

NEWS RELEASE

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Council of Parishes Co-Chairs respond to Archbishop Sean O'Malley's Statement on Reconfiguration

(Boston) - Council of Parishes Co-Chairs Peter Borre' and Cynthia Deysher issued this statement in response to the Statement of Archbishop Sean O'Malley Regarding Reconfiguration

We understand the pain that the reconfiguration process has wrought upon the parishioners of the archdiocese, and is very evident in the sentiments expressed by Archbishop O'Malley in his statement issued earlier today. The reconfiguration process has previously been discussed as a need to close parishes that failed to meet four criteria. These closings are now tied to the possibility of a financial crisis in the archdiocese, described as a "catastrophic debacle" to be avoided by downsizing.

The Archbishop's statement sets out with much more specificity than previously seen, the following points:

- ◆ "The financial situation of the archdiocese is much worse than most people think":
- ◆ The emotional toll on the Archbishop is considerable: "I never imagined that I would have to be involved in anything so painful or so personally repulsive to me as this",
- ◆ "We need to recognize and build on a unity that transcends our individual parishes and is based on a commitment... that begins with loving and forgiving one another".

The extent of the financial issues disclosed today by Archbishop O'Malley is staggering and calls into question the financial stewardship of the archdiocese over its assets, including parishioner donations and personnel retirement plans. Today's statement reflects a many years of mismanagement. The Archbishop is asking for more sacrifices to atone for this mismanagement.

We take very seriously the letter's emphasis on the archdiocese's "dire circumstances". This underscores the need for much more disclosure about archdiocesan finances. We are especially concerned by the mention of "danger" for the pension plans of laity and clergy. Comprehensive financial information must be made public and then validated by a nationally-recognized auditing firm. This information should precede the preparation of the "strategic plan for the Archdiocese" and there must be significant involvement from the broader community of concerned Catholic in the preparation of such a plan.

We understand that sacrifice is necessary on the part of many. The Council of Parishes is ready to assist, but at the same time those parish communities that may be most helpful in addressing these difficult issues should not be destroyed through closing.

The Council of Parishes recommends the following:

1. The archdiocese needs to announce a Prayerful Pause on the church closing process, for a period of at least six months to allow spirits to heal.
2. As part of this Prayerful Pause, the archdiocese should make a gesture of spiritual solidarity towards the parishes in vigil by allowing Sunday Masses in those locations.
3. Finally, to restore unity within the archdiocese, a summit meeting of concerned Catholics should be convened promptly by the Archbishop at one of the Boston- area Catholic colleges.