



Diocese of Peterborough

350 Hunter Street West - P.O. Box 175
Peterborough, Ontario K9J 6Y8
e-mail: chancery@petverboroughdiocese.org
e-mail: ndeang@peterboroughdiocese.org /personal/
tel. 705/745-5123
fax 705/745-2555

Fax

email

To: J. Jalserac	From: Bishop DeAngelis
Fax: jjalserac@lifesite.net	Pages: 3 (including cover)
Phone:	Date: Sept 11/09
Re:	CC:

Urgent For Review Please Comment Please Reply Please Recycle



Diocese of Peterborough

September 10, 2009

Pastoral Message from Bishop De Angelis to Parishioners of St. Michael's Parish (Cobourg) and to the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Peterborough

Dear Friends,

Too many people have been asking me: "Bishop, what is going on again in Cobourg?" To answer this question, I am writing this letter to you with sadness of heart. The recent events at St. Michael's Parish, Cobourg, of which you are well aware, underlie an attitude that is contrary to the life and nature of the Church. While the original unrest was the refusal of a few parishioners to accept a new pastor, now the Diocese and the Bishop have been named in a complaint filed with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. This must obviously draw our attention to the need to re-educate ourselves to the mission and function of the Church, the reason for membership in it, and the role of the Bishop.

Unfortunately, too many of the faithful forget about the mandate the Lord gave to His Disciples on the First Easter Sunday, when appearing in the upper room he told them, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" (Matthew 28:18-19). Our Lord entrusted the apostles with His authority when He said, "the person who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:6). As Bishop of Peterborough, it is my obligation and grave duty to share with you some reflections from the Church's perspective about the recent events that have undermined, once again, the spiritual atmosphere of St. Michael's Parish and entangled the Church and Bishop in civil litigation.

Listening to the voice of the Church requires humility. No one is forced to be a Catholic against his or her will. But once the free choice to be a member has been made, one is not free to pick and choose one's own confession of faith. At the same time no one can say, "I am a good Catholic" and then refuse to accept the leadership role of the Bishop, or to choose which articles of faith one will accept or reject. This "cafeteria style of Catholicism", as our Holy Father calls it, is intrinsically wrong, self-serving and contrary to Jesus' mandate.

I fail to understand how secular powers and government agencies should think they are in a position to tell the Church that she is wrong in her internal rules and regulations, even though these have directed and shaped the life of the Church during the last 2000 years. However, this is what we face today. If the Human Rights Tribunal should choose to interfere with the Church's governance, this will be most shocking. The Tribunal has no authority to place itself as an arbiter of canonical precepts. The question needed to be answered is thus: Is to serve as a volunteer, whether as an altar server, or on any other committee or function, a right? What happens if for the good of the church community some volunteers are asked to step aside?

The Church teaches us that for a volunteer to serve on any parish committee (i.e., parish financial council, property/planning committee, pastoral counsel, etc.) or to assist at the various liturgies (i.e., as choir member, altar server, etc.), **is not a right**. Rather, it is an invitation from the pastor or bishop, which can also be terminated at any time; particularly, when the voluntary service gives rise to tension, animosity, discord or division in the life of a parish. It is for the bishop to regulate, in view of the common good, the exercise of rights proper to Christ's faithful.

In a July 27, 2001, letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship, Cardinal Jorge A. Medina Estevez, Prefect of the Congregation, in a Letter on Altar Servers, stressed that **no one has a "right" to**

serve at the altar and strongly reaffirmed that altar boys should be encouraged, in view of fostering vocations to the priesthood. He stated that, while the assistance of the non-ordained faithful may be enlisted, they "do not have the right to service at the altar." It follows that to call oneself a Catholic, while challenging the Church and Her internal discipline entrusted to the Bishops, is a contradiction.

When I learned that some volunteers, who were serving in different parish committees at St. Michael's parish, were the objects of tension, criticism and division within the parish community, I called the Pastor, Father Allan Hood, into my office for a meeting, to hear directly from him the assessment of the situation. I met with him a number of times. These meetings confirmed what I already knew through ongoing correspondence, emails and phone calls from various parishioners.

I then asked Father Hood to kindly invite the volunteers involved, particularly those who were the object of tension and disagreement, to step aside and give the chance to other volunteers to serve. Among these volunteers, there were some who were serving as readers, Eucharistic ministers, adult altar servers, Church Restoration Committee members, and others involved in various committees. I asked Father Hood to thank them for the service done so far in the Parish, but to know that it was now time to allow others the chance to serve as volunteers.

In addition to asking Father Hood to deliver this message to them on my behalf, I personally replied to a number of them who had written me. I reminded them that their volunteer service to the life of the parish was on a temporary basis and in an advisory capacity. Their acceptance to step down from a volunteer position ensured that all parishioners would have a similar opportunity to volunteer, while preventing a monopoly by individuals in particular areas of volunteer service. Soon thereafter, a number of volunteers graciously resigned their volunteer service to make room for others to replace them. For some, the relinquishing of their volunteer position was a source of sadness and frustration. Yet, they did so in humility and obedience to the Bishop.

The only exception was one adult altar server, who made the decision to report the Bishop and the Diocese to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal alleging discrimination based on sexual orientation.

My friends, I can honestly say that I treated all the volunteers the same, with equal respect and dignity. I am at a loss to understand how there has been any misinterpretation of a practical decision made with honesty and without any discrimination. For the good of the parish community, more than once I encouraged the pastor to renew the volunteers in light of irresolvable tensions and divisions, which were deleterious to the spiritual life of the parish. Indeed, for some persons, particularly those who spent countless energies in coordinating the challenging restoration of the Church, it was more painful to step aside, but they did so in humility and with respect towards the Bishop's decision, knowing that he was trying to restore peace, harmony and reconciliation in the parish.

My friends, when we go to Church on Sunday, we are all looking for peace and harmony. We go to "share and break the bread of life" that gives us strength and "makes us one". God indeed has created us equal. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Even though we play different roles, we all have the same dignity — that of being children of God created in His image and likeness. To be faithful Christians, we must listen to Jesus' message and follow His teachings, leading lives worthy of authentic children of God.

I believe it is time for St. Michael's in Cobourg to turn the page and to reconcile with each other. This can only happen if you strive to rebuild the parish community in humility and obedience to the Bishop. I know that you wish to follow Christ. I ask you to pray for Fr. Hood and for one another. One only needs to look around at the beauty of your parish to see a history of faith. Continue in the spirit of the many people who have been sanctified in your church, who have knelt before the Blessed Sacrament in quiet prayer when life's difficulties knocked at their door, and who left the church able to face the challenges of life with an inner strength and peace that comes from Jesus.

May God Bless you all.

+ Nicola De Angelis