

## **DECREE**

### **In The Name of God. Amen.**

Since its solemn dedication in 1892 (and subsequent renovation in 1950), the Saints Peter and Paul church building has functioned as a spiritual home in the village of Phenix in West Warwick for generations of families and for the celebration of the sacraments. In recent years at Saints Peter and Paul Parish, the gradual decrease in parishioners has resulted in diminished sacramental practice and parish income. This worsened to the point, when on January 1, 2025, regular weekend Masses and all activities were halted there. In November 2025, there was a parish merger involving the Saints Peter and Paul church building (Saints Peter and Paul Parish, West Warwick, merged into St. Joseph Parish, West Warwick). During the same interim, parish operating costs at St. Joseph Parish have increased in order to maintain three campuses (St. Joseph, Our Lady of Good Counsel, and Saints Peter and Paul properties). This pattern of lack of maintenance and financial strain has progressed to a point where physical issues related to the Saints Peter and Paul church building are obvious. Since the cessation of weekend Masses and all activities on January 1, 2025, there have been no public Masses or liturgies. That means that the church building has been unused for communal worship for more than a year now.

In its insurance report dated April 15, 2025, Catholic Mutual Group identified issues with the safety and upkeep of the church building. The largest issue from the report pertains to the church roof, which is described as in poor condition. The current church roof has been repaired to address leaks, but the current church roof contains the original slate tiles. The pastor notes that the current church roof was installed after a fire in the church building prior to a 1936 news

article documenting the history of Saints Peter and Paul Parish. The replacement of a slate roof would pose a significant financial burden.

Other observations from the Catholic Mutual Group report for the church building include the need to repair: the circular, stain glass window at the rear of the church; water damage throughout the church building (old damage to the ceiling above the choir loft; to the ceiling halfway up the main aisle in several areas; to the ceiling directly in front of the altar; and to the ceiling arch behind the altar to the left side). There is also minor peeling paint and a crack in the ceiling in the front entrance of the church building. Catholic Mutual Group also recommended that the church main parking lot be relined, and that the rear church walkway be repaired in certain places.

In many ways, the lack of activities at the Saints Peter and Paul church building also has created security issues there. The property is unoccupied and presents a consistent liability. The village of Phenix is located just beside Main Street, and sadly, this area of West Warwick is plagued by substance abuse issues, encampments for the homeless, and known drug locations as confirmed by the West Warwick Police Department. There was a recent attempted home invasion at the rectory of Saints Peter and Paul.

For the first five months of Fiscal Year 2025-26, St. Joseph Parish, West Warwick, spent \$8,312.92 in regular expenses to maintain the Saints Peter and Paul property. The pastor projects that, given the cost of heating oil, the annual expenses to the Saints Peter and Paul campus will exceed \$20,000.

The pastor of St. Joseph Parish, West Warwick, and the Diocese of Providence have identified the above causes that, taken together, clearly support the case that the situation regarding the Saints Peter and Paul church building has become increasingly grave. For these reasons, in his letter of December 9, 2025, the pastor of St. Joseph Parish, West Warwick, recommended that I permanently close the church building.

Therefore, at the request of the pastor of St. Joseph Parish, West Warwick; having heard those affected by the request; having heard the College of Consultors on February 17, 2026 and the Council of Priests on February 17, 2026, as required by Canons 1222, §2 and 515, §2; I hereby decree that:

1. The Saints Peter and Paul church building, West Warwick, is relegated from sacred to secular (but not sordid) use;

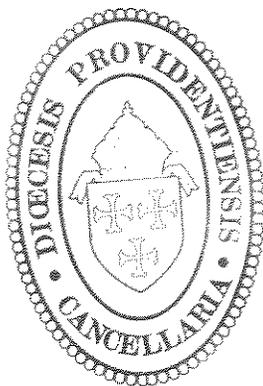
2. The church simultaneously loses its former status as a sacred place. Therefore, Mass and any other public worship or liturgical act is now prohibited there. This means that the church building is closed permanently;
3. All items inside the church be inventoried carefully; they remain the assets of St. Joseph Parish, West Warwick.

I direct that this decree be forwarded to the pastor of St. Joseph Parish, West Warwick, who will inform the parishioners by posting a copy of this decree to via the parish website on the weekend of February 21 – 22, 2026.

This decree will become effective at that time.

St. Joseph parishioners who wish to make recourse against this decree have the right to do so. According to Church law (Canon 1734, §2), they must do so **within 10 (ten) business (useful) days** of the above effective dates (February 21 – 22, 2026). Any recourse must be submitted in writing via postal mail to Bishop Lewandowski and must be accompanied by supporting documentation.

Given in Providence,  
at the Chancery,  
this 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2026



Bruce A. Lewandowski, C.Ss.R.  
Bishop of Providence

  
(Rev.) Timothy D. Reilly - Chancellor