



# DIOCESE OF SAGINAW

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

**HIS EXCELLENCY**  
**The Most Reverend Robert D. Gruss**  
**By the Grace of God and the Authority of the Apostolic See**  
**Bishop of the Diocese of Saginaw**

## DECREE

### **Permanent Closure of Saint Mary's Church, Saint Charles, Michigan**

## THE FACTS

**Whereas**, Saint Mary's Church located at 5661 Fergus Rd, St. Charles, MI 48655 is one of the worship sites of Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish, and has served the faithful for many years as a place of prayer, worship and sacramental life;

**Whereas**, on June 7, 1955, the Most Reverend Stephen Woznicki, then Bishop of the Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan, dedicated the new church; and

**Whereas**, on June 19, 1967, Saint Mary's Albee was established as an independent parish; and

**Whereas**, on November 30, 1997, a new parish center was dedicated, with the Most Reverend Kenneth Untener presiding over the liturgy;

**Whereas**, by decree effective July 2013, the Most Reverend Joseph R. Cistone, Bishop of Saginaw, erected the parish of Mary of the Immaculate Conception, into which Saint Mary's church in Albee was merged.

**Whereas**, Saint Mary's Albee was designated as a church for occasional use to meet pastoral needs.

**Whereas**, in 2022, Most Reverend Robert D. Gruss granted permission for the celebration of a Sunday morning Mass in Albee in an effort to welcome back parishioners, however, the response was limited;

**Whereas**, in recent years, the parish has experienced a sustained decline in active membership, resulting in decreased sacramental participation and diminished financial resources;

**Whereas**, a pastoral and financial review concluded that the continued maintenance and operation of Saint Mary's Church site is no longer feasible and prudent;

## **THE LAW**

**Whereas**, canons 515§2 and 87§1 support the diocesan bishop's authority to make decisions regarding parish structures and discipline for the spiritual welfare of the faithful;

**Whereas**, the diocesan bishop, in consultation with the presbyteral Council, may decide to suppress the use of a church as a place of worship for the spiritual well-being of the faithful, based on the circumstances of the parish community.

## **THE ARGUMENT**

**Whereas**, the continued use of Saint Mary's church is no longer justified by the current demographic and financial realities of the parish;

**Whereas**, the faithful of the parish will not be deprived of access to the sacraments and will be fully integrated into the liturgical and pastoral life of Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish;

**Whereas**, the Parish has experienced a sustained decline in active membership, leading to decreased participation in parish life and a diminished financial capacity;

**Whereas**, this decline renders the continued operation of the two worship sites unsustainable;

**Whereas**, responsible stewardship, ecclesial unity, and pastoral effectiveness require the consolidation of parish resources and activity;

In light of these factors, it is deemed most responsible, both pastorally and financially, to consolidate parish resources and explore viable solutions to ensure the sustainability of the parish and its mission (can. 1222§1);

### **Wherefore:**

1. Having carefully considered the law and the facts; and
2. Having heard the Presbyteral Council on February 18, 2025; and
3. Having heard on January 15, 2025, the Pastor and the Parish Pastoral and Finance Council of Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish, in whose territory the aforesaid property is situated; and
4. Having obtained on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the consent of those whose rights might be injured or violated, especially the major donors (or: the heirs of the major donor,), in accordance with the norm of canon 1222§2; and
5. Having ensured that the church will be stripped of its altar, sacred objects, and religious artifacts; and
6. Having ensured the good of the souls will suffer no harm thereby; that is, the spiritual and pastoral good of the parishioners will continue as it has been provided by Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish and;
7. Having ensured that there would be no scandal resulting from closing the church permanently;

## DECREE

**I, The Most. Reverend Robert D. Gruss**, Bishop of the Diocese of Saginaw, by the authority granted to me in canon 515§2, and after consultation with the Presbyteral Council, do hereby pronounce, declare, and decree that Saint Mary's Church located at 5661 Fergus Rd, St. Charles, MI 48655, is permanently closed effective at 12:01AM on July 28, 2025.

All sacred objects, furnishings, and liturgical items are to be treated in accordance with the diocesan norms and canon law. The property is no longer to be used for divine worship.

This decree is to be communicated to the Pastor of Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish Reverend Robert J. Kelm who is the canonical representative of the Parish, according to the norm of law (c. 532).

Everything I have decreed must be observed in all its parts. Anything else to the contrary notwithstanding, even if worthy of particular mention, may not be carried out following the promulgation of this decree. I establish that it be promulgated by way of publication on the website of the Diocese of Saginaw and on the parish website of Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish.

In accordance with canons 1734-1737, any party aggrieved by this decree has the right to petition for its revocation or amendment by hierarchical recourse within ten (10) canonical days of its legitimate notification.

Given on this 25<sup>th</sup> day of July in the year of Our Lord 2025, at the chancery of the Diocese of Saginaw.

*+ Robert D. Gruss*

Most Reverend Robert D. Gruss  
Bishop of Saginaw

*Rev. Alberto Vargas*  
Reverend Alberto E. Vargas, JCL. IV.  
Chancellor