



June 23, 2023

Dear Parishioners of St. Bernadette,

Greetings as we approach the July long weekend and the real beginning of our annual summer "break" from the frenzied pace of the rest of the year. This being said I want to bring all of you up to date on the recent efforts flowing out of my address to all the parishioners at the Sunday masses on April 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. I urge you to go to the St. Bernadette Parish Website and read that address once again. In it I set out my analysis of the present situation at St. Bernadette and the journey I propose to take with you in the following 12 months. In short I laid out my vision and objectives. I invite you all to embrace this roadmap so as to make St. Bernadette a truly vibrant and collaborative faith community.

I pledged to meet with any and all parishioners interested in working together towards this goal on a regular basis. My plan remains to meet in a open-to-all assembly format once a month so as to go forward with continued momentum. As it is essential that at all times the parishioners be informed of the most recent developments, I wish to report on the results to date of the first two general assemblies.

Both of these assemblies facilitated by myself, had the format of table-group discussions (5-7 people) answering specific questions put to them. After sharing all the results of each table's discussions, the answers were compiled.

At the first assembly held on April 26, 2023, the main question was: **What are the three feelings you wish that parishioners of St. Bernadette would leave with after attending Sunday mass?** The answers were many but have been categorized in six main clusters.

- Feeling welcome/sense of belonging/connected/unity/community/part of Christ's family
- Religious experience/blessed/spiritually fed/enlightened/inspired/closer to God
- Re-energized/rejuvenated/renewed/invigorated/commissioned/satisfied
- Joy
- Peace
- Love

Our second assembly took place on Thursday, May 25, 2023. This evening focussed on the following questions:

**Question 1: In the last 45 years, what has blocked or seriously impaired St. Bernadette living out what was described at the 1<sup>st</sup> general assembly as being the common desire of the parish?**

**Question 2: What needs to be done as concrete actions by/within the parish to overcome these obstacles to turn the ship around?**

Attached is the document listing the results from all the tables that evening. It is also posted on the parish Website. It should be noted that there were about 55 people attending the April 26 meeting and about 30-35 people attending the May 25 meeting.

The next one is set for Wednesday, June 28 at 7:30 p.m. in the church proper, i.e. the worship space. This month's general assembly will take the format of a presentation by myself, followed by questions from the assembly which I will answer to the best of my ability. There will be no small group discussion at this assembly on June 28. We will take up the table group format once again at the next assembly in September. The date and place for this assembly are yet to be determined.

Having set out what I feel has been accomplished in these first two assemblies, I wish to offer you my personal comments on where we are at the present time.

At the first assembly, given the question discussed, the tone was positive and hopeful, looking to a desired future state or culture in the parish. The second assembly was more difficult, even contentious at times. This could be expected given the questions aimed at trying to identify what are the past and present obstacles and limits to the desired future.

I found that the tone of the room was often filled with divisiveness and defensiveness. I recognize that I myself personally on several occasions descended to a place of defensiveness, I readily admit that. Therefore, firstly I want to apologize to all the people gathered there that evening. I ask you to forgive me and to pray for me.

In reflecting upon that experience, I recognize that it is very difficult for everyone to deal with difficult if not even hurtful matters. We fear hearing things such as "You should not say that ... Why are you saying that.... You have no right to say that ..."

Generally we don't share such past experiences unless we feel safe in doing so and unless we are confident that our sharing will actually make a difference, will contribute to a real change. There is most often a great hesitancy to stick one's head out of the foxhole. Any yet as a recent author on organizational dynamics expressed it: Unless there is truth-telling there is no possibility of transformation.

With that in mind, through someone I know who worked there, I contacted Mediation Services (1200 Portage Ave.). I expressed by desire that the Archdiocese would like to work with Mediation Services using 4 Listening Teams of 2 people each so that parishioners would have access to a

neutral, confidential, third party to whom they might tell their truth, their past experience at St. Bernadette. This might be done - by phone; using staff and their trained volunteer pool.

Mediation Services is open to such a project and would be willing to engage in discussions/negotiations with the Archdiocese including financial arrangements (to be entirely paid by the Archdiocese).

As well, Mediation Services would be open to further discussions with a view to making their course on defensiveness available to the people and parishes of the Archdiocese.

I will immediately pursue this offer. The goal would be that throughout the summer months of July and August, parishioners of St. Bernadette who chose to do so would be able to confidentially contact one of these teams and share about the past, the present and the future of St. Bernadette parish.

The end purpose of this huge endeavour would be that Mediation Services with their professional experience would produce a report offering both an analysis of the past functioning and dynamics (or culture) of St. Bernadette parish and also offering recommendations on how the parish should go forward. They would never refer to particular anecdotes or mention names or in any way give information that could identify an individual.

The recommendations would, of course, speak to pastors/staff/ parishioners relationships over the last 45 years and the desired nature of those relationships in the future. The recommendations would speak to the needed reorganization of the Parish Pastoral Council, the Parish Finance Committee and the network of committees and parish activities. The recommendations would speak to what should be put in place to assure all-round communication in the parish, something very often repeated in the two assemblies already held.

Then in September this report would be presented to all the parishioners and the work of monthly gatherings to work on these recommendations would begin again.

I have decided to no longer facilitate these evenings of assembly myself, though I will certainly be present to each such gathering. I want to walk with all of you in an ongoing way. We will be identifying an independent facilitator to lead these meetings. That facilitator will begin this role at the September meeting.

I closing I invite all the parishioners to consider the following:

1. Attending in person the next General Assembly of the parish, Wednesday, June 28, 7:30 p.m. in the church, where further information will be given about the road forward together. Along with welcoming all the long-time parishioners, I also particularly invite the ever-growing number of more recent parishioners, from the Philippines, from Nigeria, from India and from around the world. St. Bernadette is your parish and we absolutely need your participation and contribution in all this, especially in regards to the future.

2. Take the time needed to contact the “Mediation Services” listening teams over the summer period of July and August. Further information about how and when to contact one of the four teams by phone or virtually will be shared at the June 28 meeting. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the collective “truth-telling” phase of our journey and all the good that can flow out of it for the future. Once again I particularly invite the more recently arrived parishioners to not lose this opportunity for their voice to be heard, a voice for the future.

In closing, I ask you to entrust all this in prayer to Jesus Christ our Lord, our Good Shepherd and that through the intercession of St. Bernadette. This work is before all a spiritual work, a work to be guided and accomplished through the grace of God, through the love of God at work in each parishioner’s mind, heart and soul.

United in faith, hope and charity.

United in prayer.

*+ Albert LeGatt*

+Albert LeGatt  
Archbishop of Saint-Boniface.