

Some canonical aspects of the closing and sale of a parish church

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There are three different aspects of the closure and sale of a parish church that have canonical implications. It is possible that all three aspects may be operative in the closure of any one parish. Each of these aspects must be addressed independently.

- 1) The relegation of a parish church from sacred to profane use but not sordid use
- 2) The sale of the property of a parish
- 3) The suppression of a parish

At the end of this article, four appendices will address special issues:

Appendix 1) The order of relegation, alienation, and suppression of a parish church

Appendix 2) Where can the assets of a suppressed parish be transferred?

Appendix 3) Middle ground – The suspension of services at a parish church

Appendix 4) Special issues regarding other sacred spaces

I. The relegation of a parish church from sacred to profane use but not sordid use

Circumstance:

A church building that is consecrated, dedicated, or otherwise used for sacred worship is to be demolished or converted for another use.

Can. 1222 §1. If a church cannot be used in any way for divine worship and there is no possibility of repairing it, the diocesan bishop can relegate it to profane but not sordid use.

§2. Where other grave causes suggest that a church no longer be used for divine worship, the diocesan bishop, after having heard the presbyteral council, can relegate it to profane but not sordid use, with the consent of those who legitimately claim rights for themselves in the church and provided that the good of souls suffers no detriment thereby.

Requirements in law:

These requirements fall into two categories. If it is not possible to use the church for worship and it cannot be repaired, the Bishop may decide to relegate it to profane use (c. 1222 §1). If it is possible for the church to be used for worship or if it can be repaired, the Bishop must hear the presbyteral council and obtain the consent of those with legitimate rights before relegating it to profane use. The Bishop is to be concerned that the good of souls does not suffer (c. 1222 §2).

Preliminary steps

- ✓ A determination must be made regarding the ability to use or repair the church building.

- ✓ It is recommended that the pastor, the vicar forane, and some parishioners be consulted about the relegation of the church building.
- ✓ If it is proven objectively that the church both cannot be used for worship and cannot be repaired, the Bishop may decide immediately to relegate the church to profane use by decree. The decree should clearly and explicitly incorporate the basis on which the diocesan bishop concluded that the church cannot be used and cannot be repaired (cc. 50 and 51). Skip to “decree of the diocesan bishop.”
- ✓ Even if the circumstances do not require the diocesan bishop to consult the presbyteral council, the bishop is still free to consult the presbyteral council if he wishes to do so.

Consultation with the presbyteral council

- ✓ If it is not proven that the building is unsuitable for worship and unable to be repaired, the Bishop must consult with the presbyteral council. For validity, the entire presbyteral council must be convoked. Ample notice must be given for the members of the presbyteral council to attend a regular or extraordinary meeting (see c. 166 §1).
- ✓ The presbyteral council should be presented with the relevant facts of the case before offering their opinion (see c. 1292 §4). This data might include: The reason for relegating the parish to profane use, the state of repair of the building, the costs of maintaining the building, the number of parishioners who worship in the church, where the parishioners will be able to worship if the church building is closed, and what will be done with the church building.
- ✓ The relegation of the church must be attentive to three things:
- ✓ First, the church can be given over to profane but not sordid use. Therefore, a church can be used for a secular purpose, but not for a sacrilegious, immoral, or scandalous purpose. The presbyteral council might be asked whether they believe the faithful would be scandalized by the new purpose of the church building. The demolition of a church building is not a sordid use.
- ✓ Second, the good of souls must be provided for. The presbyteral council might be asked whether they believe the faithful will be adequately nourished from the spiritual goods of the Church after the parish church is relegated. If the number of faithful is very small or other Catholic churches are available at a reasonable distance, then the good of souls may be adequately cared for.
- ✓ Thirdly, any persons who can claim legitimate rights must give their consent. This circumstance is likely to be rare. However, a religious order may have a specific longstanding tie to a parish church and may have acquired a right to use the church. Or a donor may have given land or facilities while reserving certain rights regarding the use of these donations. The presbyteral council should be informed about the consent of any person or group with a legitimate right. Parishioners and other donors who give their support to a parish church, even for many years, do not automatically acquire any right to direct the use of those donations, unless they have expressly stated their intention when making the donation.¹

¹ When a person makes a donation, the ownership of the asset is transferred from the donor to the church. After the donation, the donor no longer has ownership over the asset and cannot exercise the power of ownership to direct what the church should do with the asset. Rather, the church has the innate right to use or alienate the asset independent of any other power (c. 1254 §1). Yet, any conditions that have been imposed by the donor must be respected (see c. 1284 §2, 4°).

- ✓ The advice of each member of the presbyteral council must be sought (c. 127 §1). Therefore, each member must be allowed to speak. This consultation should pose the question, “Should this parish be converted from sacred to profane use (or be demolished)?” The consultation should not present a plan as though it was a *fait accompli*. Rather, it should be open to the sincere advice of the presbyteral council either for or against the decision. Although a vote is not required, a consultative (not deliberative) vote may be taken as a way to demonstrate conclusively that the presbyteral council was consulted. The fact (and results) of the vote should be noted in the record of the presbyteral council.
- ✓ If the statutes of the presbyteral council allow for an alternate method of seeking counsel, the presbyteral council does not need to be convoked in person (cc. 127 §1 and 166). For example, the statutes might allow for the members to give their counsel in writing or in teleconference. Nevertheless, the presbyteral council must still be presented with all the appropriate facts and relevant issues, and the opinion of each member must be sought according to the prescriptions of the statutes. Care must be taken to insure that all necessary canonical formalities are observed if an alternate method of seeking counsel is employed.
- ✓ The diocesan bishop is not required to follow the advice of the presbyteral council. The diocesan bishop may close the parish church even over the objections of the presbyteral council.
- ✓ The consultation with the presbyteral council should be a separate action from the decision to suppress the parish.

Decree of the diocesan bishop

- ✓ If the Bishop decides to proceed, he issues a decree relegating the church to profane use (c. 1212). The decree should make note of the consultation with the presbyteral council and the reasons for relegating the parish (c. 51). By this decree, the church is no longer considered a sacred space and cannot be used regularly for divine worship. The decree should also indicate that the building may not be used for sordid purposes, such as some work that is immoral or contrary to the faith.

Treatment of the furnishings in the church

- ✓ Particular attention must be paid to the altar in the church. An altar does not lose its dedication or blessing when the church is relegated to profane use (c. 1238 §2). Dedicated or blessed altars can be used only for divine worship (c. 1239 §1).
- ✓ If the altar cannot be removed and used in another church, chapel, or oratory, the bishop should issue a decree turning over the altar to profane use (cc. 1238 §1 and 1212). No other consultation is required to return an altar to profane use.
- ✓ The code does not prescribe any further formalities for the other furnishings in a church. However, any objects that have been blessed or used in the celebration of divine worship should be treated with respect in accord with their sacred character. Any sacred vessels, vestments, liturgical books, and other sacred furnishings should be removed. If they cannot be used in another church, chapel, or oratory, or if they cannot be reverently stored, they should be destroyed.

II. The sale of the property of a parish

Circumstance:

A church building or other parish property is to be alienated. Alienation is the act of transferring ownership. Therefore, even the transfer of an asset from one parish to a religious order, or even from one parish to another parish of the same diocese, is an act of alienation and is subject to the following canonical requirements.

Can. 1291 The permission of the authority competent according to the norm of law is required for the valid alienation of goods which constitute by legitimate designation the stable patrimony of a public juridic person and whose value exceeds the sum defined by law.

Can. 1292 §1. Without prejudice to the prescript of can. 638, §3, when the value of the goods whose alienation is proposed falls within the minimum and maximum amounts to be defined by the conference of bishops for its own region, the competent authority is determined by the statutes of juridic persons if they are not subject to the diocesan bishop; otherwise, the competent authority is the diocesan bishop with the consent of the finance council, the college of consultors, and those concerned. The diocesan bishop himself also needs their consent to alienate the goods of the diocese.

§2. The permission of the Holy See is also required for the valid alienation of goods whose value exceeds the maximum amount, goods given to the Church by vow, or goods precious for artistic or historical reasons.

§3. If the asset to be alienated is divisible, the parts already alienated must be mentioned when seeking permission for the alienation; otherwise the permission is invalid.

§4. Those who by advice or consent must take part in alienating goods are not to offer advice or consent unless they have first been thoroughly informed both of the economic state of the juridic person whose goods are proposed for alienation and of previous alienations.

Can. 1293 §1. The alienation of goods whose value exceeds the defined minimum amount also requires the following:

1° a just cause, such as urgent necessity, evident advantage, piety, charity, or some other grave pastoral reason;

2° a written appraisal by experts of the asset to be alienated.

§2. Other precautions prescribed by legitimate authority are also to be observed to avoid harm to the Church.

Can. 1294 §1. An asset ordinarily must not be alienated for a price less than that indicated in the appraisal.

§2. The money received from the alienation is either to be invested carefully for the advantage of the Church or to be expended prudently according to the purposes of the alienation.

Requirements in law:

The requirements fall into three categories depending on size of the asset to be alienated.

- a) Assets worth less than the minimum amount defined by the conference of bishops. The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops recently defined the minimum amount as \$1,000,000 for dioceses with more than 500,000 Catholics, \$500,000 for dioceses with less than 500,000 Catholics, and the larger of \$25,000 or 5% of the prior year's annual income for juridic persons subordinate to the diocese. These amounts are subject to an inflation adjustment and may be larger from year to year.² A parish is a subordinate juridic person to a diocese, and is therefore subject to this last (and smallest) figure: \$25,000 or 5% of the prior year's annual income.
- b) Assets between the minimum and maximum amount as defined by the conference of bishops. The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops recently defined the maximum amount at \$10,000,000 for dioceses with more than 500,000 Catholics and \$5,000,000 for dioceses with less than 500,000 Catholics. These amounts are also subject to inflation adjustments from year to year.
- c) Assets worth more than the maximum amount, which were given by vow or which are historically or artistically precious.

Preliminary steps

- ✓ There must be a just cause for the alienation (c. 1293 §1, 1^o). Just causes might include an urgent necessity to alienate the asset, an evident advantage to the Church brought by the alienation, or another grave pastoral reason.
- ✓ Obtain two appraisals, or at least one truly credible appraisal (c. 1293 §1, 2^o). An asset is ordinarily not to be alienated for a price less than the appraisal (c. 1294 §1). There should be appropriate plans to use the proceeds from the sale for the advantage of the Church (c. 1294 §2).
- ✓ The pastor represents the parish (c. 532). The pastor must be the one to initiate the alienation of the asset. Even if the pastor and the diocesan bishop are working collaboratively to sell the asset, the pastor and not the diocesan bishop initiates the sale. The diocesan bishop cannot alienate a parochial asset against the will of the pastor.
- ✓ In the sale of parish property, a transaction that affects the heart of a parish, it is advisable to consult the vicar forane and even some parishioners about the alienation.
- ✓ The intention of the donor must be respected. Determine if any donors have attached any specific intentions that must be considered in this alienation. As mentioned above, the parishioners or donors who contributed to the parish over many years do not have the right to direct the use of their donations unless they have expressly stated their intentions when making their donations.
- ✓ The sale of the property should be separate from the decision to suppress a parish or relegate a church to profane use.

² The maximum and minimum amounts are currently linked to the consumer price index and increase annually. For more information, consult the complementary norms of the episcopal conference to canon 1292 §1. This information can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/norms/1292-1.htm>.

If the asset is worth less than the minimum amount defined by the conference of bishops:

- ✓ It should be noted that this circumstance is unlikely when selling a parish church building or parish property because the minimum amount defined by the conference of bishops is small.
- ✓ If the asset is worth less than the minimum amount, the alienation may go forward.
- ✓ If the act of alienation is considered ordinary administration and within the pastor's prerogative according to parish statutes and particular law, then the pastor may freely proceed on his own authority (c. 1281 §§1 and 2).
- ✓ If the act of alienation is considered extraordinary administration according to parish statutes and particular law, then the pastor requires the consent of the local ordinary for the sale to proceed (c. 1281 §1).
- ✓ The pastor should follow all other requirements of particular and civil law.

If the asset is worth more than the minimum amount but less than the maximum amount:

- ✓ The permission of the diocesan bishop is required with the consent of the diocesan finance council and the college of consultors.
- ✓ For validity, the diocesan finance council and the college of consultors must be convoked. These two bodies can be convoked for one common meeting or for their own separate meetings. Ample notice must be given for the members to attend a regular or extraordinary meeting (see c. 166 §1).
- ✓ It was noted above that the opinion of the presbyteral council might be sought in an alternate way without convoking them for a meeting. This is not possible when seeking the consent of the finance council and the consultors. They must be convoked in a meeting.
- ✓ The diocesan finance council and the college of consultors should be presented with the relevant facts of the case before offering their opinion (c. 1292 §4). This data might include: The condition of the asset, the appraisal value of the asset, the state of the parish, the just cause for the alienation, the opinion of the pastor, the relevant intentions of any donor that must be respected, and what is to be done with the assets from the sale. The finance council and consultors must also be informed for validity of any other connected parts of the parish that have been previously alienated (c. 1292 §3).
- ✓ The consent of the diocesan finance council and the college of consultors must be obtained (c. 127 §1). Each member should be allowed to speak, ask questions, and state his or her opinion. This request for consent should pose the question, "Does this body give consent for this asset to be alienated?" A vote is required, and an absolute majority of the members of each body must give their consent, or the alienation cannot be validly executed.
- ✓ If the finance council and consultors come together for a common meeting, the vote of each group must be taken separately as each group must give their separate consent. The results of the vote should be noted in the record.
- ✓ Finally, the diocesan bishop must give his permission which is required for the pastor to validly alienate the asset.
- ✓ The pastor may then execute the alienation of the asset, following the other provisions of particular and civil law.

If the asset is worth more than the maximum amount as defined by the conference of bishops:

- ✓ Execute the consultation with the diocesan finance council and college of consultors described above.
- ✓ The acts for the alienation are to be forwarded to the Congregation for the Clergy which is competent to handle these matters.
- ✓ The diocesan bishop should transmit his votum with the acts in which he states his reasons for granting this permission.
- ✓ If the object was given by vow or is historically or artistically precious, the diocesan bishop should also explain why an asset of this nature should be alienated.
- ✓ After the Holy See gives permission, the pastor may execute the alienation following the other provisions of particular and civil law.

III. The suppression of a parish

Circumstance:

The decision is made to suppress a parish so that it goes out of existence. It is noted that the suppression of a parish is distinct from the relegation of a church to profane use and the alienation of the asset of a parish church.

Can. 515 §2. It is only for the diocesan bishop to erect, suppress, or alter parishes. He is neither to erect, suppress, nor alter notably parishes, unless he has heard the presbyteral council.

Can. 121 If aggregates of persons (*universitates personarum*) or of things (*universitates rerum*), which are public juridic persons, are so joined that from them one aggregate (*universitas*) is constituted which also possesses juridic personality, this new juridic person obtains the goods and patrimonial rights proper to the prior ones and assumes the obligations with which they were burdened. With regard to the allocation of goods in particular and to the fulfillment of obligations, however, the intention of the founders and donors as well as acquired rights must be respected.

Can. 123 Upon the extinction of a public juridic person, the allocation of its goods, patrimonial rights, and obligations is governed by law and its statutes; if these give no indication, they go to the juridic person immediately superior, always without prejudice to the intention of the founders and donors and acquired rights. Upon the extinction of a private juridic person, the allocation of its goods and obligations is governed by its own statutes.

Requirements in law:

It is for the Bishop to suppress a parish after consultation with the presbyteral council.

Preliminary steps:

- ✓ It is recommended that the pastor, the vicar forane, and some parishioners be consulted about the suppression of the parish.

Consultation with the presbyteral council:

- ✓ Consultation with the presbyteral council is required.
- ✓ The presbyteral council must be convoked as mentioned in the section on relegation (see c. 166 §1).
- ✓ This consultation should present the facts to the presbyteral council (see c. 1292 §4). These facts might include: The reason for suppressing the parish, the state and assets of the parish, the number of parishioners, where the parishioners will be able to worship, what provision will be made for the pastoral care of the territory of the suppressed parish, and the disposition of the assets of the parish.
- ✓ The advice of each member of the presbyteral council must be sought as described in the section on relegation (c. 127 §1). This consultation should pose the question, “Should this parish be suppressed?” The consultation should not present a plan as though it was a *fait accompli*. Rather, it should be open to the sincere advice of the presbyteral council either for or against the suppression. A consultative (not deliberative) vote may be taken.
- ✓ If the statutes of the presbyteral council allow for an alternate method of seeking counsel, the presbyteral council does not need to be convoked (cc. 127 §1 and 166). This counsel must still be sought in a canonical way as described in the section on relegation.
- ✓ The consultation with the presbyteral council should be a separate action from the decision to relegate the parish church to profane use.
- ✓ The diocesan bishop is not required to follow the advice of the presbyteral council. He may suppress the parish even contrary to the advice of the presbyteral council.
- ✓ If the diocesan bishop decides to proceed, he issues a decree suppressing the parish.

Decree of the diocesan bishop

- ✓ When the Bishop issues the decree of suppression, the parish ceases to exist. The decree should make mention of the consultation with the presbyteral council and the reasons for suppressing the parish (c. 51).
- ✓ The decree is promulgated by making the contents of the decree known to the people of the parish, or at least the pastor who is to notify the people.
- ✓ In the decree of suppression, the Bishop should determine who receives the temporal goods of the parish and who is responsible for the obligations of the parish and the sacramental books.

Provisions regarding the assets and obligations of the parish

- ✓ When a parish is suppressed, provisions must be made regarding the assets of the parish which include the physical property, the tangible goods, and the liquid assets of the parish.
- ✓ Provision must also be made regarding the obligations of the parish, which includes the care of the souls in the territory of the parish, the satisfaction of the Mass obligations, and the care of the sacramental registers.
- ✓ The Congregation for the Clergy has issued an opinion regarding the disposition of assets. A parish is a “portion of the people of God” (c. 515 §1). When a parish is suppressed, the territory served by the suppressed parish must become the responsibility of some other parish. The suppression of a parish is seen rather as a merger of two parishes than an extinction of one suppressed parish. Because the mother parish absorbs the territory of the suppressed parish, the mother parish canonically inherits the assets,

rights, and obligations of the suppressed parish according to canon 121. It is not appropriate to follow the provisions of canon 123 regarding the extinction of a juridic person, because the territory is not extinguished.

- ✓ If the territory of a suppressed parish is divided so that two or more neighboring parishes assume the care of the territory of the suppressed parish, the assets and obligations of the parish may be divided among these parishes. Canon 122 addresses the division of the assets of a juridic person.
- ✓ If a parish is personal and not territorial, then canon 123 may be operative. The assets of a personal parish that is extinguished may pass to the superior juridic person (the diocese) if there is no other parish to merge with. This may occur if a personal parish serves a group of a particular rite, language, or nationality, and there are no longer many persons of that rite, language, or nationality left in the region (c. 518).
- ✓ In general, the parish that assumes the care of the territory of the suppressed parish also receives the assets and obligations. The diocesan bishop should clarify these dispositions in the decree of suppression. The diocesan bishop may have a good reason to entrust the care of the sacramental registers to another person, such as a diocesan archivist.

Appendix 1) The order of relegation, alienation, and suppression of a parish church

- ✓ Depending on the circumstances, the act of suppression of a parish, the act of relegating the parish church to profane use, and the act of alienating the parish property might be executed in different orders.
- ✓ If a parish church is to be sold for a secular purpose, the relegation of the church to profane use must precede the act of alienation.
- ✓ If the relegation and alienation comes before the suppression, it falls to the pastor of the parish that is to be suppressed to advise on the relegation and to execute the alienation of the church property.
- ✓ If the suppression comes before the relegation and alienation, then it falls to the pastor of the parish that has acquired the suppressed parish's property to advise on the relegation and to execute the alienation of the church property.
- ✓ Because the relegation of the church to profane use and the suppression of the parish require consultation with the presbyteral council, it may be advantageous to discuss both matters with the presbyteral council at the same meeting. Even if both issues are discussed in one meeting, each discussion and consultation should be a separate act.

Appendix 2) Where can the assets of a suppressed parish be transferred?

- ✓ The assets of a suppressed parish are generally transferred to the parish that assumes the care of the territory of the suppressed parish.

Can the assets of a suppressed parish be transferred to an entity other than a neighboring parish?

- ✓ Yes. There may be very good reasons for transferring the ownership (alienating) the assets of a suppressed parish to a needy or worthwhile cause. One of the just causes for alienating assets is piety or charity (c. 1293 §1, 1°).
- ✓ Some examples of worthy recipients of these assets might include: a needy parish other than the one assuming the pastoral care of the local territory, a local non-parochial Catholic school that provides a Catholic education to children from the region, a charitable organization that cares for the needs of the region, or even a diocesan fund that provides seed money for the establishment of new parishes in areas of growth.
- ✓ These entities can receive assets through a free act of the administrator of the juridic person that owns the assets who chooses to alienate them. These alternative entities cannot receive the assets by right nor as a matter of policy or law.
- ✓ The competent authority to alienate these assets is the pastor of the parish to be suppressed (prior to the suppression) or the pastor of the parish that has acquired the assets (after the suppression).
- ✓ The diocesan bishop cannot compel the alienation contrary to the wishes of the pastor of the parish that owns the assets.
- ✓ The alienation of the assets must be performed according to the laws governing alienation as described above under the “sale of the property of a parish or mission.”

Appendix 3) Middle ground – The suspension of services at a parish church

The relegation of a parish to profane use, the sale of parish property, and the suppression of a parish are traumatic events in the life of a parish. In some places, a preliminary step may precede these actions: the suspension of services at a parish.

- ✓ The suspension of services does not take away the need to follow through with the relegation of the church building, the alienation of the parish assets, and the suppression of the parish at a later time.
- ✓ Although the suspension of pastoral services is neither relegation nor suppression, the suspension of services at a parish should be preceded by consultation with the presbyteral council, since a diocesan bishop is not to “notably alter” a parish without consulting the presbyteral council (c. 515 §2).
- ✓ In my understanding of the view of the Apostolic Signatura, the suspension of services is tantamount to the relegation of a parish to profane use. A parish that is suspended is indefinitely taken out of sacred use whereas a parish that is relegated is perpetually taken out of sacred use. If it is not anticipated that the suspended parish will be revived, then the suspension is the first step in the relegation and suppression of the parish. Rather than waiting to consult the presbyteral council at the point at which the parish has *de facto* ceased to function, it is appropriate to consult the presbyteral council at the moment the decision is made to proceed on this course.

Appendix 4) Special issues regarding other sacred spaces

This article has addressed the relegation of a parish church, the alienation of parish buildings and property, and the suppression of a parish. However, there may be other circumstances in which a church, chapel, or oratory that belongs to some entity other than a parish needs to be relegated or sold. The following are some observations about the acts of relegating a sacred space, alienating (selling) a sacred space, and suppressing the entity that owns the sacred space.

The relegation of other sacred spaces

- ✓ Sacred spaces include churches, chapels, and oratories.
- ✓ Sacred spaces must be established by the competent authority.
- ✓ A church is a sacred building designated for divine worship to which the faithful have the right of entry for divine worship (c. 1214). All churches must follow the requirements of law for their relegation to profane but not sordid use. Even if a church belongs to an entity other than a parish, it must still follow the canonical requirements for its relegation. These requirements were described above in number 1.
- ✓ An oratory is a place for divine worship designated by permission of the ordinary for the benefit of some community or group of the faithful (c. 1223). An oratory can be relegated to profane use by the same authority that established it (c. 1224 §2).
- ✓ A chapel is a place for divine worship designated by permission of the local ordinary for the benefit of one or more persons (c. 1226). The authority that is competent to establish a chapel is competent to relegate it to profane use.
- ✓ Oratories and chapels are to be blessed (c. 1229). Once an oratory or chapel has been blessed, it is appropriate that it be relegated to profane use by decree of the competent authority (c. 1212).
- ✓ No consultation is prescribed by law for the relegation of an oratory or chapel.
- ✓ The decree relegating the sacred space should express the reasons for the relegation (c. 51). The decree should make mention of any restrictions on the future use of the sacred space.
- ✓ The relegation of a dedicated or blessed altar is a separate act (c. 1238 §2).
- ✓ The decree may make mention of the care of any other objects that have been blessed or used in the celebration of divine worship. These should be treated with respect in accord with their sacred character.

The alienation or sale of a sacred space

- ✓ It must be determined who owns the sacred space to be alienated or sold. Some examples of entities (other than parishes) that might own a sacred space include: a hospital, a Newman center, a university, a cemetery, or a nursing home. In some cases, a diocese may be the direct owner of a sacred space if no other juridic person has been established to care for that space.
- ✓ It must then be determined if the entity that owns the sacred space is a public or a private juridic person in the Church.
- ✓ If the sacred space is owned by a public juridic person, all the requirements of law for the alienation of ecclesiastical goods must be observed (c. 1257 §1). These requirements were described above in number 2.

- ✓ A parish is a public juridic person (c. 515 §3). A quasi-parish is equivalent to a parish and is therefore a public juridic person (c. 516 §1). Other entities may also be public juridic persons and must follow the requirements of law. Sacred spaces owned directly by a diocese, which is a public juridic person by law, must also follow the requirements for the alienation of ecclesiastical goods.
- ✓ If the sacred space is owned by a private juridic person, the requirements of its statutes must be observed regarding the alienation of assets. It should be noted that private juridic persons are not subject to the same diocesan oversight as a public juridic person, and are not subject to any diocesan tax (cc. 1257 §2 and 1263). While a private juridic person might own and operate an oratory or a chapel, it would be most unusual for a private juridic person to own and operate a church which is dedicated for the public exercise of divine worship.

The suppression of an entity other than a parish

- ✓ If the entity that owns the sacred space is a juridic person, it may be suppressed, especially if the juridic person has ceased to function (c. 120 §1).
- ✓ A quasi-parish is equivalent to a parish and should follow the same requirements for the suppression of a parish (c. 516 §1). These requirements were described above in number 3.
- ✓ An entity (other than a parish) that is a public juridic person can be suppressed by the decree of the competent authority. An entity that is a private juridic person can be suppressed by the decree of the competent authority according to the norm of its statutes (c. 120 §1). No consultation with the presbyteral council is required in these cases.
- ✓ The disposition of the assets of a juridic person follows the precepts of canons 121-123.