



August 12, 2005 - Update on Reconfiguration Process

In January 2004, Archbishop Seán O'Malley outlined the process for "reconfiguring" the Archdiocese of Boston, reflecting the complexity of this period in the life of the Church. The process was unlike prior processes in the Archdiocese because the concept was to examine the whole Archdiocese in a global way rather than focusing on individual parish needs. The reasons for this approach were clearly outlined to all the faithful of the Archdiocese in a letter dated January 9, 2004. These clearly defined reasons included the financial difficulties facing the Archdiocese. As the process unfolded, the people of the Archdiocese were informed that certain parishes would be closed rather than joined together. The people were informed that the reason for this decision was that when a parish is closed, the assets and liabilities flow naturally by way of Canon Law to the Archdiocese of Boston. This approach would allow the entire faithful of the Archdiocese of Boston to face its many needs together and to permit allocation of funds to parishes with greatest need. By contrast, merging parishes would keep the assets and liabilities in the local area, in some cases resulting in two wealthy parishes combining to form one very wealthy parish; while if two poorer parishes are joined they could potentially only inherit liabilities to form one very poor parish. The Archdiocese has explained from the beginning how the money would ultimately be used (see Bishop Lennon's letter dated July 27, 2004). It has further announced that a committee set up for this purpose, the Reconfiguration Oversight Committee, would monitor the monies collected as a result of this process.

A thorough and very public process of reconfiguration took place over the past 20 months with many challenges, some foreseen and others not. Over that period a few closed parishes appealed to Rome asking the Congregation for the Clergy to reverse the decision regarding the parish's closure. The Congregation received all of the documentation about the Archdiocese's process and communicated to the Archbishop that it was satisfied that the process used to close parishes in Boston was a legitimate process. The Holy See has not indicated that they will be asking the Archdiocese to reopen any of the closed parishes. However, the Congregation indicated its view that certain corrections need to be made in the process used to allocate the assets and the liabilities of the closed parishes to the Archdiocese. The Congregation has informed the Archdiocese that in situations where the parishioners of the closed parish are directed to a new receiving parish, the Archdiocese must work with the receiving parish in order to allocate the assets and liabilities of the closed parish to the Archdiocese. Discussions of this issue have occurred with the pastors and parish finance councils of the affected receiving parishes.

While the discussions between representatives of the Archdiocese and pastors and Finance Councils have been made public, final resolution of the problem has not yet been reached. The Archbishop will continue to work with the pastors to find the best solution for the good of the entire Archdiocese of Boston.

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