

Summary: Request For Mediation

A “Request for Mediation” was delivered today in Rome to the Holy See’s Under-Secretary for Relations with States, Second Section of the Secretariat of State, on behalf of 31 American parishioner groups in the following eight Catholic dioceses:

- Allentown; Boston; Buffalo; Cleveland; New York, New Orleans; Scranton; and Springfield (MA).

The Request urges the Secretariat of State to instruct the Vatican Curia to suspend reviews of parish closings; and to instruct the diocesan bishops to suspend parish closing decrees, and instead to enter into Mediation with the 31 parishioner groups.

The Mediation proposal is a last resort before a deeper crisis emerges, namely a possible future decision by diocesan bishops to order the police to remove by force Catholics now in vigil in five Boston-area churches, and one church in Adams, MA.

Hundreds of appeals by Catholic parishioners in America through the Vatican’s canon law mechanism have been denied, including nine Boston appeals now for final review at the highest Vatican court, the *Plenaria* of the *Apostolic Signatura*. There is no realistic chance for relief, given that the *Plenaria* has not granted any parishioner appeals in the past forty years. All efforts by parishioners for a pastoral dialogue with their bishops have failed.

The closing of Catholic parishes across America is surging: at least one thousand communities have been, or will soon be, closed. And many more, in the thousands, will face this fate in the years ahead as the Church continues to implode. Bishops give a variety of reasons, but most of these are pretexts. The ugly truth for these wholesale closings was given by the advocate for the Archdiocese of Boston in a sworn brief to the *Signatura*:

“...maximum discretion was given to...the Archbishop of Boston so that he might save the entire archdiocese from monetary ruin provoked not only but also by the sexual abuse crisis. It is in this context that all actions of this process...are to be understood, not excluding the suppression of parishes of maximum vitality...”

Catholicism in America is in a crisis ranging far beyond the Archdiocese of Boston. A comprehensive survey by the *Pew Forum* last year found that,

“Approximately one-third of the survey respondents who say they were raised Catholic no longer describe themselves as Catholic. This means that roughly 10% of all Americans are former Catholics.”

In last fall’s presidential election, despite a vigorous campaign by some American bishops against the Democratic candidate, many Catholics in the swing states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan disregarded these admonitions, and those of

Signatura Prefect Archbishop Raymond Burke. Docility in the pews is a thing of the past.

If the Holy See fails to intervene, there will be consequences for the Church in America:

- Spreading protests against parish closings, including vigils – i.e. 24/7 sit-ins;
- More class-action lawsuits against the Holy See itself; and
- Schismatic communities of neo-Catholics, with fraying ties to Rome.

Protests emerged in Boston in 2004-2005, with nine churches going into vigil; currently, four have completed 54 months, and a fifth has been in vigil for almost four years; the other four were reopened by the archdiocese. Vigils have received attention from national media, including The New York Times, Time magazine, several television networks, as well as local press and TV. Arrests of vigilers in their churches in Boston, NYC, and New Orleans, were covered; any future actions will not go unnoticed.

Currently two **class-action lawsuits** against the Holy See alleging clergy sexual abuse have cleared the legal barriers shielding it as a sovereign state, and are moving through federal courts. In Boston, parishioners are formulating a legal theory based on the bishop's fiduciary duties as the trustee of parishes; violation of these duties by seizing parish assets; extension of liability to the Holy See which appoints bishops; collusive actions of the Congregation for the Clergy in orchestrating parish closings; and negligent supervision of bishops by the Congregation for the Bishops.

Catholic **schismatic groups** have been in the news with the lifting of excommunication on four Lefbvrst bishops, including a *Shoah* denier. After-the-fact the Holy Father explained in an unusual letter, quoting from the Gospel of Matthew,

“...is it truly wrong in this case to meet half-way the brother ‘who has something against you’...”

Meeting “half-way” a schismatic cult on the far right would indeed be morally compromising: in the words of Churchill about Naziism,

“I decline utterly to be impartial between the fire brigade and the arson.”

It would signal that the Holy See split the difference with the *Ecône* schismatics, but would not budge a millimeter towards mainstream American Catholics.

In the wake of parish closings in Boston, 35%-40% of Catholics have dropped out. Nationally, hundreds of thousands and eventually millions will be lost. Many of them are finding their way into new Catholic communities with no ties to the bishops; this is not merely *Cafeteria Catholicism*, but separation from Rome. A citation from Matthew, fuller than what was in the papal letter, might be instructive for these bishops:

“Lose no time; settle with your opponent while on your way to court with him.”