



DIOCESE *of* COLUMBUS

VATICAN GRANTS “MINOR BASILICA” TITLE TO ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION CHURCH IN LANCASTER

St. Mary of the Assumption is the first church in the Diocese of Columbus to receive the title, “Minor Basilica.”

COLUMBUS— In a letter addressed to the Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes, Bishop of Columbus, the Vatican decreed that St. Mary of the Assumption in Lancaster, Ohio has been granted the title of, “Minor Basilica.”

The letter, signed by Archbishop Arthur Roche, the Prefect for the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and Archbishop Vittorio Francesco Viola, O.F.M., Secretary of the Dicastery, sent on July 7, 2022, decreed the status of minor basilica to this “important church... intensifying the bond with the Church of Rome and with the Holy Father, also promotes it as an exemplar of liturgical and pastoral action within the Diocese.”

The church started in 1817 in the home of Michael Garaghty at the corner of Main and High streets, and was officially named “St. Mary of the Assumption” in 1818/19. The parish will now be named, “Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption.”

In October of 2021, Bishop Robert Brennan along with pastor, Reverend Craig Eilerman, petitioned the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for the title. Bishop Brennan’s letter read in part, “It is the home of a thriving Catholic community and is already a destination for pilgrims and visitors who seek to experience the holiness of this place, and to admire the beauty of this sacred edifice.”

Bishop Earl K. Fernandes affirmed the request in June of 2022.

“With the transition of bishops, the Congregation wanted to know whether we should move forward with the request, and, of course, I said, ‘Yes.’ It’s a great honor for the Diocese of Columbus. It’s a beautiful and historical church, which has been restored and enhanced. In Lancaster, people of faith have gathered to worship God for more than two centuries. Here they have celebrated sacred moments in their lives. The designation also shows the ongoing loyalty of the Diocese of Columbus and its people to the Holy Father. The designation is a testimony to the faith that was brought here by missionaries and a reminder to continue to be missionaries, bringing Good News to others!” - Bishop Earl K. Fernandes, Diocese of Columbus

The bestowal of the title of Minor Basilica is an initiation of a very particular bond between St. Mary of the Assumption Parish Church and the Holy Father; it sets the church of St. Mary apart in rank from other churches. While the principal church of Columbus is St. Joseph Cathedral, the Basilica ranks after the Cathedral as a church of great distinction.



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“I am thrilled that our church has been granted the title of a Minor Basilica. It’s an affirmation of the strong Catholic faith that has existed for over 200 years in Lancaster and of the outstanding beauty of St. Mary of the Assumption Church.” - Reverend Craig Eilerman, St. Mary of the Assumption Church

The Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption in Lancaster is one of 105 churches in the Diocese of Columbus. It is the seventh church in Ohio to be granted the title of minor basilica. The other minor basilicas in Ohio include; Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation (Carey), Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption (Marietta), Basilica of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Youngstown), Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon (North Jackson), and Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains (Cincinnati).

While somewhat familiar to Catholics, the term Basilica originally referred to a specific function and style of building in use during the time of the Roman Empire. A Basilica was a public building used by the Emperor or Judges for major events of noble import or significance. The structure was usually distinguished by columns, a long center aisle, and an apse within the building. It was into the apse that the Emperor or Judge would be seated. As Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, Basilicas were converted into churches, with the Altar and Tabernacle of Our Lord, Jesus Christ substantially present in the apse, the place once occupied by the emperor. The Basilica thus became the “Royal House” where Christians gathered to celebrate the Eucharist and proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord.

There are two types of Basilicas: Major Basilicas and Minor Basilicas. All the Major Basilicas are found in the city of Rome. Minor Basilicas are those churches throughout Christendom that have been given a special designation by the Holy Father. Reasons for bestowing this designation may be granted for architectural beauty, historical significance, liturgical renown, or for any combination of these attributes. A Minor Basilica shares a special relationship with the See of Rome and with the Holy Father.