

December 12, 2016 (Day 1,960 of the Closure, 5 years and 5 months and 12 days)

Dear SOCA members and friends,

A friend sent me the following recent report of vandals desecrating four churches in Rome:

(Click on link: [Heart-breaking vandalism desecrates four churches in Rome](#))

It is indeed heart-breaking when vandals desecrate churches anywhere, whatever their reason. On a much bigger scale, in recent months we have viewed with horror and sadness, the displacement of millions of people, the killing of thousands of men, women and children - even babies! - and the havoc and destruction of churches, mosques and historic sites in Syria and elsewhere reduced to rubble by the forces of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). ISIS is a modern manifestation of such forces that wantonly destroy the precious heritage of previous generations.

I think that we are all agreed that vandalism, plundering, pillaging and fanatical savagery have no place in a civilised society. But what if one person or a group of persons arbitrarily decide to get rid of St. Peter's in the Vatican? Unlikely? What about Westminster Abbey? Out of the question, don't you agree? What about St. Patrick's Church, Lethbridge? What criteria do we employ in deciding whether a church is worth retaining or can be "relegated to Profane but not Sordid use"?

The question is, where do we draw the line?

At the 5:00 p.m. Mass at Assumption on Saturday December 10, our Pastor, Fr. Kevin delivered a thought-provoking homily on the theme that all of us want more instead of being satisfied with what God has given us. One doesn't have to be a Catholic to acknowledge that the desire to want more is the root cause of many of the problems we experience in the present world. Yet Fr. Kevin's words rang a bit hollow to me because on the day before, in an interview with Global TV reporter Erik Mikkelsen, Fr. Kevin stated that our three churches in All Saints Parish may have served our needs in the past but can no longer do so. "It's about all these other things - Bible Study, the Men's Group, the Women's Group, the Youth Group - it's about all these other things that we cannot provide." Were none of these things being provided in the past, one wonders? Are there not ways of providing these services that will not cost \$21 million?

"Change is hard," said Fr. Kevin during the interview, "but change is very, very good because it helps you to grow." On the very next day, I heard him tell us that we must learn to make do, be satisfied with what God has given us. Don't get me wrong. I have a great deal of respect for Fr. Kevin and I know he has done many very good things in our parish. I particularly admire his efforts to reach our youth and I just loved the warmth with which he greeted our new Syrian families at the end of Saturday's Mass. But, when he comes to justifying the need for a new church, does he really think we are naïve? For one thing, has keeping the largest church in the parish closed for the last five years not affected the provision of services and cut down on our options in our parish? For another, have we explored other less expensive possibilities.

In actual fact, I happen to agree with Fr. Kevin that it would be a good thing to have more facilities in the parish. In 1993 (if I remember correctly), I was on a committee chaired by then Catholic School System Religious Studies Coordinator David Lynagh. One of the ideas we explored was that of a Catholic Youth Centre in Lethbridge. When exploring different options, we heard that the building on Scenic Drive next to the Martha Centre now owned by Radiology Associates Inc was up for sale. Built at a cost of over \$2 million, it was available for about \$1 million. It had oodles of space (more than two times what the proposed new church will provide for meeting rooms and facilities). The committee wrote to Bishop Henry asking if the Diocese would guarantee a bank loan. We would raise the entire cost locally so it would not cost the Diocese a cent even though the building would be purchased for the diocese. Michael Chan, replying on behalf of the Bishop, declined our request saying that the Diocese had no interest in a Catholic Youth Centre in Lethbridge.

I would like Fr. Kevin to explain why a centrally located Catholic Youth Centre with ample space for youth activities and more that would cost the Diocese nothing (as the committee undertook to raise the \$1 million itself), should be declined whereas twenty three years later we are being asked to sacrifice three neighbourhood churches and approve an expenditure in excess of \$21 million for a church and limited facilities on the south-eastern extremity of the city. Is change only good when it has a price tag of \$21 million or more?

The Bishop's Decree

On December 23, 2016, as Procurator for over 500 parishioners of All Saints Parish who had signed procurator nomination forms, I wrote to the Congregation for the Clergy in the Vatican asking it to examine the shuttering of St. Patrick's Church by Bishop Frederick Henry. We believed it was not a valid decision according to Canon Law and, if so, the Bishop should reopen St. Patrick's Church for regular worship. The Congregation agreed to examine the issue but then extended the time limits for studying the matter first to July 29, 2016 and then to October 28, 2016. Bishop Henry made a preemptive move on October 1, 2016 by issuing his Decree relegating St. Patrick's Church to Profane but not Sordid Use as of January 1, 2017. In simple terms, it means that as early as January 1, 2017, the Bishop could deconsecrate St. Patrick's Church. Once the stained glass windows and sacred objects like the Altar are removed for possible use in the proposed new church, the shell of the building will probably be of no use to anyone

and the likely fate of the building will be to be razed to the ground to make way for commercial interests (Think: A TRUMP TOWER in the heart of our city!) and/or a residential high rise because of the prime location in the centre of our city.

As Procurator, I had ten days in which to appeal the Decree on your behalf. I did so on October 6, 2016. The Bishop rejected my appeal. With the guidance of Philip Gray, our Canon Law lawyer, President of the St. Joseph Foundation of Ohio, I then appealed to the Congregation for the Clergy On October 31, 2016. This was followed by two further letters to impress the urgency of the situation on the Congregation. The latest, a 9-page letter sent on December 9, 2016, ended with the following request to the Congregation for the Clergy:

I ask again for what was written in my 31 October 2016 appeal and 3 December 2016 follow-up letter.

- 1. Revoke the Bishop of Calgary's 1 October 2016 Decree of Relegation against St. Patrick's Church;**
- 2. Direct the Bishop of Calgary and the Pastor of All Saints Parish to re-open St. Patrick's Church for regular use. It is a Parish Church, and it should be used in accord with the dignity demanded by its consecrated status and protected in law.**
- 3. Direct the Bishop of Calgary and the Pastor of All Saints Parish to end their negligence and fulfill their obligations to repair, maintain, and use St. Patrick's Church and Hall, in accord with donor intentions.**
- 4. Direct the Bishop of Calgary and the Pastor of All Saints Parish to enter collaborative dialogue in fulfillment of Canon 50, with all parishioners of All Saints Parish to determine whether the building of a new church in a single location is proper for our parish, given its size and the large territory.**
- 5. Finally, I beg the Congregation for the Clergy to issue a suspension of the Decree of Relegation and an injunction to protect St. Patrick's Church from being sold, pending final resolution of this appeal.**

Most especially, I beg you to suspend the 1 October 2016 Decree pending the outcome of this appeal.

Conclusion

I began this update with a report on vandals causing damage in Vatican churches. The actions of vandals, savage hordes and religious fanatics are devastating and difficult to explain leave alone condone. But I find it equally incomprehensible that intelligent and responsible people in high office can even contemplate the relegation of a beautiful treasure like St. Patrick's Church to "profane but not sordid use." Perhaps the fact that neither Bishop Henry nor Fr. Kevin have any previous connection with Lethbridge and certainly have no long-term interest in our city allows them to contemplate such an action with equanimity. They are merely carrying out their bureaucratic duties before one retires and the other goes on to his next posting. To me and to many others, their proposal to dispose of our three churches is tantamount to a betrayal of a sacred trust. They didn't build St. Patrick's Church, St. Basil's Church and Our Lady of

the Assumption Church. These churches were built by the people of Lethbridge. The Bishop and the Pastor hold St. Patrick's in trust for generations of parishioners who built and maintained St. Patrick's Church, who were baptised, received their sacraments, got married and eventually were buried out of St. Patrick's Church. The Bishop and our Pastor may justify the Decree in whatever way they want. All I know is that if the Bishop's Decree is carried out, hundreds of parishioners in Lethbridge - and many non-Catholics, as well - will look upon the loss of their beloved church as a crime as heinous as the desecration of the churches in Rome.

God bless!

Francis Noronha, Secretary, Save Our Churches Association