July 2009)

In July 2009, Holy Trinity Parish (Old City) merged with Old Saint Mary Parish.

At that time, the Holy Trinity church building became a worship site of the newly formed Old Saint Mary Parish and was available for the occasional celebration of Mass.

The Holy Trinity Church building has significant historical value. It is the third Roman Catholic Church built in the City of Philadelphia and the first national parish in the country, designated to serve German speaking Catholics. The building's exterior is historically designated and cannot be altered without the approval of the historical commission of the City of Philadelphia.

In July 2019, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced that the Archbishop of Philadelphia had approved the relegation of the Holy Trinity church building to profane but not sordid use effective September 3, 2019. The Decree was ultimately revoked by a later Decree issued in April 2020 (<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Signed-Decree-by-Archbishop-Perez-Withdrawing-Relegation-of-Holy-Trinity-Church-Philadelphia.pdf>) as a result of concerns raised relative to its relegation.

Additional information regarding the original Decree relegating the Holy Trinity church building to profane but not sordid use can be found at the following link:

<https://archphila.org/archdiocese-of-philadelphia-announces-closure-of-worship-sites-in-the-city-of-philadelphia/>
(<https://archphila.org/archdiocese-of-philadelphia-announces-closure-of-worship-sites-in-the-city-of-philadelphia/>).

Saint Peter Claver Parish Closes and Becomes Home to the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization (1985)

When Saint Peter Claver Parish closed in 1985, the former parish church building became home to the Saint Peter Claver Center for Evangelization (SPCCE).

The SPCCE carried on the ministerial outreach of the former parish by serving the spiritual, pastoral, and temporal needs of Black Catholics in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It did so through the celebration of the Holy Mass, the offering of retreats, and regular community service projects.

The SPCCE was closed on October 31, 2014 and has not been used for any pastoral purpose since that time. The decision to close the SPCCE was made at that time in response to demographic shifts which resulted in effective ministry to Black Catholics taking place at a number of parishes throughout the five-county Archdiocese as opposed to one central location. As the Black Catholic community spread to many areas of the Archdiocese, the SPCCE became utilized by fewer and fewer people over the years.

At the time the SPCCE closed, Mass was being offered on a monthly basis and was attended by fewer than 15 people. Additional information about the 2014 closure of the SPCCE can be found at the following link <https://archphila.org/archdiocese-of-philadelphia-announces-closure-of-saint-peter-claver-center-for-evangelization/> (<https://archphila.org/archdiocese-of-philadelphia-announces-closure-of-saint-peter-claver-center-for-evangelization/>).

In March 2019, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced that the Archbishop of Philadelphia had approved the relegation of the Saint Peter Claver church building to profane but not sordid use effective April 8, 2019. The Decree was ultimately revoked by a later Decree issued in May 2019 (<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/StPeterWithdrawl.pdf>) as a result of concerns raised relative to its relegation.

Additional information regarding the original Decree relegating the Saint Peter Claver church building to profane but not sordid use can be found at the following link:

<https://archphila.org/archdiocese-of-philadelphia-announces-closure-of-saint-peter-claver-center-for-evangelization/>
(<https://archphila.org/archdiocese-of-philadelphia-announces-closure-of-saint-peter-claver-center-for-evangelization/>).

Today's Announcements

Today, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced that Most Reverend Nelson J. Pérez, Archbishop of Philadelphia, has approved the relegation of the Sacred Heart, original Saint Philip Neri, Holy Trinity, and Saint Peter Claver church buildings to profane but not sordid use effective January 23, 2023.

These formal, canonical designations mean that these buildings will close and no longer be designated as Roman Catholic churches.

This information was shared with parishioners at all Masses during the course of this weekend at all affected parish communities. A copy of the official canonical decrees regarding the relocations can be found at the links below.

<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Sacred-Heart-Church-Phoenixville-Signed-Updated-Decree-of-Relegation.pdf> (<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Sacred-Heart-Church-Phoenixville-Signed-Updated-Decree-of-Relegation.pdf>).

<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Former-Saint-Philip-Neri-Church-East-Greenville-Signed-Decree-of-Relegation.pdf> (<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Former-Saint-Philip-Neri-Church-East-Greenville-Signed-Decree-of-Relegation.pdf>).

<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Holy-Trinity-Church-Philadelphia-Signed-Decree-of-Relegation.pdf> (<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Holy-Trinity-Church-Philadelphia-Signed-Decree-of-Relegation.pdf>).

<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Saint-Peter-Claver-Church-Philadelphia-Signed-Decree-of-Relegation.pdf> (<https://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Saint-Peter-Claver-Church-Philadelphia-Signed-Decree-of-Relegation.pdf>).

Further Information Regarding Today's Announcements

The formal request to close a worship site typically originates from the pastor of the parish, together with his parish pastoral and finance councils after joint study and consultation. The requests are then reviewed by the Archdiocesan Council of Priests and presented to Archbishop Pérez, who, after a careful review of all supporting factors, makes the final decisions.

The formal request to close the former Saint Peter Claver worship site originated with the Archdiocesan Secretariat for Evangelization. The request was then reviewed by the Archdiocesan Council of Priests and presented to Archbishop Pérez, who, after a careful review of all supporting factors, made the final decision.

Sacred Heart Church Building (Phoenixville)

In March 2020, with the onset of COVID-19 public health restrictions, all liturgies held at Sacred Heart Church were discontinued. Since that time, no liturgical celebrations have taken place at Sacred Heart Church.

The annual and deferred costs of maintaining the Sacred Heart church building and adjoining property continue to impact the financial vitality and well-being of Saint Ann Parish. During the fiscal year ending in June 2021, Saint Ann parish expended nearly \$40,000 to maintain the property. An additional \$90,000 was recently spent for necessary concrete and brickwork repairs to the church. The church roof is currently in need of serious repairs that were estimated to cost nearly \$106,000. Due to the passage of time and the rate of inflation, that estimate is now likely much higher.

Since Sacred Heart and Saint Ann Parishes merged in 2012, the buildings on the former Sacred Heart campus have been rented to various non-profit agencies.

When Sacred Heart and Saint Ann Parishes merged, all real estate holdings, assets and debts of the former Sacred Heart Parish were transferred to the newly formed Saint Ann Parish. These transfers are standard procedure in the case of all parish mergers.

As such, the former Sacred Heart church building is the property of Saint Ann Parish. The future disposition of this building will be determined by the pastor of Saint Ann Parish in consultation with his parish pastoral and finance councils in a manner consistent with providing for continued parish viability and sustainability.

Original Saint Philip Neri Church Building (East Greenville)

The original Saint Philip Neri church building has not been used for divine worship since 1968 when the new parish church in Pennsburg was built. In addition, the original parish campus includes the former parish rectory, former parish convent, and former parish school building, all of which are now empty and unutilized. The annual and deferred costs of maintaining the original parish church and the entire East Greenville campus are negatively impacting the financial state of the parish and the overall future of its ministerial outreach efforts.

Saint Philip Neri Parish enjoyed an operating surplus for the 2021-2022 Fiscal Year, and while the parish does possess financial reserves, it also has standing debt requiring reduction. A potential future sale of this property would help alleviate the parish's financial burdens.

The original Saint Philip Neri church building is the property of Saint Philip Neri Parish. The future disposition of this building will be determined by the pastor of Saint Philip Neri Parish in consultation with his parish pastoral and finance councils in a manner consistent with providing for continued parish viability and sustainability.

Holy Trinity Church Building (Old City)

The reasons that prompted the original Decree issued in July 2019 relegating the Holy Trinity church building to profane but not sordid use remain valid. Since that time, the reasons supporting the relegation have strengthened.

Necessary annual and deferred maintenance costs to maintain the Holy Trinity church building currently range in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In 2017, parishioners of Old Saint Mary Parish asked for Masses not to be celebrated in Holy Trinity Church due to the deteriorating flooring. Mass has not been celebrated there since that time.

Old Saint Mary Parish obtained various estimates to gauge the cost of repairing and restoring Holy Trinity Church. They included roofing, flooring, electrical, and HVAC replacements.

Based on these previous estimates, the cost to repair and restore the Holy Trinity church building is approximately \$750,000. Due to the passage of time and the rate of inflation, that estimate is now likely much higher.

An attempt to cover these costs would require the expenditure of significant parish resources that would seriously jeopardize the fiscal solvency of Old Saint Mary Parish.

When Holy Trinity Parish and Old Saint Mary Parishes merged, all real estate holdings, assets and debts of the former Holy Trinity Parish were transferred to the newly formed Old Saint Mary Parish. These transfers are standard procedure in the case of all parish mergers.

As such, the former Holy Trinity Church building is the property of Old Saint Mary Parish. The future disposition of this building will be determined by the pastor of Old Saint Mary Parish in consultation with his parish pastoral and finance councils in a manner consistent with providing for continued parish viability and sustainability.

Saint Peter Claver Church Building (South Philadelphia)

The reasons that prompted the original Decree issued in March 2019 relegating the Saint Peter Claver church building to profane but not sordid use remain valid. Since that time, the reasons supporting the relegation have strengthened.

In addition to the Saint Peter Claver church building, 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.

In August 2022, an assessment of needed repairs was undertaken by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. This process noted that both the interior and exterior of both the church and rectory buildings are in need of serious repair. This assessment estimated the costs of repairing the buildings so as to render them functional would be nearly \$1,350,000. In addition, the Archdiocese has spent over \$500,000 since 2010 to cover necessary ongoing maintenance expenses for these buildings. The costs have proven significant to the Archdiocese, and the cost of undertaking the repairs needed for the church and rectory buildings, would impede the Archdiocese from allocating its resources in ways that directly impact its current ministries and evangelization efforts.

It is envisioned that a sale of these properties by the Archdiocese would generate funds dedicated to supporting ongoing ministry to Black Catholics through the Office for Black Catholics. The Women of Hope Program will transition to a new site over time without interruption of client services.

Recognizing the legacy and history of Saint Peter Claver Church, the Office for Black Catholics supervised the movement of many sacred items from the church to active parishes in the Archdiocese where African-American Catholics currently worship.

This building has been historically designated since April 1984, and its exterior cannot be altered without the approval of the Historical Commission of the City of Philadelphia.

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Editor's Note: For additional information on the Parish Area Pastoral Planning Initiative in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, please visit <http://archphila.org/features/parish-planning-initiatives/> (<https://archphila.org/features/parish-planning-initiatives/>).

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