

# Spiritual Bond to St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome

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## Welcome to Historic St. Mary's

For over two and a half centuries this church has stood as a house of prayer where the faithful of Lancaster County have felt welcome and at home. Established in 1741, this beautiful church stands as a symbol of the vitality and dedication of Catholic life in Lancaster. We have the distinguished honor of being the fourth oldest Catholic Church in the original thirteen colonies and the added blessing of having Mary, the Blessed Virgin of the Assumption, as our patroness. Look beyond the beautiful sacramental signs of handcrafted marble statuary, stained glass windows and carved altars, and you will see a special mosaic . . . not of sculptures or paintings but a mosaic of people from different cultures, economic backgrounds, and ages all gathering together to pray and serve the Lord.

## St. Mary Major in Rome

Our church was granted this special spiritual bond with the Papal Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome on February 5, 2009, and with it comes the privilege of a Plenary Indulgence for each member of the faithful who makes a pilgrimage to the church under certain prescribed conditions.

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades requested the privilege of the bond following an invitation by the archpriest of the papal basilica to bishops around the world. In announcing the granting of the spiritual bond, Bishop Rhoades told *The Catholic Witness*, "St.

Mary's Church in Lancaster is one of the most historic and beautiful churches of our diocese. The original chapel was the third place of public Catholic worship in Pennsylvania. This parish, and indeed our whole diocese, is honored by the wonderful privilege bestowed upon St. Mary's Church – the special spiritual bond with the Papal Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome."

## A Testimony of Church Unity

The Basilica of St. Mary Major is the largest church in Rome dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is one of the four great papal basilicas, along with St. Peter, St. Paul outside the Walls and St. John Lateran. The basilica's construction was inspired by the Council of Ephesus in 431, which proclaimed Mary as the Mother of God. It is the only patriarchal basilica in Rome to have kept its original structure.

This special relationship between St. Mary's in Lancaster and the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome demonstrates the unity and universality of the Church. As Baptism and reception of the Most Holy Eucharist makes us one in Christ, this communion is manifested in other ways. For example, we are gathered and strengthened by our Bishop who is a successor to the apostles and unites us to the Body of Christ in a unique way. Now, this extraordinary connection between these two churches in Lancaster and Rome also testifies to the unity of the universal Church.



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## Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church

*Historic St. Mary's Church*  
119 S. Prince Street  
Lancaster, PA 17603

# Plenary Indulgence

## What is a Plenary Indulgence?

In his apostolic constitution on indulgences, Pope Paul VI said: "An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain defined conditions through the Church's help when, as a minister of redemption, she dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions won by Christ and the saints" (*Indulgentiarum Doctrina* 1).

This technical definition can be phrased more simply as, "An indulgence is what we receive when the Church lessens the temporal (lasting only for a short time) penalties to which we may be subject even though our sins have been forgiven." To understand this definition, we need to look at the biblical principles behind indulgences.

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—Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

## History of Plenary Indulgences

The pious use of indulgences dates back to the early days of the Church, and the principles underlying indulgences extend back into the Bible itself. Catholics who are uncomfortable with indulgences do not

realize how biblical they are. The principles behind indulgences are as clear in Scripture as those behind more familiar doctrines, such as the Trinity.

Indulgences are an important part of the life of the Church. Yet their purpose and goal are sometimes misunderstood. We might hear, "The Church doesn't believe in those any more, does she?" or "If Jesus forgives my sins in Confession, why do I need an indulgence?" In actuality, indulgences are a tremendous gift to the people of God and are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance and God's mercy.

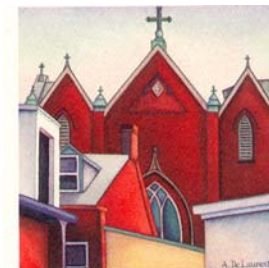
The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes this amply clear when it states that "An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishment due for their sins." The Church does this not just to aid Christians, "but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity" (CCC 1478).

Indulgences are part of the Church's infallible teaching. This means that no Catholic is at liberty to disbelieve in them. The Council of Trent declared them to be in the realm of infallibly defined teaching. The Council also denounced those who claim that the Church does not have the power to grant them (Trent, session 25, *Decree on Indulgences*).

## When can an Indulgence be granted?

- On the feast day of the Papal Basilica of St. Mary Major (August 5)
- On the feast day of the patron of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15)
- On all the solemnities of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God
- Once a year on a day freely chosen by each member of the faithful
- Every time the faithful go for devotion in groups to Historic St. Mary's Church or the Basilica of St. Mary Major

In order to receive an indulgence, the faithful must meet the following prescribed conditions: We must be in a state of grace (even venial sin), go to Confession, receive the Holy Eucharist, and pray for the intentions of the pope (an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* are suggested). It is appropriate but not necessary that Confession, Holy Communion and the prayer for the pope's intentions take place on the same day as the visit to St. Mary's Church.



*A Church nestled among the people*

### Historic St. Mary's Church

Rev. Leo M. Goodman III, Pastor

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Lancaster, PA 17603  
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[www.stmaryslancaster.org](http://www.stmaryslancaster.org)