

Pastoral Letter

To all the Faithful of the Diocese of St. Paul

Dear Faithful,

You are most probably aware that I have been obliged to take the difficult decision of closing the parish of Vilna that was accumulating a serious debt that could no longer be met. This debt was not accumulated out of ill will of the faith filled parishioners that still attend and continue to contribute to their parish as best as they can but because of many factors, one of which was the decreasing number of its parish members. Vilna can no longer meet its financial responsibilities that included the upkeep of a priest. This situation will produce other changes such as a realignment of new parish groupings.

The closing of a parish, albeit unfortunate, has happened in the past, here and elsewhere, and we are all aware of parish communities that had to face this dilemma. This has also happened in other dioceses such as the Archdiocese of Edmonton. In the Alberta Catholic Directory of 2010, the Archdiocese of Edmonton lists sixty parishes without a resident priest, twenty three of which have no regular masses scheduled. In our Diocese we would have many parishes that are still open but in a very precarious situation as was stated in the Parish Review Committee Report that I commissioned in 2006: *Making Our Catholic Community More Vital – Vibrant – Viable*.

The closing of a parish in this Diocese gives me however the occasion to highlight the responsibility of all parishioners to support financially their parish. This responsibility is recalled in the Code of Canon Law (can. 222§1) and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2043).

To support financially one's parish includes of course the upkeep of the parish priest who sometimes has the responsibility of two, three and even four parishes.

In this last case, the upkeep of the priest is shared by the parishes that are grouped together. This is what is called the shared costs of a priest.

The shared costs are firstly based on the annual financial statement that is sent by each parish to the Diocesan Pastoral Centre by the end of January of each year. The shared cost is then calculated on the imposable revenues of the parish of the previous year (except interest revenues received by the parish through investments with the Diocese, cemetery plot revenues, special mandatory collections, meals and rent received for the priest and funds received from other parishes in the units for the maintenance and upkeep of the priest.) Shared costs are finally proportionally allotted based on the sum total of all revenues for that unit of parishes.

This might sound complicated. However a shared costs schedule is to be calculated annually by the Diocese and forwarded to each parish.

This has been formulated to insure a just and equitable allotment for all.

This has been discussed and approved by the Finance Committee of the Diocese, the Presbyteral Council of the Diocese, the Business Administrator of the Diocese and the Chancellor of the Diocese. This has also been explained to the priests by the Deans of the respective Deaneries.

In simple terms, each parish has to meet its financial obligations which include the financial obligations toward its parish priest. Without this, a parish is not viable and cannot expect to remain open. The sad reality of the closing of a parish should be a wake-up call to every parish. To be viable a parish must meet its financial obligation. This should be obvious to all and this duty is a responsibility of all.

Great strides have been made to obtain the necessary priests to serve every parish in this Diocese in order that every community remains a Eucharistic community. But in order to keep the priests in our midst, we must indeed support them.

The Parish Finance Committees should therefore be cognizant of these issues. Thus the necessity for every parish financial committee to establish for themselves a yearly budget and to forward to the Diocese their yearly financial statement as is required by the Diocesan Policy by the end of every January. The shared costs are established on the previous year's financial statement. But every

parishioner should take to heart the stewardship of their parish and in particular its financial stewardship.

The Business Administrator of the Diocese is always available to entertain questions related to this matter or any other financial concern.

Let us continue to work together in order that God be glorified and may we always be faithful stewards of our parishes. This is my prayer for all.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

† Luc Bouchard
Bishop of St. Paul

June 1, 2010