

Decree of Relegation to Profane Use of Saint Peter Church, Ketch Harbour

Preamble

The first church in Ketch Harbour was built in 1806 to support approximately eleven families. A new church was completed in 1892 and the old church was razed. All that remains of it today is the dome over the tabernacle in St. Peter Church. The stained-glass windows in the nave were imported from Italy, and the stained-glass windows in the sanctuary were originally from the former Holy Heart Seminary in Halifax. Ketch Harbour began as a mission of the Catholic parish in Prospect, but when the parish of St. Paul was established in Herring Cove, St. Peter Church became its mission church. In 1937, St. Peter Parish in Ketch Harbour was erected as a separate parish.

In 2013 St. Peter was re-joined with St. Paul and established as St. Peter and St. Paul Parish. Significant work was undertaken to St. Peter Church in the 2010s to renew, maintain, and preserve the historic building.

Recently, with the steady decrease in Mass attendance across the province of Nova Scotia and accompanying financial restraints, the decline in the number of priests available to serve the parishes, and a desire to consolidate parish ministries and services, decisions regarding the configuration of all the parishes in the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth were required.

As a result of these decisions, St. Peter and St. Paul Parish was joined with St. Michael Parish and St. John the Baptist Parish to form the new parish of Stella Maris on January 1, 2020.

Consultation and Decision

On May 29, 2013, the parishes of St. Peter, Ketch Harbour and St. Paul, Herring Cove were involved in an extinctive union and the new parish of St. Peter and St. Paul was established. This decision was made to better share limited parish human and financial resources and allow for a stronger, more unified response to pastoral needs and missionary outreach in the region.

Soon after, the parish struggled financially and there were significant concern about its ongoing viability. In November 2015 a committee was struck, with representation from both churches, to research and consider some sort of consolidation plan that would provide ongoing care for parishioners in a more financially sustainable way. On June 20, 2016 the committee presented its findings to the St. Peter and St. Paul Parish Pastoral Council, and on July 4, 2016, the majority of the council voted to either close St. Peter Church or close either site at the pastor's discretion. After considering the evidence and counsel of each member, the pastor, Rev. Alfred Eshun, decided to recommend closure of St. Peter Church in Ketch Harbour. Rev. Alfred conveyed this decision to the Pastoral Council on July 4, 2016. On July 7, 2016, he met with the Vicar General and Financial Administrator of the Archdiocese, Rev. John Williams and Peter Browne, to discuss this decision and determine a course of action. In spite of these discussions, the recommendation of closure was never formally announced to the community or acted upon, although its intention was known by

many parishioners.

In 2017 Archbishop Anthony Mancini released a diocesan pastoral plan, *Equip the Saints*, to begin to address the challenges to our local Church. Among other initiatives, the plan proposed a reconfiguration of our parishes to help us more fully orient our temporal goods and pastoral activity towards fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ.

On December 6, 2018 a final draft of the diocesan action plan, *New Parishes: Stronger Together*, was presented to all the clergy for final discussion. Included in this plan was the establishment of a new parish comprising St. Peter and Paul Parish, St. Michael Parish, and St. John the Baptist Parish. Having heard the clergy, the Council of Priests was consulted, and accepted the proposed parish configurations on December 6, 2018. The action plan was launched on January 1, 2019 and new parishes were decreed as of January 1, 2020.

Throughout 2019, in anticipation of the decree of their new parish, clergy and parishioners of Stella Maris Parish began considering how to align their existing resources and capacities with a missionary focus. The financial state of the proposed parish of Stella Maris was considered insufficient to maintain its four churches – particularly when the community does not require this number of worship sites. Daily operating costs were being covered by withdrawing funds on deposit, and very little money (less than 1% of the annual budget) was being spent on outreach or evangelization. St. Peter Church had significant deferred maintenance and, while not causing structural issues, would be required in the near future. The community of Ketch Harbour is sparsely populated and has not seen the same surge of development that has been present in much of the rest of the parish. Most major amenities are located more centrally in the parish. Like the rest of the Archdiocese, attendance at St. Peter Church has been declining and the median parishioner age increasing for a number of years.

At a parish meeting on May 25, 2019, the topic of closing St. Peter Church was reintroduced to the parish by Greg Aikins, Parish Life Coordinator. This was in the context of a larger discussion of parish finances and a significant budgetary deficit. On November 25, 2019 the Transition Finance Committee for the proposed Stella Maris Parish reviewed the costs associated with the maintenance needed at St. Peter Church and, in light of its predicted impact on the parish's mission capacity, unanimously recommended the closure of St. Peter Church as soon as possible. The Parish Transition Team met on November 27, 2019 and similarly endorsed the recommendation to proceed with the closure of the church. At an initial meeting with Archbishop Anthony Mancini on November 28, 2019, the situation was presented by parish leadership and Archbishop Mancini indicated his support for this difficult decision.

The pastor and Parish Life Coordinator conducted meetings with affected parishioners on January 21, 2020 and January 29, 2020, respectively, to discuss their concerns. In February 2020, the Pastor and Parish Life Coordinator formally recommended to Archbishop Mancini that St. Peter Church be relegated to profane but not sordid use. Some of the reasons for this recommendation included: the lack of attendance (between 25-30 parishioners); the church is close to St. Paul Church; the needed maintenance on the building; an issue with mould in the church in November with an estimate for remediation being \$65,000. On September 9, 2020, Archbishops Mancini and Dunn met

with a group of concerned parishioners from St. Peter Church, St. Paul Church, and St. John the Baptist Church, as parish discussions had begun concerning the closures of St. Paul and St. John the Baptist Churches as well. Subsequent follow-ups were held with the Parish Life Coordinator and parish priest to determine a path forward for the parish. It was determined that each church would be dealt with as a separate case to give appropriate consideration to each decision and provide the necessary care of those affected.

On November 18, 2020, Archbishop Dunn met with fifteen concerned parishioners from St. Peter Church. The Archbishop also invited additional submissions by e-mail until December 3, 2020, so he could review the feedback before meeting with the Council of Priests. Six inputs were received: four were summaries of inputs given by participants at the meeting, and two were new responses.

The Council of Priests met on December 3, 2020 and voted unanimously in favour of relegating St. Peter Church to profane but not sordid use.

All of these above reasons contribute significantly to the concept of grave cause as required by the jurisprudence associated with the decision to relegate a church to profane use.

Whereas Canon 1222 of the *Code of Canon Law* gives the diocesan bishop the authority to close a church and, in the presence of grave reasons, decide that the church should no longer be used for divine worship, with the provision that he obtains the advice and consent of various groups;

Whereas the 2013 document from the Congregation for the Clergy regarding the Modification of Parishes deals with this issue of the need for a grave cause: “To assess the gravity of a cause, each case must be considered individually, weighing the whole context of the situation. At times the gravity of a cause will arise only from a combination of just causes, each insufficient in itself, but which together manifest the seriousness of the situation” (*Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes, the Closure or Relegation of Churches to Profane but not Sordid Use, and the Alienation of the Same*, Prot. No. 20131348, April 30, 2013, 2f).

Whereas Stella Maris Parish was created in January 2020 with four churches, including St. Peter Church, and this parish does not require four separate church buildings to provide spiritual care for the parishioners;

Whereas Canon 1212 of the *Code of Canon Law* gives the diocesan bishop the authority to issue a decree such that a sacred place be closed;

Whereas the Parish Life Coordinator, Greg Aikins as well as Rev. Joseph Thomas, priest appointed according to canon 517, §2, have requested the closure of St. Peter Church, after discussing this with parish committees;

Whereas the Council of Priests was apprised of the situation of Stella Maris Parish on June 11, 2020 and September 10, 2020 and the Council supported a continued process of consultation. On December 3, 2020, the Council passed a motion unanimously that St. Peter Church should be relegated to profane but not sordid use;

Therefore, invoking the authority given to me as Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth, and from canons 1222 and 1212, judging that all the conditions have been met, I hereby decree that, effective June 29, 2021, St. Peter Church will be relegated to profane but not sordid use.

Furthermore, all sacred vessels and liturgical objects, as well as all parish registers belonging to St. Peter Church, remain in the care of Stella Maris Parish.

Anyone who feels aggrieved by this decision may initiate hierarchical recourse to the Congregation for the Clergy (Palazzo delle Congregazioni, 00193 Roma, Piazza Pio XII, 3) following the appropriate procedures outlined in the *Code of Canon Law* (Canon 1734).

It is my hope and prayer that the parishioners who are connected with St. Peter Church will accept this decision in a spirit of faith as their spiritual needs are fulfilled at Stella Maris Parish.

Given at Halifax, this 12th day of January, 2021, effective immediately.

† Brian Joseph Dunn
Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth

Rev. Mr. Robert Doyle
Chancellor