

SAVE OUR CHURCHES ASSOCIATION (SOCA)

2913 – 31st Avenue South, Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 6S6
 E-mail: francisoronha64@gmail.com Telephone: 403-328-7616
 Website : saveourchurches.vpweb.ca/



January 31, 2023 (4,201 days, 11 years, 5 months, 31 days of the closure).

SOCA UPDATE FOR JANUARY 31, 2023

To: SOCA Members and friends

The end of January of this new year finds SOCA in a difficult situation. As you know, there was supposed to be a Pastoral Advisory Council meeting on January 18. An Agenda was sent out with the usual items included. Then, SURPRISE! After every weekend Mass on the 14th and 15th, an announcement was made that the Bishop would attend the PAC meeting. When we arrived for the meeting, we were told it would be held in the O.L.A. Church, not the Parish Hall. It turned out to be not a PAC meeting but a presentation on the East Lethbridge Catholic Parish Assessment Project (ELCPAP) by none other than the Bishop, complete with a well-thought-out 14-slide show. The Bishop was flanked by the Diocesan Moderator, Fr. Wilbert Chin Jon and Mr. Dean Carton who was introduced to us as the Project Coach.

Now, let's pause there for a moment to catch our breath and ask some questions:

1. Bishops and Moderators don't act on the spur of the moment. If they knew they were coming to Lethbridge, why were parishioners not informed earlier in the Church Bulletin?
2. The slide presentation was not something that the Bishop scribbled on the back of an envelope on his way down to Lethbridge. Slide 6 indicates that it has been in the works since September 2022, if not before. It was a carefully thought-out presentation designed to present the project in the best light possible. There was a lot to absorb in the short time available. Why was it not sent earlier giving us time to study it and be prepared to discuss it? I, for one, was totally blindsided and didn't ask half the questions that I should have.
3. I have provided a link on the cover page for those of you who have not downloaded the Slide presentation already from the Parish website. You will see that it covers some weighty issues that will affect Catholics not only in East Lethbridge but also, as stated in Slide #6, in unspecified "surrounding areas". This Project should have been advertised weeks ahead and held in a hall, not in a church.

SOCA's Board of Governors had a lengthy meeting on January 25 and discussed the Bishop's proposal in detail. All ten members of the Board voted unanimously to decline the Bishop's invitation and to inform him that the terms and conditions he had set were totally unacceptable to SOCA. As such, no member of SOCA's Board will participate or sit on any ELCPAP committee. I have attached our 3-page reply to Bishop McGrattan. I ask you kindly to take the time to read it. If you have any questions, do please call me (403-328-7616). There are many rumors and much misinformation circulating and it is important that you have the facts on which to base your views, answer our critics and make your decisions.

As you know, I send a copy of every Update to the Bishop and Pastor. If I have made a mistake, I invite either of them **to correct me in writing** and I'll bring the correction(s) to your notice. There is a lot at stake and it is important that we base our future actions on facts.

continued on p.2

The hierarchy of our parish gave us no choice but to take our case to the Vatican in 2016. On March 12, 2021, the highest court in the Vatican ruled in our favor and declared Bishop Henry's Decree of October 1, 2016 invalid and **ordered the present Bishop to reopen St. Patrick's Church**. Obviously, the intention was that St. Patrick's Church be reopened as a fully functional church as it was before Bishop Henry closed it. When the Signatura makes a decision, it is final and binding on both parties.

Instead of accepting the Signatura's decision, the Bishop and the Diocesan lawyers looked for a way out pleading that the Diocese has "financial challenges" and lacks the means to repair and refurbish St. Patrick's Church. The Bishop informed the meeting that a lesser court at the Vatican, the Congregation for the Clergy, advised him in writing that he would comply with the **letter** of the Signatura's decision if he opened St. Patrick's for a minimum of two celebrations and occasional prayers in the year. By copy of this document, I request Bishop McGrattan to kindly provide SOCA with a copy of the Signatura's written advice as it goes against the **spirit** of the Signatura's decision.

Even if the Congregation for the Clergy gave the advice that he says it did, if the Bishop were truly sincere in his desire to bring healing, peace and unity to our divided All Saints community, he should have complied not only with the **letter** but, more importantly, with the **spirit** of the Signatura's decision. It is clear that Bishop McGrattan is equivocating when he says he will reopen St. Patrick's Church and in the next breath says it will be open only twice a year for the Holy Eucharist. This offer is identical to the one made by Bishop Henry 12 years ago and which parishioners rejected categorically as totally unacceptable. Is this the Bishop's idea of fair play? Is this truly what the spiritual leader of our Diocese thinks is what Jesus would do to his people?

I ask SOCA members and parishioners to consider carefully the deal the Bishop is offering. Here are some of the gems he is offering us:

1. St. Patrick's Church **will be opened** but possibly for **only two Eucharistic celebrations** a year.
2. Before St. Pat's can be opened, it has to be repaired and the costs of the repairs will have to be **borne by parishioners** although it was the **mismanagement of the Diocese** and **eleven years of invalid closure** that created the need for repairs.
3. Parishioners will still have to **pay their usual tithes** for the support of the parish.
4. Parishioners will be asked to **support the proposed New Church Building Fund** for the next twenty or more years.

Are you prepared to increase your present annual contributions by 5 times or more? That is what you are committing yourself to by going along with the Bishop's pre-set conditions.

There will be several who will say that SOCA was invited to the ELCPAP table to design a "Made in Lethbridge" solution (where have we heard that phrase before?) Now, you know the reasons why SOCA's Board has declined the invitation to participate. Feel free to pass this information sheet and SOCA's reply to the Bishop to friends and critics alike. We don't need any financial support thanks to your previous generosity but we do need you to come out of the shadows and become more vocal. We need you to step up, become more vocal and support SOCA's Board as you have done time and again in the past twelve years. The truth will prevail. Thank you, dear members and friends.

Francis Noronha, Secretary of SOCA, Procurator for our recourse to the Vatican.