

Preserving Parish Property

Preamble

Many parishioners are becoming acquainted with new parish surroundings. A merger or anticipated merger of parishes, partnership, or linkage takes adjustment, unique to each person and to each parish community. It is an opportunity to become familiar with each other, to learn the history of each church, to understand the significance of the parish's sacred objects, and to treasure parish activities, both in the past and anticipating the future.

This document discusses the preservation and possible changes in use of buildings and property. It is vital to avoid hasty property decisions, which could be later regretted. As good stewards, parish communities are encouraged to support wise decisions – sometimes inspirations - which will impact future generations.

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Pastors and pastoral administrators are typically aware of property and building conditions in daily or frequently used sites. However, sometimes they are less aware of the state of facilities which are used infrequently¹. This document describes steps which a pastor or pastoral administrator should take to assess the security of church property and to reduce risk of personal injury and property damage. This document proposes a procedure to evaluate property needs and steps to renovate buildings for handicap accessibility. The document also guides decisions regarding change or discontinuance of use of buildings, including churches, with the necessary care of sacred objects.

Building and Grounds Care

A responsible person (or persons) should be designated to daily walk around buildings and property, including cemeteries, and weekly walk inside all parish buildings. In fact, this standard of visual inspection is required by the property insurer utilized by the Diocese of Saginaw. It is wise to increase the scope and number of building and property evaluations at key times, such as when experiencing freezing weather, after a heavy storm, or after a group uses the building.

If a building is not used daily, a log or record must be kept, documenting the fact and date that each walk-through occurred, and noting necessary work to be done in order to provide for the preservation and security of the building or property. The log should be submitted, at least monthly, to the pastor or pastoral administrator and business manager of the parish. The log must be kept with the parish records.

- Lawns of all properties should be mowed and parking lots/sidewalks should be clean of snow and ice on a regular basis; the dates of snow removal must be kept in the log.
- The exterior of buildings should be maintained in good condition to maintain the value of the property.

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- Repair of buildings and property should occur as soon as possible in order to prevent further damage.
- If property is dangerous and not yet able to be repaired, the area should be cordoned off with barriers to prevent entry.
- The property insurer must be notified if there is a change of useⁱⁱ.
- The parish office is to maintain records including blueprints, abatement reports (such as asbestos), environmental reports (such as the presence of hazardous material), and property information (abstracts of title, maps, and so forth), as well as the inspection/care log.
- Injury of persons, criminal activity including vandalism, and significant property damage (due to fire, water damage, freezing pipes, etc.) must be reported immediately to the pastor or pastoral administrator (who will inform the Bishop's office) and the proper insurer. Criminal activity must be reported to the proper law enforcement agency.
- As long as the necessary steps are taken in meeting the insurance requirements, the insurer has not increased premiums for infrequently used property.

Preventative measures can often be taken to avoid damage of items within buildings, in which heat is turned down. For example, water pipes may be wrapped with heat cable to prevent freezing. Musical instruments are often wrapped and a de-humidifier is placed next to the instrument to avoid problems related to moisture and cold weather. Sensory equipment is recommended, such as to detect and notify of power outages, water sensors, and heat-loss sensors.

Keys and Security to Building Entrances

Good stewardship requires that the pastor or pastoral administrator, with the assistance of the parish business manager, know who has keys to buildings.

- Locks should be periodically changed (or buildings rekeyed).
- Keys should be kept solely by those individuals who have regular access to a building. The individuals who would keep a key might include the maintenance employees, person responsible for daily/weekly evaluation, and parish business manager.
- A list of individuals who receive keys should be kept; each individual should notify the business manager if a key is lost or misplaced. All individuals should agree in writing, upon receipt of the key, that they will not make copies or distribute the key(s).
- A key sign-out/sign-in system should be in place for individuals who periodically need access to buildings. Alternatively, a key card system should be investigated.
- Whenever there is concern regarding security, pastors and pastoral administrators should consider installing alarm systems and cameras, and utilizing the services of security companies.

Assessment of Parish Properties

Parish leaders should periodically determine the long-term and short-term needs of all buildings and properties. The pastor or pastoral administrator should consult with the following people and groups when evaluating buildings and properties:.

1. Parish Finance Council
2. Parish Business Manager
3. Parish Building and Grounds Committee
4. Members of the parish with expertise in fields such as building, mechanical, electrical, architectural or engineering, real estate
5. Parish maintenance person
6. Parish DRE and any other staff to provide input concerning their programs' needs
7. A representative from the Parish Cemetery Commission

This group should strive to understand the current and future needs of the parish, including service and outreach programs. The group should refer to the structural evaluations of churches and parish halls provided by the Diocese in 2012, the parish self-evaluations, stained glass evaluations, bell tower evaluations, the Maintenance and Risk Management Guidelines, the past years' utility bills and other relevant bills. Property concerns such as water drainage, tree removal, drains, building maintenance requirements, property line disputes, and the most recent MCC loss control report on each building should be considered.

A site walk-through should take place including the exterior property lines. The exterior of all buildings including roofs, brick condition, landscaping, security and parking lot lighting, and parking lot surfaces should be considered. Also, appropriate property care should be evaluated, including lawn mowing and snow removal. The age and condition of equipment required to take care of the properties, including cemeteries, should be assessed.

The next step should be a methodical walk-through of the interior of all buildings. Particular attention should be given to the contents of each building, maintenance needs, upgrades required for each building for compliance with existing safety and ADA codes. This portion of the evaluation considers such matters as: mechanical equipment, electrical wiring and panels, paint condition, carpet and tile, presence of asbestos and lead paint (found frequently in buildings built before 1976), piping and plumbing fixtures and the costs of future replacement. Discussion should take place about budgetary monies required to make upgrades and required maintenance time allotment for each building.

Input from parish groups, including the pastoral council, should take place as to what the parish community believes the parish should look like 5 years from now. Requirements of each parish faith formation and outreach program should be included in the evaluation within the context of stewardship of resources and the parish's mission. Presentation to parishioners, with opportunity for feedback and additional study, should occur in a timely and thorough manner.

Renovation for Handicap Accessibility

Efforts should be made to make bathrooms and building entries handicap accessible. As a parish plans to make these renovations, the Directives for the Building and Renovation of Churches and Chapels should be followed and the Diocesan Building Commission must approve changes. Renovations to buildings must proceed only after written permission has been obtained,

following the Diocese of Saginaw procedures. The following outline of procedures will be helpful in starting your ADA upgrade:

1. Contact the Diocesan Facilities Director to inform of your intent to begin process
2. Interview and selection of architects - Architect to provide:
 - a. Design and Cost Analysis
 - b. Incorporation of ADA, local, and state building code requirements
 - c. Space availability study
 - d. Provide a list of authorized contractors to bid project
 - e. Highly encourage green building practices
 - f. Seek energy savings and financial rebates incentives
3. Parish Finance Council approval following information-sharing with parish community
4. Contact the Diocesan Facilities Director to proceed to Diocesan Building Commission
5. Submit parish authorization to proceed with bidding process
6. Building Commission approval required with minimum of 3 bids
7. Inter-parish Deposit and Loan approval if required
8. Letter of approval from Bishop to proceed with project
9. Project completion with supervision by architect and all permits obtained and finalized

Decision to change the use of or to close a building

All parish property is held in trust for the parish and can be transferred or have a change of use only with the written permission of the Bishop. If a pastor or pastoral administrator believes that a change of use or discontinuance of use of a building or property should be discussed by the parishioners, the Bishop should be informed that the parish community will consider options regarding the building or property.

The parish community should be informed of a possible change or discontinued use. Consultation with the Parish Finance Council and Pastoral Council must occur, with specific recommendations by the council members recorded in each council's minutes and a vote recorded. The minutes of the councils' meetings, the summary of the information provided to the parishioners, the summary of parishioners' responses, and the pastor or pastoral administrator's recommendation should be submitted to the Bishop. No action may be taken unless authorization is given by the Bishop.

Following proper consultation, the Bishop decides whether to accept the recommendation to alter the use or discontinue use of a building. If the Bishop agrees with the recommendation, he will approve the change in writing. Upon receipt of the letter of approval, the pastor or pastoral administrator is to take the following steps.

For change of use:

- The parish community should be notified of the future change(s) and provided a rationale.
- With the guidance of the Diocesan Office of Liturgy and Facilities Director, all sacred objects must be removed. It is recommended that sacred objectsⁱⁱⁱ be used or displayed in a fitting manner within the parish.

- Security and a regular schedule for a walk-through should be increased in order to avoid vandalism and building deterioration. In most circumstances, alarm services should be installed.
- The property insurer should be notified.

For discontinued use:

- In most circumstances, heat of 50 degrees should be maintained in order to keep the building from damage. The water should be shut off and properly drained. Dehumidifiers are typically required.
- Emergency service providers should be notified of decreased use of a building.
- Power should be shut off to all circuits, except those required for emergency lighting, alarms, sump pumps, heating, and other required needs. Bells and automatic sound systems must be turned off.
- Building sump pumps must be maintained to prevent water damage. Outdoor lighting and interior emergency lighting should be retained. The building must be kept in presentable and clean condition.
- The city/township should be notified; tax assessment may be a consideration.
- Buildings and sites must be cleaned out of all trash and unwanted materials. Hazardous materials must be removed from the site, including gasoline, paint, and perishable items in compliance with industry standards.
- Entries to buildings should be evaluated to avert vandalism.
- The building must be emptied of all salvageable items such as fire extinguishers, refrigerators, stoves, and other usable materials. Items should be distributed to other parish buildings. Following consultation with the finance council, the pastor or pastoral administrator may offer surplus items to others. (Restrictions regarding sacred objects must be followed.)
- The Diocesan Facilities Director will assist the parish to determine possible future uses and whether to demolish buildings and/or to sell or lease the property.
- If a building is to be demolished, service companies (providing gas, power, water, etc.) should shut off utilities as soon as possible. The parish Business Manager must review all records pertaining to the property and determine, with the help of experts, if abatement work is necessary. The insurer and MCC should be informed of the demolition.
- A sales agreement, realty contract, or demolition contract may be entered into only after completion of the diocesan approval process, facilitated by the Diocesan Facilities Director, and finalized by written authorization by the Bishop.

Decision to change the use of or close a church

If a pastor or pastoral administrator believes that a church may be used for another purpose or may no longer be needed by the parish, the Bishop should be notified as soon as possible that the parishioners will discuss this subject.

No decision to change the use of or close a church can be made until/unless the Bishop promulgates a *decree permitting the church to be used for secular, but not unbecoming use*^{iv}.

Process to be followed

1. With notification regarding the topic, one or more meetings with parishioners to discuss a possible recommendation to discontinue use of the church;
2. Consultation with the Parish Finance Council; a vote, recorded in the minutes, to ask the Bishop to discontinue use of the Church, and to permit the church building to be used for secular, but not unbecoming use (canon 1222); minutes must be signed by the members of the Finance Council;
3. Consultation with the Parish Pastoral Council; a vote, recorded in the minutes, to ask the Bishop to discontinue use of the Church, and to permit the building to be used for secular, but not unbecoming use (canon 1222); minutes must be signed by the members of the Pastoral Council;
4. Letter of recommendation by the pastor or pastoral administrator to the Bishop, including minutes of meetings;
5. Following consultation with the Presbyteral Council and with those who can provide essential information, the Bishop will decide whether to accept the parish recommendation. No action can be taken without the approval of the Bishop.
6. If the Bishop issues a *decree permitting the church to be used for secular, but not unbecoming use*, the pastor or pastoral administrator is to consult with the Diocesan Office of Liturgy and the Diocesan Facilities Director regarding the recommended means to remove and store all sacred objects^v (including the altar, tabernacle, Stations of the Cross, and stained glass windows).

Security of Sacred Objects

- Before any change occurs, a video inventory must be made of all aspects of the building and its complete inventory with historical references noted, to include donor, year donated or purchased, and estimated value, if possible.
- It is recommended that sacred objects and art be utilized in a fitting location within the parish. Prior to moving these items, the pastor or pastoral administrator is to consult with the Diocesan Office of Liturgy. The Diocesan Facilities Director is to be consulted if relocation of items involves dismantling items or removal from a fixed location.
- All remaining items will be stored for possible re-use at other parishes. The parish is to consult with the Diocesan Office of Liturgy and Facilities Director regarding removal, storage, and installation of sacred objects, stained glass, and sacred art. For security and inventory purposes, the storage location is selected by the Diocesan Facilities Director.
- The pastor or pastoral administrator must approve of all transactions of sacred objects to another parish. Proceeds from the transfer of sacred objects to another parish^{vi} will be returned to the distributing parish, minus costs associated with the transfer of items.
- In some cases, removal of permanently placed items may result in building or property damage. Restoration is a legitimate cost associated with the transfer.

ⁱ Examples of property which may not be used regularly: Churches for occasional use and associated church halls with infrequent requests for usage; unoccupied rectories or convents; school buildings and recreational fields following school closure, or other buildings which may be used periodically or seasonally.

ⁱⁱ In order to avoid burdening the parish in the future, change of building use should be carefully weighed, especially if a parish is anticipating a merger in the near future. Factors to be considered include: 1) whether the parish will be hampered in carrying out its normal activities (such as the impact on a parish which converts a parish/religious education building to an outreach program or seeks historical or similar designation of buildings); 2) whether the new use will entail additional expenses or obligations (such as renting a building to an agency or organization, without the means to pay for upkeep of the facility); 3) whether an agency or organization would offer programs offensive to the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Diocesan Office of Liturgy must be consulted and approval must be given before a sacred object is moved into or out of a church. The decision to move, the history and reason for moving a sacred object (such as transferring crucifixes between a church for additional use and a parish church) should be documented in the minutes of the pastoral council and finance council.

^{iv} *A decree permitting the church to be used for secular, but not unbecoming use* may be granted in a variety of circumstances. Examples include: 1) the Faithful no longer or rarely request Mass in the church; 2) the church building has serious structural or engineering concerns, and, with the advice of the Parish Finance Council, the pastor or pastoral administrator believes that the funds should not be spent to repair the building; 3) due to various circumstances, the pastor or pastoral administrator, with the advice of the Parish Finance Council, believes the church should not remain open (considering such factors as frequent vandalism of property; periodic flooding; declining numbers of persons attending Mass in the church).

^v Sacred Objects: All objects that have been blessed and are being used or have been used in the church, including crosses, stained glass windows, tabernacles, altars, vestments, art, statues, chalices, Stations of the Cross, etc. In addition, organs, pianos, furniture specifically related to liturgical celebrations (credence tables, pews, ambos, for example) are to be treated with proper dignity, due to their close association with liturgical celebrations.

^{vi} Transfer of sacred objects may be to a parish, religious institution (such as a Catholic school, hospital, religious institute, or similar group listed in the Official Catholic Directory). In some circumstances, following the same approval process described above, a pastor or pastoral administrator may loan items to the diocesan heritage museum, give items (such as to a mission). Other items may be destroyed due to unsuitable design or fabric, irreparable damage, and similar concerns. In order to protect the integrity of sacred objects, a parish may not distribute (by sale or donation or other means) sacred objects to individuals or non-Catholic organizations.