

January 3, 2006

An Open Letter

To: The Lexington Catholic Community Pastoral Planning Committee c/o St. Brigid Parish Office
Fr. Colletti "From the Pastor's Desk" asked for opinions and inputs regarding the upcoming submission of a plan for the Catholic community of Lexington. My observations of this planning process to date, are that it has totally frustrated both the Pastor and the duly elected Sacred Heart Parish Council who reflect in a large way the sentiments of the "Friends of Sacred Heart". The Pastor has vented his frustration, both from the pulpit and in past "Pastor's Desk" articles to the point calling the "friends" "those trouble makers". The "friends" and the PPC have, in fact, been less than fully cooperative with the planning process.

"Why" one might ask, have these outstanding Sacred Heart parish leaders acted in this manner? My opinion is that they feel that they've "been taken". Instead of suppressing the parish outright so that the parish could file an appeal and otherwise keep pressure on the Archdiocese, the Archdiocese mandated that the community should take a year to formulate a plan. In that approach the Sacred Heart Parish Council is expected to approve a plan which has as its basic premise that Sacred Heart will be suppressed.

The "Friends" have as a basic premise that there is no justifiable reason for suppression so they are willing to cooperate in formulating a plan that achieves maximum integration of the functions of both parishes but retains both parish entities with all their inherent rights and duties. But, how can they cooperate in planning that is pre-determined to mandate suppression. If they do, they certainly cannot appeal that mandate. (It has been contended that anyone could appeal suppression once the edict is issued. But, what appeal board could be expected to take seriously the appeal of a suppression that was approved by the parish council and the Pastor).

The Sacred Heart Parish Council did ask for a ruling on the question of maintaining two parishes under one pastor. This proposition was presented to the Archdiocese and the Pastor reported that he was unequivocally told that that was not an option. However, the Archbishop subsequently wrote the pastor on that subject and the letter was published to all parishioners. But in that letter, the Archbishop *equivocated* saying that he did not *desire* more than one parish in Lexington.

Unfortunately, the two sides do not seem able to come to an agreement. If the current impasse prevails, the end result will be suppression of Sacred Heart and antagonism of the lay leaders of Sacred Heart Parish (and some number of other parishioners). They will most likely be pushed aside during the remainder of the planning process and their ability to mount an appeal, if desired, of the resulting suppression will be thwarted.

There is another way. There are many models in the United States of parishes with shared pastors or lay management with visiting priests. In light of the Archbishop's equivocation, the planning committee ought to adopt one of these models to proceed with the plan. The plan can then be formulated with full cooperation of both Parish Councils to accomplish all of the necessary decisions regarding integration of facilities, services, commissions, etc. and this can be submitted to the Archdiocese. It might be argued that this is contrary to the mandate of the Archdiocese. However, until they've suppressed, they haven't suppressed.

This planning process would derive the best ideas of both parishes without the current acrimony. If the Archdiocese then does officially disapprove the maintaining of two parishes, and hence issue an edict of suppression, a good functional plan would be in place and Sacred Heart could appeal its suppression, if desired.

In "From the Pastor's Desk" the Pastor asks for a description of a "spiritually successful" parish. That would be one based on love- among all the flock and mutually between the shepherd and all the flock, for the Love of God.

Sincerely,


John P. Shanley

c.c., Rev. Arnold Colletti
Friends of Sacred Heart