



**Holy Rosary Church in Tacoma**, which has been closed since last fall when sheetrock fell from the ceiling, will be demolished in accordance with a decree issued August 25 by Archbishop J. Peter Sartain. Photo: Courtesy Holy Rosary Parish TACOMA – Holy Rosary Church, which has been a visible sign of faith in Tacoma for nearly a century, will be demolished “due to its unsafe condition,” according to a decree issued August 25 by Archbishop J. Peter Sartain.

“It is with great sadness and a heavy heart that I write to you today,” the archbishop said in a letter to be read at weekend Masses August 24–25. His

decision, he explained, came after the archdiocese completed a series of assessments of “the significant safety issues of your beautiful church building.”

That work began last fall, after sheetrock fell from the church ceiling October 6. As Northwest Catholic reported earlier this year, the building has a history of water issues including leaks, falling plaster, flooding in the steeple, and damaged brickwork that doesn’t meet today’s seismic standards.

The assessments — which the archbishop said involved “more than 800 hours of staff time and consultant resources” — concluded that the required structural repairs would cost nearly \$18 million.

“Unfortunately, the Archdiocese does not have the funds to pay for these significant repairs, nor does your Holy Rosary community,” the archbishop wrote.

He added, “Even if the necessary financial resources could be found, would it be the most prudent use of \$18 million to repair one church building serving a small community of faithful, when there are so many other pressing needs, both spiritual and social? Faithful stewardship of both parish and archdiocesan resources says no.”

In the decree, the archbishop said the archdiocese would work with the parish to “assess options for Catholic use of the property, including but not limited to low income or affordable housing.”

### **‘A huge loss’**

The closing of the church building is “a huge loss” for a parish community that “has been struggling in various ways for years,” said Deacon Jim Fish, Holy Rosary’s pastoral coordinator.

The neo-Gothic church, visible from Interstate 5, is also “a Tacoma icon,” Deacon Fish said.

“The thousands of vehicles that go by it every day, north and south, see this steeple from the freeway, and for those who are Catholic ... it’s a symbol of the greatness of the Catholic Church.”

Since last fall, the parish has been celebrating Masses in the auditorium of Holy Rosary Bilingual School, and that will continue, Deacon Fish said. But total attendance at Holy Rosary’s two weekend Masses has dwindled to about 200, and the future of the parish is unclear.

As parishioners mourn the loss of their beloved church building, Deacon Fish is encouraging them to have hope, which for Christians is not “that everything’s going to be OK and it’s going to be wonderful and beautiful,” he said.

“The hope is that God is with us in our suffering.”

As painful as it is, the decree is not “the end of the story,” he added.

“It’s a challenge for us to come together more strongly and more lovingly for each other, for the poor that we hope to serve and the good news we hope to proclaim — because if we can’t do that in the midst of this difficulty, then what kind of disciples are we?”