



25 April 2012

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

With tremendous sadness I have received the communication of Fr. Faustino Ruiz, your pastor, by which, after having conferred with the Parish and Finance Councils, he recommends St. Mary's School be closed. Having reviewed all the data, conferred with those who are expert in these matters, and taken the matter to prayer, regrettably, I cannot disagree with the recommendation. As such, St. Mary's Catholic School will be closed at the conclusion of the School Year 2011-2012.

Although more fitting tribute needs to be paid, I cannot fail to make mention of the many wonderful and faithful people who have worked over the years to build and sustain St. Mary's Catholic School. May the Lord reward and console all who have served this endeavor out of faith, in hope, with love. I know that many of those same people stand ready to assist the religious education program at the parish, so that parents are assisted in educating their children in the faith.

I deeply lament the closing of St. Mary's Catholic School. There are a good number of parents who, in their responsibility for forming their children, have relied upon the generosity of the parish community and the goodness of their Catholic sisters and brothers, to assist them by way of a Catholic school. These Catholic parents, their children, and those to come after them, suffer tremendously because of this. Your whole community suffers. I suffer with you.

When I learned that the school had financial trouble, last year, I immediately sent word offering a guarantee of emergency finances for the school until the close of the current school year, as well as my promise of weekly prayer and fasting particularly for St. Mary School. It was never my desire that that the school be closed, and I hoped that guaranteeing the financial operation for this year would allow time for the parish to come together to resolve the financial troubles. During this time I sent members of my Office of Finance to Platteville, to offer whatever help they could. And the priests and the school administration worked out a plan whereby the school could keep operating on a reduced budget. In short, many people were engaged in working on keeping the school open if possible. If, in time, people of similar good will wish to petition for the reopening of the school and if there is clearly support from the community, I am very eager to receive your petition.

With regard to the here and now, it has been said that the only solution for saving the parish school would be for me to remove Fr. Faustino Ruiz and Fr. John Del Priore. This would, I have been told by many people, ransom the school from those who are protesting and return giving to its previous level. I'll not get into the previous financial condition of the school here, and there is certainly something to be

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said for the lack of monetary support coming from the parish community. But, as evidenced by the very fact of this situation of protest and refusal to support the needs of the Church, the deficit at St. Mary and St. Augustine Parishes is of a much greater kind.

Ultimately, a Catholic School - to be what it is meant to be - must be animated at every stage, by faith, hope, and love. The provision of a school is not the principal focus of a parish community; rather a school should flow from that community as a fruit of its faith, hope, and love. The loss of this Catholic school is a tragedy, but there is more at stake for each of us and as a community. What must be undertaken at this time is fervent prayer and then action for deepening faith, hope, and - most of all - charity.

The priests who have come to serve you have themselves admitted that they undertook some changes in a way that was abrupt for many people. This resulted in some instability, misunderstandings, and hurt – all of this I heard about at our recent meeting and in many letters. Those feelings are not insignificant, and action should be taken to bring a return to stability, increase understanding, and heal the hurt – the priests know this and I encourage them once again to apply themselves to these actions.

But from where can firm stability, true understanding, and real healing come? It can come only from Jesus Christ. It is only Jesus, and the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church which He founded that can be the vessels of stability, understanding, and healing. I have no doubt that Fr. Faustino and Fr. John will provide Jesus Christ, the teachings of His Church, and the Sacraments.

From the beginning, some have claimed that the priests I sent do not teach according to the precepts of the Church and, particularly, as restated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. I repeatedly responded to these claims by asking for concrete examples to be given of any straying from the doctrine and discipline of the Church. It is my duty to ensure that the authentic teaching of the Church is handed on, and I stand ready to make corrections where needed. To this date, however, I've received no examples of teaching or practice contrary to the teachings of the Church. I have received examples of permissible differences in style, and, as I mentioned above, I've received examples of human errors, which resulted in relational hurts. I have every confidence that your priests continue to stand ready to resolve any personal issues you might have. But I've not received a single substantiated claim of false teaching or of a liturgical violation. I am still open to receiving claims of such correctable errors (with suitable reference to the proper documents).

I think, however, that at the end of the day, the Catholic faith is being taught according to the proper understanding of the Second Vatican Council, and that what remains are personal likes and dislikes, along with inflated rumors and gossip, some of which may even rise to the level of calumnious inciting of hatred of your priests, the faith, and myself. For these likes and dislikes, gossip, and hurt feelings, the Catholic faith is rejected and a school is closed.

This, tragically, is where we are today. In charity and in justice, I must caution you most strongly that this cannot continue. I do this now in sincere hopes of avoiding the issuance of Canonical warnings in the days ahead. Attached to this communication, is a list of texts upon which I would ask you to reflect prayerfully. I have a responsibility to do what I can to foster stability, understanding, and healing in your community, so that the Gospel message of Jesus Christ can shine forth. Where there are women and men of good will ready to renew their efforts in this regard, I believe that stability, understanding,

and healing can come. Where there are individuals who do not truly seek the good, and who even work actively against it, where there are those who work to incite hatred, there may need to be more formal warning and action. First, though, I exhort you, with the words of St. Paul to the Church in Ephesus:

“Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil...And do not grieve the holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. [And] be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ. (Eph 4:25-27, 30-32)

Your feelings do matter to me, and I do not take them lightly. However, our end goal should not be simply to restore good feelings. No, there is something greater than good feelings at stake, as good feelings come and go. Much deeper than feelings, what these priests have been sent to offer, is Jesus Christ, He who suffered with and like you, who died for you, and who has been raised to new life, so that you might have lasting joy, lasting hope, and lasting peace – eternal life. The reality of following Jesus is not at every moment full of good feelings; neither Jesus Himself, in His human nature, nor Mary, nor the Apostles were even granted that gift of freedom from painful emotions. By allowing ourselves, with openness, to enter into the mystery of His Church and His Sacraments we find that deep inner joy which passing emotions can't eradicate.

As Christ's Church, we profess faith in one Holy Spirit – the same Spirit that descended upon the apostles at Pentecost, the third person of the Blessed Trinity. It is this same Spirit that guided the early Church; has led the Church through two millennia, and will lead her until the end of time. The same Spirit that led the Church from the beginning and through the Second Vatican Council leads her today – and His message is the same, it cannot change. To think otherwise, or to claim that the hierarchy in union with the Pope, and the People of God might receive conflicting direction from the Spirit, would be mistaken. There is only one Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit poured out on the Church, which Christ, Himself, established. Objectively, the priests of the Society of Jesus Christ the Priest, with their human weaknesses and faults, their differences in style, and permissible practices, walk with the Church, as guided by the Holy Spirit.

There can be no “firing” of priests by the parish community in the Diocese of Madison. Thus, the priests of the Society of Jesus Christ the Priest will remain in priestly ministry at St. Mary and St. Augustine Parishes in Platteville, and they stand ready to serve you and to seek stability, understanding, and healing. I beg you to seek the same so that the light of Christ might shine. I ask you to forgive, whatever that takes, and to move forward in faith, in hope, and in love.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Rev. Robert C. Morlino  
Bishop of Madison

## **Texts for prayerful reflection, with regard to the letter of Bishop Morlino to the Catholic people of Platteville**

**Document of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 20** - Bishops, therefore, with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing...Therefore, the Sacred Council teaches that bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the apostles, as shepherds of the Church, and he who hears them, hears Christ, and he who rejects them, rejects Christ and Him who sent Christ (cf. Lk 10:16)." (LG 20)

***Lumen Gentium*, 37** - The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their spiritual shepherds the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the word of God and of the sacraments...They are, by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church. When occasions arise, let this be done through the organs erected by the Church for this purpose. Let it always be done in truth, in courage and in prudence, with reverence and charity toward those who by reason of their sacred office represent the person of Christ.

The laity should, as all Christians, promptly accept in Christian obedience decisions of their spiritual shepherds, since they are representatives of Christ as well as teachers and rulers in the Church. Let them follow the example of Christ, who by His obedience even unto death, opened to all men the blessed way of the liberty of the children of God. Nor should they omit to pray for those placed over them, for they keep watch as having to render an account of their souls, so that they may do this with joy and not with grief.

Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action."

**Catechism of the Catholic Church, Number 2842** - "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect(Mt 5:48)"; "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful(Lk 6:36)"; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another (Jn 13:34)." It is impossible to keep the Lord's commandment by imitating the divine model from outside; there has to be a vital participation, coming from the depths of the heart, in the holiness and the mercy and the love of our God. Only the Spirit by whom we live can make "ours" the same mind that was in Christ Jesus (Cf. Gal 5:25; Phil 2:1,5). Then the unity of forgiveness becomes possible and we find ourselves "forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave" us (Eph 4:32).

**CCC 2843** - Thus the Lord's words on forgiveness, the love that loves to the end, (Cf Jn 13:1) become a living reality. The parable of the merciless servant, which crowns the Lord's teaching on ecclesial communion, ends with these words: "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart (Cf. Mt 18:23-35)."

**CCC 2104** - "All men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his Church, and to embrace it and hold on to it as they come to know it (*Dignitatis humanae* 1 § 2)." This duty derives from "the very dignity of the human person (*DH* 2 § 1)." It does not contradict ...the requirement of

charity, which urges Christians "to treat with love, prudence and patience those who are in error or ignorance with regard to the faith (*DH* 14 § 4)."

**CCC 844** - In their religious behavior, however, men also display the limits and errors that disfigure the image of God in them: Very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and served the creature rather than the Creator. Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair (*Lumen Gentium* 16; cf. Rom 1:21, 25).

**CCC 845** - To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is "the world reconciled."

**Code of Canon Law - 392 §1** - Since he must protect the unity of the universal Church, a bishop is bound to promote the common discipline of the whole Church and therefore to urge the observance of all ecclesiastical laws. §2. He is to exercise vigilance so that abuses do not creep into ecclesiastical discipline, especially regarding the ministry of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals, the worship of God and the veneration of the saints, and the administration of goods.

**Can. 528 §2** - The pastor is to see to it that the Most Holy Eucharist is the center of the parish assembly of the faithful. He is to work so that the Christian faithful are nourished through the devout celebration of the sacraments and, in a special way, that they frequently approach the sacraments of the Most Holy Eucharist and penance. He is also to endeavor that they are led to practice prayer even as families and take part consciously and actively in the sacred liturgy which, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, the pastor must direct in his own parish and is bound to watch over so that no abuses creep in.

**Can. 1311** - The Church has the innate and proper right to coerce offending members of the Christian faithful with penal sanctions.

**Can. 1369** - A person who in a public show or speech, in published writing, or in other uses of the instruments of social communication utters blasphemy, gravely injures good morals, expresses insults, or excites hatred or contempt against religion or the Church is to be punished with a just penalty.

**Can. 1373** - A person who publicly incites among subjects animosities or hatred against the Apostolic See or an ordinary because of some act of power or ecclesiastical ministry or provokes subjects to disobey them is to be punished by an interdict or other just penalties.

**Can. 1374** - A person who joins an association which plots against the Church is to be punished with a just penalty; however, a person who promotes or directs an association of this kind is to be punished with an interdict.

**Can. 1390 §2** - A person who offers an ecclesiastical superior any other calumnious denunciation of a delict or who otherwise injures the good reputation of another can be punished with a just penalty, not excluding a censure. §3. A calumniator can also be forced to make suitable reparation.