

SOCA Update For June 17, 2015

CANON LAWYER BRINGS HOPE, AFFIRMATION, AND CONFIRMATION OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF OUR CAUSE

Following our AGM, Mr. Philip Gray, President of the St. Joseph Foundation, addressed the meeting. What was expected to be a half hour session went on for an hour and twenty minutes with Mr. Gray sharing his long experience in Canon Law as it applies to the closure and sale of churches and then fielding numerous questions from members eager to avail themselves of Mr. Gray's knowledge and experience.

The St. Joseph Foundation was formerly based in San Antonio, Texas, and its former President, Mr. Charles Wilson, has been a valued friend and advisor to SOCA for over three years. In 2014, age and illness forced him to step down and Mr. Gray, already employed as a Canon Lawyer by the Foundation became the President. The last year has been a transition year for the Foundation especially as it moved its operating base to Hopedale, Ohio, where Mr. Gray is based.

Mr. Gray began by explaining that the Foundation is a non-profit organization that does not charge for its services and is entirely dependent on donations from friends and supporters. Its primary purpose is to assist faithful Catholics in using Canon Law to obtain remedies for violations of their rights within the church. Its goal is to work within the Church's system of justice to restore harmony rather than achieve a mere tactical "victory." (The St. Joseph Foundation Fact Sheet)

Mr. Gray displayed a remarkable depth of knowledge of our situation in All Saints Parish and he began by assuring SOCA members that from all the documents he had studied, SOCA had acted correctly and respectfully in pursuing its objectives with the pastor(s) and the Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary. Mr. Gray stated that under Canon Law, a church may only be closed for grave reason. He had examined the reasons for the closure (shuttering, temporary closure, whatever) of St. Patrick's and found no "grave cause" to justify the closure. Shortage of priests, mergers, or churches requiring repairs are not considered "grave causes". As such, it was his opinion that the closure of St. Patrick's Church was not correct according to Canon Law. He sympathized with the parishioners of All Saints Parish who have endured a proposal to sell two of their churches and have had the largest and most historic church "temporarily closed" and likely to be diminished in its function to a "mission church" even if it is reopened. Mr. Gray urged SOCA members not to give up but to have hope and keep praying.

On the question of ownership of churches, Mr. Gray stated that under Canon Law, the parish, not the Bishop, owns the church because the church was built and maintained by the parishioners. The pastor serves as its administrator, not the Bishop. It is the Pastor who has primary responsibility for the proper care and maintenance of the church(es) and church properties as administrator of the parish. A pastor who says that he cannot and will not go against the wishes of the Bishop has an incorrect understanding of his vow of obedience under Canon Law.

On his return to Hopedale, Mr. Gray promised to work on a strategy to address our situation in All Saints Parish. SOCA's Board of Directors will work closely with Mr. Gray and keep members informed of what is happening. There will be forms to be filled and letters to be written and we shall have to mobilize all our resources if we want to present a strong case to the Congregation for the Clergy. Stay tuned!

In the short time he was in Lethbridge, Mr. Gray met with a large number of people, several of the Board of Directors of SOCA, attended Sunday Mass at Assumption and visited St. Basil Church. Before coming to Lethbridge, he had requested a meeting with our Pastor, Father Kevin Tumbach, and a walk through all three churches. Father Tumbach had an hour-long meeting with Mr. Gray but he declined permission for Mr. Gray to enter St. Patrick's Church. Apparently the insurance policy does not allow anyone to enter except an employee of the parish who checks daily if the water and

heating are working. Father Kevin added that the Bishop has told him that no one should have access to St. Patrick's Church. Father Kevin also said that the mould in the church is a health hazard and that anyone entering the church has to wear a mask while he is in the church.

(It appears that although the leak in the tower that is causing the mould was discovered at least four years ago, nothing has been done to fix the leak or deal with the mould. Leaks don't stop of their own accord and mould will spread if not dealt with. To me, this is tantamount to deliberate negligence and dereliction of duty in violation not only of Canon Law but also the Diocese's own rules for the proper care and maintenance of churches. If the condition of the St. Patrick's has deteriorated because of neglect since it was shuttered, surely there is a liability issue. Equally well, the hierarchy is also responsible for the proper care and maintenance of Our Lady of the Assumption Church and St. Basil Church. Francis)

Mr. Gray remarked several time how much he had enjoyed his visit to Lethbridge, how moved he was with the depth of feeling displayed by parishioners for their churches and how impressed he was with the patience and restraint shown by SOCA and its members in a challenging situation. He looked forward to working with us and for us and he asked us to pray for a positive outcome.

On behalf of the members of SOCA, I wish to thank Mr. Gray and to let him know what a pleasure it was to meet him in person. We look forward to a warm and continuing relationship with him beyond the immediate task in hand.

Biographical Note:

Philip Gray is the sixth of twelve children. He was born and raised in Denison, Texas, but currently lives in Hopedale, Ohio where, in his spare time he operates a hobby farm where he raises yaks. He has been married to his wife Emily for 28 years. They have six children; the eldest is 24, the youngest 10.

Mr. Gray has a B.A. in Theology from the Franciscan University of Steubenville, a Licentiate in Canon Law (JCL) from St. Paul University and a Masters in Canon Law (MCL) from the University of Ottawa.

In his work career, Mr. Gray started off as a Social Worker but, in recent years, he has been primarily concerned with Canon Law. He is the Founder and Director of Professional Canonical Services. His involvement with the St. Joseph Foundation began in 2009 as a Canonical Consulter and a member of the Board of Directors. In 2014, he took over as President when Mr. Charles Wilson stepped down for health reasons.