

"SAVE OUR CHURCHES" ASSOCIATION

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UPDATE for January 3, 2016 (Day 1,616 of the Closure, 4 years and 5 months)

Dear SOCA members and friends,

Don and Pat Demers and the Board of Directors of SOCA wish you a Happy New Year and, as so many of us are at a stage of life where health is a critical issue, may you and your dear ones be blessed with good health. As some of you know, I ended 2015 with a bout of pneumonia and I regret to say it has lingered on into the new year. I devoutly pray that it's the last I see of illness this year!

Because of illness, I was unable to attend Christmas or New Year services. I understand the total attendance at all Christmas Masses sank to a low of one thousand for all Christmas Masses! That is four hundred below even last year's figure of one thousand four hundred. I recall that in 2001, we had three thriving parishes with all three churches pretty well packed for Christmas services. St. Patrick's Church alone had a total of well over one thousand three hundred worshippers at its three Masses. Together with Assumption and St. Basil's, the total for the Christmas Masses was well over two thousand. Perhaps our shepherds should ask: Where are the missing thousand?

As mentioned on many occasions, SOCA is not opposed to the proposal to build a new church in East Lethbridge providing that it is not done at the cost of our present churches and without the consent of the parishioners. The question does arise, however, whether a new church is really required for a parish that has a total attendance of 1,000 at all Christmas Masses (the best attended Masses in the year). Further, will a diminishing number of parishioners be able to afford the monthly premium payments and upkeep if a church does get built?

On December 7, 2015, in an open letter to Father Kevin, I raised 12 questions that needed to be answered before our parish embarks headlong on what could be a foolhardy and disastrous building misadventure. I have received no answer to those questions. Now I would like to add two further questions:

#13. *In view of the low attendance at our parish 2015 Christmas Masses, does Father Kevin feel that a \$21 million, 1,200-seat church is really needed at this time? and*

14. *Are the present financial resources of our parish adequate to undertake such a venture?*

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UPDATE ON THE CHURCH ISSUE

Many of you have asked what progress if any has been made in appealing to the Vatican on the closure of St. Patrick's and the intended sale of Assumption and St. Basil's. The Appeal process has begun under the guidance of our Advocate, Mr. Philip C. L. Gray, J.C.L. of the St. Joseph Foundation of Hopedale, Ohio. As with most legal matters, it's a lengthy process that we tried our best to settle locally but Bishop Frederick Henry was not prepared to discuss the issue with us and left us with no alternative but to appeal the matter to the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome. Here is what has happened so far in accordance with the laid down procedure:

STEP 1: Appeal to the Bishop

On August 12, 2015, I sent Bishop Frederick Henry copies of Procurator Mandate forms nominating me as Procurator to act as the representative for those who had signed the mandate forms (eventually 510). I respectfully asked the Bishop to direct Father Kevin Tumback as Pastor to re-open St. Patrick's Parish Church for regularly scheduled Masses, devotions and prayers, and to suspend further activities on purchasing land or selling any of the three churches that constitute sacred patrimony of All Saints Parish.

The Bishop had **ninety days** to respond to this request. He didn't. This constituted a negative response. We were then able to proceed to the Second Step.

STEP 2: Second Letter to the Bishop ("Remonstratio")

On November 12, 2015, I sent a second letter to the Bishop outlining the violations of obligatory canons on which our appeal was based and once again basically making the same requests as in Step 1. This time the Bishop had **one month** to respond to our request. Again he didn't respond so we were able to presume a negative response. I then had just **15 days** in which to proceed to Step 3.

STEP 3: Appeal to the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome

On December 24, our Advocate, Mr. Gray, dispatched a package with my Letter of Appeal and supporting documents, including the 510 Procurator Mandate forms and nine letters of support from prominent citizens that included two past Mayors and a former Provincial Court judge. The package was sent to His Eminence The Most Rev. Beniamino Cardinal Stella, Prefect, Congregation for Clergy.

I feel a tremendous sense of relief that the matter is no longer one that pits one parishioner against another in our parish. Even those who oppose SOCA should surely welcome the fact that the matter will be adjudicated by the Vatican Committee charged by the Pope with settling appeals on church closures. Who better?

Of course, the Bishop and the Diocesan lawyers will be given an opportunity to respond to the arguments we have presented through the good offices of Mr. Gray. Church closures are by no means clear cut issues and the process can drag on. Decisions of the Congregation have gone either way, so nothing is a foregone conclusion. We can only hope and pray that the members of the committee will have enough time to study the entire process from 2001 to 2015 because that will reveal clearly that the views of the parishioners were consistently ignored with disastrous consequences to three previously thriving and viable parishes.

I ask for your prayers that Mr. Gray's efforts on our behalf will meet with success. We are indeed grateful for the support and help so generously provided by him and the St. Joseph Foundation and we hope for a speedy and happy resolution to this matter that has had such a divisive impact on our parish.

Once again, my good wishes for 2016. God bless!

Francis
Secretary of SOCA