

Mailing

#376

Title of the mailing *Letter from the Standing Committee – September 29, 2010

Body text of the mailing *

September 29, 2010

St. Michael and All Angels

Dear Bishop Bennison:

It has been six weeks since your return to active ministry in the diocese of Pennsylvania. You have met with the Standing Committee's Executive Committee, attended one Standing Committee meeting, met with Diocesan Council's Executive Committee, chaired one Diocesan Council meeting, chaired one Council of Deans meeting, met with a small group representing the Diocesan Mission Planning Commission (DMPC), and met with many others, individuals and small groups as well as the staff at Church House. You have attended one House of Bishops meeting, and you have also addressed some issues concerning the situation in the Diocese of Pennsylvania through the media.

We list these things in order that you may understand that we are very concerned with the inconsistency of your message, the seeming lack of understanding on your part as to how well we do now communicate in the diocese, and the discrepancies between what you have said and what you seem to be doing.

You informed the Standing Committee and others that you have clearly seen that there have been changes in the diocese during your absence, and you felt it would be important for you to listen for some time before determining your own actions going forward. But your actions and communications these last six weeks belie this.

To begin with, you voiced to the Standing Committee your commitment to the process approved by Convention in the formation of the Diocesan Mission Planning Commission and told us you had made clear to that Commission that you supported their work and would not be about changing this way in which the diocese has agreed to go forward.

Bishop, if what you have said about supporting this structure is true, then why are you attempting to revive the situations having to do with Wapiti and the Cathedral Commons project? These are long-range planning issues that require time and finances. The Standing Committee, as a fiscally responsible agent, has spent the time you were away considering not only what the diocese can afford but, more importantly, allowing a time and space for the diocese to determine that itself. The very work of the DMPC is to look ahead, to determine what we think the church in Pennsylvania will look like, be like, in the next two years, ten years, twenty-five years, and what our mission will be. They still have much work to do: gathering facts, wishes, visions, and opinions from the diocese, and getting information from city Planning Commissions and other qualified sources. Why would we even consider major real estate projects before knowing what it is, and who it is, we are planning for?

Additionally, it has come to our attention that you are discussing the possible purchase of another building (the Karp property) in relation to the Cathedral Commons project while three governing bodies (Standing Committee, Finance and Property, and the Church Foundation Board) have committed to the sale of the one

we own now – 3717–19 Chestnut Street. Why would you encourage such a thing at this time in the life of the diocese? Are you chasing a dream, a vision, of your own?

It has also come to our attention that you have mentioned the possibility of renewing activities at Wapiti. Again, in your absence the decision was made by convention to sell Wapiti. There is a committee that is representative of Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, and Finance and Property that have worked many hours with highly qualified real estate people in marketing this property. If you wish for convention to reconsider this decision wouldn't it make sense for you to first consult with this committee rather than for all of us to read about your thoughts on such a volatile subject in the newspaper? It is so disrespectful of all the diocese has worked for in being open and honest with each other for you to attempt at this time to undo that work by undermining and obfuscating information.

We are also aware that it is your intention to use funds from the income of the Nunn's Fund , approximately \$70,000.00, to publish the book on the history of the diocese – a project left unfinished when you were inhibited. Again Bishop, wouldn't it make sense to find out why that project had not been completed before forging ahead? The Standing Committee has been extremely careful, frugal even, with the income from the Nunn's Fund during your absence. We recognized that our future needs are great and hoped those funds would be available as, again, we worked towards an understanding of what the future of our diocese will look like. According to the trust document, these funds are to be used "at the discretion of the bishop for the good of the diocese;" and while we were the Ecclesiastical Authority, we guarded these funds, honoring the use for which they were intended. In our extremely fragile situation, and considering the confusion and great discontent of so many at your return, it makes no sense at this time to publish a history of this diocese, much less to spend \$70,000.00 doing so. The diocese has spent \$133,000.00 on this project already, and we have met all contractual obligations. We are in a position to wait for publication until we can (1) afford it and (2) determine if this history book should include another chapter or two about the history we have made here in the past five years.

At Diocesan Council meeting on Saturday, September 25, 2010, you made clear that the pledge to the DMPC of \$50,000.00, made by the Standing Committee and committed from the Nunn's Fund income, would be honored by you, but that you could not offer any more than that. Bishop, thanks to the Standing Committee's fiscal responsibility, when you returned the income available to you was almost \$500,000.00. The fact that you are willing to spend \$70,000.00 for an incomplete history book but would not consider supporting the DMPC and our future mission speaks volumes to your perspective of what is good for the diocese. Granted, the DMPC did not ask for more funds, but you were adamant anyway that there would be no more for that work.

As the diocese prepares to come together in convention, and as the hard facts of the Program Budget shortfall become evident to the diocese, we are extremely concerned that your apparent insistence on putting everything back the way it was before you left will cause a large number of parishes to hold back funding to the diocese, both assessments and pledges. The Standing Committee continues to hear from people in the diocese daily, through letters, emails, and phone calls, concerning your return. About 85% of these communications are negative. When it becomes clear to more and more that you want to move us back to some vision of your own, we are afraid that this will add to the potential "revolution" in the diocese.

Bishop, we – i.e., you, the Standing Committee and all the leadership of the diocese – are not here to affirm our own personal vision but to help guide and support the diocese in determining a shared vision. Can we please let that work go forward without throwing obstructions up, creating dissent through distrust and misinformation, and investing heavily in anything that will stretch the finances of the diocese beyond

anything realistic and cause more and more parishes to withhold funds.

Finally, and perhaps most shocking of all, we have been made aware of what you said at Diocesan Council on September 25, 2010, concerning the witnesses at your trial: "It is known now that all the witnesses at my trial intentionally perjured themselves." These are shocking words, and words which we feel you need to address immediately. Can you possibly have meant what you said? If so, this is one more indication of a serious problem. You have managed to ignore or discount the opinions and conclusions of three courts, two Presiding Bishops, the House of Bishops, and untold numbers of lay and clergy in the diocese of Pennsylvania, and now all the witnesses at your trial. We find it amazing that you are able to think that this is in any way normal behavior.

Bishop, the letter of the law has allowed you to return. Please consider the spirit of the law as you determine your way forward, for yourself and for the Diocese of Pennsylvania.

In order to honor our commitment to openness and honesty we plan to make this letter public to our diocesan family.

Faithfully,

The Standing Committee

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