

August 27, 2004

Dear Brother in priestly Ministry,

At last Fall's convocation, a few of us came together to discuss the current climate in the archdiocese. We noted the table discussions regularly mentioned an "elephant in the living room" – some issue that cried out to be publicly discussed but wasn't. Subsequently Gerry announced an informal meeting to address this phenomenon. Out of this gathering a group began to meet that named itself the Elephants.

The Elephants came to identify these non-discussable issues as a symptom of a deeper problem: a steady erosion of the spirit of Vatican II. In late June we sponsored a forum on Vatican II ecclesiology. Over one hundred of you attended. Evaluations were overwhelmingly positive.

The enclosed "Call Toward a More Healthy, Scripturally Based and Open Church" comes out of comments and suggestions made by forum participants. It is the work of the planning committee. We ask you to read and reflect on it and, if it expresses your experience and feelings, to add your name to the list of signers.

We propose to use the Call as the basis for a future discussion with members of the Presbyteral Council, our representative body with whom the Cardinal consults. When such a meeting is scheduled, all signers will be invited to take part in it.

For the planning committee,

Gerry Bechard

Tom Lumpkin

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Please sign no later than Sept 13<sup>th</sup> and return to Tom Lumpkin at Day House, 2640 Trumbull, Detroit MI 48216

Add my name to the signers of "A Call Toward a More Healthy, Scripturally Based and Open Church"

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

Comments:

## **A CALL TOWARD A MORE HEALTHY, SCRIPTURALLY BASED AND OPEN CHURCH**

We come to you, the Presbyteral Council, to engage in a fraternal dialogue. We speak out of concern over the present state of the church as we experience it in the archdiocese. We find it *less healthy, less scripturally based* and *less open* than we have known it.

### *Less healthy*

As with any living organism, the fundamental “law” of a healthy church is *balance*. So it rests upon two differently gifted apostles, Peter and Paul. Through Peter, God’s Spirit has guided the church through the ages from the top down; through Paul, from the bottom up.

But at present, the spirit of Peter is overdeveloped to the detriment of the spirit of Paul:

- For all practical purposes, authority is seen as only coming from the top down. The authority of the Roman curia and magisterium is overdeveloped; the authority of the local church and of the *sensus fidelium* is nearly ignored.
- The ministerial gifts distributed to the baptized are underutilized; those distributed to the ordained are exhausted and drained.
- Within our local church, the assumptions, criteria and standards driving planning issue from the chancery and not from the faithful. Their input is sought only within chancery-given parameters.
- Programs and speakers sponsored at the parish level are ordered to be cancelled by the chancery if deemed by it alone to be not in accord with the understanding of the faith community.

### *Less scripturally based*

The New Testament images of Jesus’ community (the family – God as Father/Parent, we as brothers and sisters--, the body, the vine and branches) stress intimacy, a fundamental equality, a particular concern for the weaker members. The basic New Testament image of a leader is the good shepherd who knows and is known by his own and who leaves the ninety-nine to seek out the lost one.

- But the present administration of the church reflects more of a *corporate model* than a *New Testament* model. Centralized, “top down” management drives the process. Quantifiable indicators determine outcomes. “Larger and fewer” is preferred to “smaller and more.” Financial strength is highly important. Mergers and closures are acceptable outcomes.
- Churches of 1000+ families make it nearly impossible to practice good shepherding (as distinguished from good corporate administrating): People are not known; the cries of the poor and marginalized are lost to the demands of efficient management.

### *Less open*

We have a sense that within the presbyterate there are serious and significant differences of theological perspective:

- Yet opportunities to dialogue about these differences seem to be discouraged, rather than faced and explored (e.g. at the convocation).

We recognize a sense of isolation among our brothers removed from ordained ministry because of sexual abuse allegations.

- They are not welcome at convocations and other formal gatherings of the presbyterate.
- They have no forum in which to gather to speak their frustrations and fears.
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As a result of all the above, we discern among us an increasing spirit of frustration and apathy in our attitudes toward archdiocesan policies and practices. We have heard similar feelings expressed among our pastoral staffs and many Catholics. So we call upon you, as the presbyteral council, to speak and act boldly and creatively to restore us to a more healthy, scripturally based and open church in the archdiocese. We set before you the apostle Paul, who, guided by the Spirit and for the good of the church, found it necessary to “oppose him [Peter] to his face since he was manifestly in the wrong” (Galatians 2:11).

We list the following as examples of how you might speak and act boldly and creatively at this time:

- Re: the “Strategic Guidelines for Planning in the Archdiocese”:
  - propose a *broader process* for its development that involves “bottom up” involvement from the beginning (e.g., the process that led to the archdiocesan synod).
  - propose more *scripturally based criteria*:  
E.g.: “I know mine and mine know me.” Do people and the pastoral leaders in the faith community know each other? Are they attentive to the needs of the marginalized in their midst?
- Question the disappearance of a clear, positive urban agenda within the vision and practice of the archdiocesan leadership.
- Openly ask whether the archdiocese still has a commitment to people who aren’t Catholic, especially the poor. Specifically, whether the commitment still exists to provide educational opportunities for non-Catholic poor children.
- Propose an archdiocesan commitment to the recruiting, training and appointment of lay pastoral leadership.
- Arrange for dialogue that addresses the developing gap in theological understanding within the presbyterate.
- Instigate open discussion on the issue of chancery censorship of speakers and topics. (Who decides? On what basis? Does the *sensus fidelium* have any import on this matter?)
- Advocate for the removed priests to be invited to gatherings of the presbyterate (convocation, holy hours, reconciliation celebrations, etc.)

- Propose a presentation and discussion open to all parish leaders on the archdiocesan financial situation that would permit full disclosure of where the money is coming from and where it's going.
- Make issues such as the above the basis of the next convocation.

In closing, we are *not* calling for a rupturing of the unity of the church; we *are* calling for a reinvigoration of Paul's role within it. We are conscious of acting within and honored and even nationally recognized history of archdiocesan priests speaking and acting in the spirit of Paul when deemed necessary and urgent.

Individually, we are the signers below.