

Update for July 7, 2015 (Day 1437 of the Closure)

Dear SOCA members and friends,

"*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.*" - Martin Luther King Jr.

Re: Minutes of the Pastoral Advisory Council Meeting of June 10, 2015, and All Saints Parish Bulletin for July 5, 2015 and the attachment

Let me state at the outset so that there is no misunderstanding: SOCA has not objected to our parish buying land for a new church or, for that matter, a new church being built if the money can be raised. With respect, what we have adamantly opposed and will continue to oppose is the proposal to build a new church and sell or otherwise dispose of the three existing neighbourhood Roman Catholic churches of East Lethbridge. We have also repeatedly and respectfully questioned the decision-making process in Lethbridge and the Diocese of Calgary as decisions have been made affecting our churches without adequate consultation or the consent of the parishioners who built and maintained St. Patrick's Church, Our Lady of the Assumption Church and St. Basil Church.

We have had admissions and acknowledgments that the process in the past was flawed and mistakes were made. Such admissions seem very empty when we see that the same *modus operandi* keeps being repeated. Attached to the Church Bulletin of July 5, 2015 was a sheet titled "**Purchase of New Church Land**". The sheet has no signature or indication as to who has sent it out. From the opening sentence it appears to be a committee, not an individual. I shall assume that the communication comes from the Building Committee with the approval of the Pastor. The sheet informs parishioners that "We (presumably All Saints Parish) have recently signed a conditional land purchase agreement for 53 acres of land located east of 43rd Street between Forestry Avenue and 20 Avenue South." The City's current Area Structure Plan is considering this land for commercial and business/industrial purposes but the Parish Building Committee would like that changed to an "integrated" community development. The Building Committee asks for "a large amount of support from All Saints Parishioners" to make the change happen.

The lot being considered might be the best location for a new church but then again, it might not be. Once again we are being asked to support a proposal without adequate information and with no opportunity to ask questions or obtain clarification on key issues. "Trust us, we know what is best for you!" seems to be the attitude of the writers. I have no doubt that several parishioners will dutifully send off letters of support to the City with the wording suggested on the information sheet. Are we as parishioners there only to rubber stamp the paternalistic decisions made for us? In his "Cluttered Desk" of June 22, 2014, Father Kevin stated that "... to be in full communion with the Catholic Church you must be in full communion with your local Bishop. Some people will argue that this only applies to issues of faith and morals but the reality is that if we are publicly disobedient to the Bishop we cannot say we are in full communion with the Church and/or Jesus".

As a scholar of Canon Law, Father Kevin is surely aware of Canon 212 #3 (1983) which states :
" They (the people of God) have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church." We are all aware of the many problems that arose in the Roman Catholic Church because of the doctrine of "Vox episcopi - vox Dei" (The Voice of the Bishop is the Voice of God). Canon Law upholds a different belief - "Vox populi - Vox Dei" (The Voice of the people is the voice of God).

I am disturbed that parishioners are being asked to unquestioningly to support the present purchase of New Church land. Some of the concerns that I have are:

- Why is the parish required to purchase 53 acres when all that we need for a new church is 10 acres? We are told Covenant Health will purchase 8 acres and the remainder of the land will be sold to a local developer. These are uncertain times and we don't know what the economy will do in the next year, leave alone the next ten. Do parishioners really wish to go out on a limb and purchase 53 acres?
- There is no mention of how much this parcel of land is going to cost the parish. Is that not basic information that should be supplied before asking for support? Does the parish have the funds for this purchase?
- Is the proposed location the optimum one for a new church? What factors were taken into consideration? Surely this proposal merited at least a general meeting of parishioners where information could be given, views expressed and questions asked? Would it not have been a good idea to invite someone like Byron Buzunis, Urban Construction Manager for the City of Lethbridge to be present at the meeting to provide firsthand information and answers to questions?

- There is no certainty that the City will provide infrastructure or services in the near future to the proposed area.
- I note that Covenant Health may build two facilities adjacent to the new church. While that would be nice if it comes about, I wonder how much importance was given to the demographics of the city in choosing a southside location. In the 2013 Census, West Lethbridge showed the greatest growth (3.47%) over the 2012 figure and now leads with a population of 33,988. South Lethbridge (30,655) was the only area to show a decline (-0.45%) while North Lethbridge (25,774) continued to show growth (1.34%). I have noticed that the most crowded weekend Mass in our parish is the 11:00 a.m. Mass at St. Basil Church. Parishioners need to know why the Building Committee has consistently favoured a southside location. Should a new church not be located where it is most needed? Is it not possible that in five years time, it will become necessary to build a new church in West Lethbridge?
- If St. Patrick's Church is repaired and renovated, would we really need a new church in East Lethbridge?

These are some of the concerns that I have. Many of you may have others. I certainly have no intention to write a letter of support until the powers that be show greater consideration and respect for parishioners by taking immediate steps to do what they should have done in the first place i.e. called a town hall meeting on the proposal to purchase new church land. It is time that greater importance be paid to the decision-making process in our parish. Our community remains divided because decisions continue to be made and we are asked to either like it or lump it.

God bless!

Francis, Secretary, SOCA

"If you are right and you know it, speak your mind. Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is still the truth." Mahatma Gandhi