



MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 25, 2023

TO: Fr. Francis Chukwuemeka Okafor

C.C.: Members of the Parish Pastoral Council
Members of the Parish Finance Council
Deacon Mr. Doug Cross

FROM: Most Reverend Albert LeGatt
Archbishop of Saint Boniface

SUBJECT: **Upcoming address to parishioners of St. Bernadette at all weekend masses of April 22, 23**

Dear Fr. Chukwuemeka,

Greetings of a joyous Easter season to yourself, your staff and all the parishioners of St. Bernadette.

I am sending you this letter as a follow-up to our meeting last Friday, April 14 and to recap our discussion. As I had shared with you previously and as I reiterated to you last Friday, I will be presiding the Eucharist in your parish at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 22 and at 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, April 23. This will give me the opportunity to address myself once more to all the parishioners about my analysis of the present state of the parish, its future challenges and possibilities as well as the support and assistance the archdiocese i.e. myself and its various pastoral and administrative services, wish to offer the parish in its renewal and growth at all levels.

I will certainly underline the good efforts that have been made in the last while in regards to the pastoral life of the parish and especially the whole process of coming to establish a Parish Pastoral Council after surveying and analyzing the wishes of the parishioners. As you have shared with me this group continues its effort to organize and expand the pastoral services to be offered to all in your parish.



I will also underline the equally positive efforts of the Parish Finance Council to inform themselves of the complete picture of the parish's financial situation as well as its administrative structures and processes, including personnel matters. They have made strides, in tandem with your leadership, to be in a position to fully communicate all this with the parishioners and so work to establish trust amongst all the parishioners. This will be done at an Annual General Meeting (AGM) in several months at a date yet to be determined.

However, beyond all this, I wish to offer comments about what I believe is needed in the parish at this moment to fully embrace its mission to be a Christian community, united in its faith, united in its practical charity and mutual support and finally united in its strong outreach. In short how to become even more a parish that welcomes the presence and participation of all parishioners. This is especially necessary as your parish is being constantly enriched with the arrival of people from all over the world.

In this sense I believe we need to have a very focussed and continued effort to have the parishioners gather together and listen to each other about the following:

- 1) their feelings towards the present state and spirit of parish life
- 2) their desires and vision for the future 5-10 years,
- 3) the process for assuring a lay leadership in the Parish's Councils and Committees that is representative of the whole parish. This is to overcome the propensity to silos, to people or groups working on their own with no communication to others in the parish.
- 4) Setting out concrete ways of assuring greater communication and transparency between pastor and parishioners, pastor and councils/committees, councils and committees amongst themselves, councils and committees with the parishioners as a whole, pastor and staff, staff and parishioners, etc.
- 5) How to establish the future membership of both the Parish Pastoral Councils and the Parish Finance Councils. I will offer a manner of achieving this through a parish discernment process that involves all the parishioners. It is more effective and unifying than waiting for people to step forward, than simply asking for volunteers through the bulletin or than asking for nominations and then holding elections.

The reason I am proposing these efforts of listening to one another are several. Firstly, this is the only way that the spirit of Vatican II and its implementation throughout the life and functioning of the Church, whether universal, diocesan, or parish, can happen in reality and not just be words.

This has more recently been picked up and furthered by all the efforts of Pope Francis around synodality. This word, while being church parlance and seemingly new, can be explained thus: We listen to the Holy Spirit by listening to one another and to all others in our community. We are guided by the Holy Spirit and not by worldly spirits, by discerning together what we have learnt in sincerely listening to one another.

Upon being ordained a priest 40 years ago, I chose as my motto “That they may be one” Jn 17, 22. It has remained my personal inspiration and ideal, but also my personal pastoral thrust and program ever since, in Prince Albert, in Saskatoon and, since 2009, now in the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface.

More precisely I am inviting all the parishioners of St. Bernadette, to this pastoral journey together at this point of time because of my involvement with the parish throughout the years especially at the time of my first pastoral in 2016 and the events that followed: the discovery of the fraud of \$409,000.00, the eventual return of this amount to the parish, the events around the suspension of Fr. Fred Olds and his eventual laïcisation by Pope Francis, the years of Fr. Phil Daley. Some time ago, after his departure, I came to speak about the importance of communication and how this might be advanced in the parish, in particular through an Annual General Assembly. Such an annual assembly was held but the attendance was very very small.

More recently I directed the archdiocesan committee for the renewal and growth of parish pastoral councils to lead the parish, working with a group of willing parishioners, to undertake a process whereby a survey of peoples’ opinions and desires was collected and analysed. The efforts of the present Parish Pastoral Council are guided by the fruits of this analysis for the renewal of the parish.

However, it must be said that the survey also identified a malaise felt by many people, due to poor communication overall in the parish, to a felt lack of respect between people and groups, to a lack of trust amongst parishioners, to past hurts unresolved and to a strong reluctance to step forward once again and actively participate in the life and activities of the parish.

Taking this all in and wishing very much to continue walking forward with this community of St. Bernadette, I have decided to ask all to join me in a necessary next step – one of rebuilding the basic foundation of any human community, especially a Catholic parish as it seeks to live out Christ’s mission. All parishes must continuously strive to bring about, in thousands of ways, a unity of faith and charity, both effectively and affectively.

In this vein I am inviting you and all your parishioners to a vast parish-wide listening circle experience spread over the next year. I am committing myself to a year-long parish pastoral visit made up of common prayer and common gatherings where we listen to each and to all. I envision pursuing together a common vision: for a change in the parish culture, for a change in parish organization and the functioning of the parish councils and committees, for a change in communication at all levels within the parish. This can only free up all the goodness within people and free the parish to more wholly be that parish where all feel welcome, safe and able to share their gifts.

This journey, like that of the disciples of Emmaus will assuredly free the parish to be more fully that People of God and Body of Christ for the world that Jesus our Lord asks St. Bernadette and all parish communities to be. That is my sure hope and my personal commitment.

The first gathering will be this **Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall** as we had previously discussed. I look forward to this Sunday and to the journey together with all the people of St. Bernadette.

As I assure you of my prayers, I humbly ask for your prayers and those of all your parishioners.

Sincerely in Christ.

+ Albert LeGatt

+Albert LeGatt
Archbishop of Saint-Boniface