



“SAVE OUR CHURCHES” ASSOCIATION

2913 – 31 Avenue South, Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 1M4

February 05, 2018

The Very Rev. Kevin Tumback, Pastor
All Saints Parish
2405 – 12 Avenue South
Lethbridge AB T1K 0P4

Dear Father Kevin:

During H.E. Bishop McGrattan’s visit to our parish, he met with the Board of the Save Our Churches Association (SOCA) and kindly allowed us to express our concerns regarding the possible imminent sale of St. Patrick’s Church and the intention to sell Our Lady of the Assumption Church and St. Basil’s Church in the future. Towards the end of the meeting, the Bishop’s Deacon asked us whether it would be true to say that we felt that the process by which the decision to build a new church and sell the existing churches was flawed. We agreed that in our opinion the process was certainly flawed from the outset.

We, the members of the Board of Directors of SOCA, wish to clarify that “**Process**” is not our only concern. Our major concern has been and continues to be the “**Outcome**” of the process. As you are aware, we appealed in the first instance to our pastors and Bishop Henry. When our appeals fell on deaf ears and our arguments remained unanswered, we had no option but to seek recourse with the Vatican. The fact that we appealed the closure of St. Patrick’s Church and the intended sale of the two other churches first to the Congregation for the Clergy and more recently to the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura is evidence of our concern that our parish is in grave danger of losing three well-loved and financially viable churches for a biblical mess of pottage.

At the Pastoral Advisory Council (PAC) meeting of January 17, 2018, you reported that a committee from Calgary had visited Lethbridge and met with the Building Committee and reviewed plans for the new church. We may note that the Building Committee is a group appointed by you and not by parishioners. Only a few of the members of the committee have any experience in the fields of design, architecture and engineering. Some of their former recommendations have already been rejected by you which calls into question their credibility.

You stated that the architectural drawings and plans would now be sent to various committees in Calgary for approval. As a Board, we are reassured that these committees will provide Diocesan oversight to the proposals for Lethbridge. Conspicuous by its absence is any attempt to present the plans to the parish at large. To our knowledge, there has also been no single document giving a complete picture of the proposed new church and the financial implications for the parish. There is ample evidence in our diocese of rose-tinted proposals that were implemented and parishes then having difficulty meeting their obligations. Indeed, Father Kevin, you first showed your awareness of this possibility at the PAC meeting of January 16, 2013 when you pointed out, as stated in the minutes, that once you opened your last church, “the fundraising dried up; other communities have

big shortfalls.” We fear that a situation may arise where we build a new church, sell our present churches and find that the parish cannot keep up with mortgage payments on the new church. Would the Diocese be prepared to subsidize the parish indefinitely in such a scenario?

The financial aspect is a major consideration. At the January 2018 PAC meeting you stated that the parish has already collected \$7 million in the Building Fund. Does that include \$2 million of parish funds earmarked by Bishop Henry for transfer from the Central Fund, money that was in the Central Fund before the proposal to build a new church was even mentioned to the parish? Does it include the questionable injection of the \$500,000 balance that the Diocese acquired from the sale of Catholic Charities buildings, money that arguably should have been spent on the poor rather than a new church that has no connection to the source of the funds i.e. Catholic Charities Clothes Fund that was meant to help the poor? Does it include the estimated \$3 million that is hoped for (it is likely to be a good deal less) from the sale of the three present churches? If the answer to any of these questions is “Yes”, it begs the question: does the total actually donated by parishioners after ten years of concerted fundraising really suggest that the parish will be able to service a mortgage of \$10 million or more? What if it cannot?

The proposal to sell the three churches and build a new 1,200 –1,500 seat church in Lethbridge originated with Bishop Henry and his advisory committees in Calgary in 1998. It was then promoted by then Pastor, Fr. Tim Boyle, and his three appointed committees. The process was characterized by control and manipulation rather than open and transparent consultation with parishioners. The Agendas were designed to prevent any free discussion of the future of the three churches. The guiding factor was always Bishop Henry’s dictum: “The status quo is unacceptable.” As parishioners discovered that their views on the retention of the three churches would not be entertained, a sense of alienation began to grow in the parish. It is not surprising to find that although twenty years that have elapsed since 1998, the new church is no nearer completion than it was in 2012, the first deadline.

At the PAC meeting of January 13, 2013, the Chairman of the Building Committee, Mr. Joe Prozniak, stated (again quoting from the minutes) , **“Original financing assumed \$3 million from the sale of the churches and 1000 parishioners. Needing half of the money to tender (for a \$21 million church), we would then have two years to sell the churches and continue fundraising to approximately \$13 million. We assumed that we could raise \$15 million total to leave a \$5 million mortgage. This averaged to \$15000 per parishioner to be debt free or \$11000 per parishioner to leave a \$5 million mortgage. The answer is that the money is there if people will pay it, it is not unachievable, we can afford a \$5 million mortgage, but not \$10 million.”** “...if people will pay it,” – that is indeed a very big “if”!

Our concern is this: Not only is the parish nowhere near raising \$13 million in the Building Fund, but also it is now considering a \$10 million mortgage that was previously considered beyond the ability of the parish to service. What has changed in the last five years to enable the parish to view the financing of a new \$21 million church with equanimity and confidence? To add to our concern, the plans include a columbarium. New arrangements will have to be made for clergy accommodation. Any items like these add to the projected cost of the project and need to be considered. We note from the periodic balance sheets that All Saints Parish is just about paying its way and surpluses that built up the Central fund have not been evident ever since the proposal for the new church was announced. Yet we are told that the new church will be a reality in two or three years. Is this mere wishful thinking or is the parish embarking on a perilous voyage without making the parishioners aware of the financial implications and the risks involved? One estimate by a qualified bank manager well versed in these matters put the cost of servicing a \$10 million mortgage in excess of \$65,000 a

month- a huge undertaking for a parish just about breaking even at present! In this regard, we note that a feasibility study was never carried out on the new church proposal. As you, Fr. Kevin, had a background in the business world before following your vocation to become a priest, we are sure that you will agree that a feasibility study would have been a prudent measure prior to undertaking a multi-million dollar project.

Will the Bishop's advisory committees in Calgary be considering only the design of the proposed new church or will they be looking also at the finances and considering the ability of the parishioners to meet the financial obligations arising from building the new church? We request that the concerns expressed in this letter be brought to the attention of the three Diocese of Calgary advisory committees.

Following are some other concerns that we have:

1. There are many parishioners who have moved to other parishes, others who have ceased attending Masses or joined other denominations and many who have flatly stated that they will not step into the new church. The fact that a significant number of parishioners has no intention of contributing to the cost of building a new church is a problem; but a graver issue is the alienation and possible loss of souls that has taken place and will continue to take place. Is the building of a new church more important than the example of the Good Shepherd? We are aware that you, our Pastor, and your predecessor took a vow of obedience to the Bishop. You were therefore obliged to carry out his order to build a new church. As Pastors, however, are you not also responsible for the welfare of your flock? Was the Bishop made aware of the large number of parishioners who were being alienated by his plan to sell three well-loved neighbourhood churches to build a new church?
2. Parishioners of All Saints parish rejected Bishop Henry's proposal to convert the basement of St. Patrick's Church to a columbarium because St. Patrick's would cease to be a regular church and would diminish in function to what the Bishop described as a "mission church." Bishop Henry's immediate response was to send us what we can only describe as a petulant undated letter that took the punitive measure of closing historic St. Patrick's Church, the largest and most centrally placed Roman Catholic church in Lethbridge. As displaced parishioners moved to the two smaller churches, the immediate result was a parking problem at both churches and overcrowding at the Sunday 11:00 a.m. Mass at St. Basil's. These problems have been mentioned *ad nauseam* over the last six years in homilies and at PAC meetings. All kinds of temporary fixes have been suggested or made but no tangible solution has emerged. The hierarchy has studiously avoided the most obvious solution: reopening St. Patrick's Church. This would be a relatively easy undertaking for a Pastor who was instrumental in building St. Albert the Great Church in Calgary. SOCA would willingly assist in carrying out this project if requested.
3. Christmas and Easter services in the last few years have had to be held in non-sacred venues (a gym and an agricultural exhibition hall affectionately known locally as "the Cow Palace"). Many parishioners did not favour these arrangements and either stayed away or chose to attend services at other area churches. You are also aware that these are times when many lapsed Catholics choose to return to church. Holding Masses in a school gym does not do much to win back lost souls... It has been suggested that these arrangements were deliberate to emphasize the need for a new church. Such arrangements did not need to be made when St. Patrick's Church was open. Besides, a parish does not expend \$21 million merely to accommodate Easter and Christmas overflows.

4. It has been suggested that no real solution has been sought to the parking and overcrowding problems to bring home to parishioners the need for building a new church. The continued closure of St. Patrick's Church lends credence to this belief.
5. Many parishioners are concerned about the choice of location of the proposed new church. Our Lady of the Assumption Church in the south of Lethbridge has no Mass that is full to capacity even though it is the smallest of the three churches. The 11:00 a.m. Mass at St. Basil's is so full that there are people who have to follow the Mass downstairs in the Church Hall. You have, in fact, addressed this problem at two successive PAC meetings. It is clear that the biggest growth in numbers of Roman Catholics in East Lethbridge is in north Lethbridge. Why then has the preferred location of the Building Committee for the new church been consistently on the south-east outskirts of Lethbridge? You must be aware that many parishioners believe that this location has been influenced less by the interests and welfare of the parishioners of East Lethbridge and more by the possible future closures of the churches in Milk River, Picture Butte and Coaldale. If this is even partially true, then why are the parishioners of All Saints parish bearing the brunt of the cost, suffering the loss of their churches and facing future inconvenience of location? Was the committee that came from Calgary made aware that parishioners have expressed concerns regarding the location of the new church and the complete lack of parishioner input into the choice?
6. In the Building Committee report submitted by Mr. Joe Prozniak for the January 2018 PAC meeting, he stated that the three members of the Diocesan Planning Commission who came to Lethbridge reviewed "what is happening with **our** (my bolding) 54 acres of land" among other tasks. "Our"? When the land was originally bought, parishioners were given to understand that the land had been purchased by the Diocese and our parish was going to purchase just nine acres of the 54 acres. Has the Parish actually purchased the entire 54 acres but will utilize only nine acres? Who has paid for the 54 acres, the Diocese or the parish? If it is the parish, where did the money come from? Is the parish or the diocese getting into the land development business?
7. Mr. Prozniak also pointed out that as the City is unlikely to provide services (roads, sewer, water, storm drains, etc.) to these 54 acres in the near future, the parish may have to provide "temporary services to allow construction of the church in the next two to three years." No mention was made of how much this would cost and who would pay for it. Is the cost of the land and of these "temporary services" included in the \$21 million price tag of the new church? According to Diocesan regulations, 50% of the total cost of the project has to be in place before any work can commence on the project.. The \$7 million that you mentioned in the Building Fund is nowhere near the 50% mark unless the plans for the church have been downscaled and the cost lowered considerably.
8. When promoting the need for a new church, Fr. Tim Boyle and you repeatedly mentioned the need for meeting rooms. The three present churches and the office building have ten meeting rooms of varying size and three halls. We may be wrong but from what we could see in the plans there will be only four meeting rooms and one hall in the new church. Admittedly the hall in the new church will be much larger than the present halls but our parish rarely needs a hall for more than 100 people and we have hardly ever exceeded the 200-seat limit of St. Patrick's Church hall. Moreover, having three halls and a variety of meeting rooms provides a flexibility that the new church will not provide.
9. We note also that the original plans for the kitchen have been scaled back to save \$250,000. It could be argued that we were better off with three kitchens that were adequate to the needs of the community they served.

The Save Our Churches Association (SOCA) represents a paid up membership of over 700 parishioners and many other supporters who have not formally signed up. We are not “a small group of dissidents” that Father Tim Boyle and Bishop Henry felt could be ignored. Our primary mandate is to save our three neighbourhood churches that are viable and fully paid up. The parish funds in the Diocesan Central Fund (approximately \$4 million) were there for the use of the three churches and would have been amply sufficient to carry out all necessary repairs and refurbishing. There was no immediate need for the parish to be saddled with a substantial debt that building a new church will entail.

At this time, we have not even had an acknowledgment from the Supreme Council of the Apostolic Signatura that they have received our appeal against the decree relegating St. Patrick’s Church to profane but not sordid use and the declared intention to sell the other two churches. There is no indication of how much longer the process will take. It is our hope, however that as we are allowed legal representation at the hearings, the outcome will be fairer. We note, for instance, that the Congregation for the Clergy rejected our appeal in part because they accepted the diocesan claim that there had been “extensive consultation” whereas the reality was that all consultation was merely on the size, location, etc. of the new church. The retention of our three churches was never discussed as Bishop Henry ruled that the “*status quo* was unacceptable.” It is sad that the Diocese resorted to such prevarication and that the Congregation accepted it as the truth. The Congregation also paid more credence to the Diocesan claim that the project has found “broad support” among parishioners and ignored our contention there was widespread alienation at the possible loss of three churches. Surely if the project had enjoyed “broad support”, the new church would have easily been built by the original target date of 2012. Ten years after the project was approved by the diocese and fundraising began, the total donations of the parishioners amount to less than 20% of the projected cost of the land and building. Surely it is prevarication to suggest that this constitutes “broad support”?

We suggest that when a project of this kind with expenditure of considerable magnitude is proposed, a brochure or booklet should have been produced giving full details of the proposed church, the land that has been purchased, the reasons for the location and a detailed account of how the project will be financed. As it stands, we have to glean that information from a number of minutes of PAC meetings and several All Saints parish bulletins. As you were involved with business and familiar with good business practices, Fr. Kevin, you know that no responsible business would approve a \$21 million project on the kind of haphazard information that has so far been presented to us. The parishioners of All Saints Parish deserve better if their approval and financial support of the project are expected. Sharing bits and pieces of the puzzle to the 35 to 40 core group of committed supporters of the project who attend PAC meetings faithfully, good people though they undoubtedly are, is no substitute for calling a meeting of all parishioners and presenting them with a complete picture of the proposal. While it is good that the Bishop and his advisory committees provide oversight to ensure that the diocese is not placed in a financially embarrassing position, surely the parishioners who are being asked to pay for the project also have the right to be given a clear picture of what they are being asked to pay for at a time when many parishioners are experiencing financial difficulties.

As we have stated several times, SOCA is not opposed to a new church unless the building of a new church is done at the expense of our present three churches. However, as parishioners we are very concerned about how the building of a new church will impact the faith community of All Saints Parish and indeed all of Lethbridge. We submit the above concerns to you in all honesty and humility.

Fr. Kevin, you once told us to stop looking back and that it was time to start looking forward. We *are* looking forward and we see much to concern us. The time is overdue, in fact, to make a rational assessment of the situation instead of plunging headlong into completion of the project (“in two or three years”) regardless of possible consequences. We hope that our concerns will be taken into consideration by you, our Pastor, Bishop William McGrattan and the Bishop’s three advisory committees.

We are grateful to you for your dedication in serving our faith community to the best of your ability. We also appreciate the cordial relations that we have enjoyed with you despite our differing viewpoints. Be assured that we are not trying to be stumbling blocks but seeking what is best for our parish. We hope that the future of our Church in All Saints Parish can be resolved with wisdom, prudence and compassion.

Assuring you of our prayers ,

Yours in Christ,

Executive Members of the Board of the Save Our Churches Association (SOCA):

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cc. H.E. The Most Reverend Bishop William McGrattan
Mr. Philip C. L. Gray JCL, President, St. Joseph’s Foundation