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Religious Life





Sister Teresa Agnes Gerlach of Jesus Crucified, former prioress of the Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity in Arlington, Texas, and Bishop Michael F. Olson of Fort Worth, Texas, are pictured in an undated combination photo. The Holy See declared the Texas monastery "extinct" in a decree Nov. 28, 2024, a month after its residents were dismissed from the Carmelite order and religious life over "their notorious defection from the Catholic faith" following a bitter feud with Bishop Olson over his April 2023 investigation of the former prioress. (OSV News/courtesy Matthew Bobo and Bob Roller)

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Fort Worth, Texas — December 4, 2024

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The Holy See has suppressed the Carmelite Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity in Arlington, Texas, a month after its residents were dismissed from the Carmelite order and religious life.

The decree, issued Nov. 28 by the Vatican Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, stated that the monastery "is extinct."

The decree described having previously dismissed on Oct. 28 "five solemnly professed nuns for reasons of their notorious defection from the Catholic faith" as well as the "Carmel's only novice," whose temporary vows had expired in August, "leaving the Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity with no members." The decree was signed by Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, the dicastery's prefect, and Sister Simona Brambilla, the dicastery's secretary.

In an accompanying letter to Bishop Michael F. Olson of Fort Worth, Texas, dated Nov. 29, Sister Simona, a Consolata Missionary who has served as the dicastery's secretary since 2023, said the dicastery "acknowledges that the events of the past year and a half have caused you and the faithful of the Diocese of Fort Worth hardship and unwarranted public attention."

"Be assured that we are grateful for your heroic and thankless service to the local Church," she said.

In a Dec. 2 letter to the diocese, issued on the diocesan website with the decree and Sister Simona's letter attached, Olson described the situation as the culmination of a

"sad series of events."

He emphasized that the women living in the former monastery are no longer nuns, despite their previous claims to the contrary. He also said that the diocese is not making, and has not made, claims to the former monastery property, which sits on 72 wooded acres within the boundaries of the Fort Worth Diocese.

"I wish to again acknowledge the great sadness that this entire affair has brought to our local church and beyond, and to me personally," Olson wrote in the letter. "The actions of the former nuns have perpetrated a deep wound in the Body of Christ. I ask all of you to join me in praying for healing, reconciliation, and for the conversion of these women who have departed from the vowed religious life and notoriously defected from communion with the Catholic Church by their actions."

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Over the past year and a half, the now former nuns have openly fought with Olson following his allegations in April 2023 that their prioress had committed unspecified sins against chastity, revealed later to have allegedly taken place via phone with a priest from another diocese. The nuns filed a lawsuit against the bishop, launching a feud that has involved both civil and church courts, as well as law enforcement, and included allegations that the bishop wanted access to the nuns' donor list or property, and that the nuns were engaged in illegal cannabis use. The bishop also placed various restrictions on the nuns' access to the sacraments, and the monastery's access to the public.

The former nuns also refused to recognize the authority of a Carmelite from another monastery whom a Vatican office appointed in April as the community's major superior.

In September, the nuns affiliated themselves with the Society of St. Pius X, a traditionalist fraternity of priests without official canonical recognition by the Catholic Church that follows older forms of the Roman rite used prior to the Second Vatican Council, but has objections regarding the council's teaching and the scope of its authority. While it is not in schism, the SSPX exists in an irregular state of communion with respect to the pope.

The nuns also illicitly transferred ownership of the Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity to a nonprofit organization of laypeople, according to an Oct. 28 statement issued by the diocese.

As of April 2023, around 50 people went to the monastery for daily Mass, with at least 10 more joining the nuns for Sunday Mass. At that time, the nuns described their community — which was founded in 1958 — as including their prioress, seven sisters and two novices, women in formation to take vows. As cloistered, contemplative nuns, they lived apart from the world to dedicate their lives to prayer.

In September, Olson urged Catholics not to seek sacraments at the since-suppressed monastery "for the good of your souls ... as such participation will associate you with the scandalous disobedience and disunity of the members of the Arlington Carmel."

In his Dec. 2 letter, the bishop wrote "that any Masses and sacraments celebrated at the former Monastery are illicit and done so by priests without faculties or permission to minister in the Diocese of Fort Worth. It is gravely wrong for Catholics knowingly to assist at these Masses. Catholics do harm to the Communion of the Catholic Church by intentionally attending these ceremonies."

This story appears in the **Arlington Carmelites in controversy** feature series. View the full series.
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