



A message from Bishop Samuel Aquila

April 8, 2010

In the past several weeks, I have consulted with the College of Consultors, the Diocesan Finance Council, the Seminary Finance Council and the Deans of the diocese regarding the future of Cardinal Muench Seminary and parish and Catholic school properties in the Fargo, West Fargo, Horace and Kindred areas. The matter was first discussed several months ago in executive sessions with the College of Consultors, Diocesan Finance Council and Deans. As a result of these discussions and after much prayer, I have made two decisions.

First, having received the counsel and advice of these bodies, I have decided to discontinue the college seminary program at Cardinal Muench Seminary at the end of the 2010-2011 academic year (May 2011). As some of you may know, the number of college seminarians studying at Cardinal Muench Seminary has risen above 20 only twice since 1988. The cost of education per college seminarian, when the numbers are so few, is excessive. Currently the annual cost of educating one seminarian at CMS averages \$115,000; whereas, the annual cost of educating a seminarian in major seminary, where they complete their final years of formation and discernment, averages \$35,000. Even with the CMS college seminarians paying tuition of approximately \$15,000 per year, the educational and operating costs left to be covered per seminarian is \$100,000. It is not good stewardship to underwrite each college-level seminarian at \$100,000 per year. While subsidies would decrease with higher enrollment, the question of stewardship remains.

While donors to Cardinal Muench Seminary have been very generous over the years, we are now at the point when we have to recognize that the best use of donations toward seminarian education is to provide scholarships for our seminarians to attend seminaries elsewhere, rather than trying to fund our local program at an excessive level of expense.

Currently, only seven men are registered for studies at CMS for the 2010-2011 school year. Although the formation program is excellent at CMS, the question

also arises as to whether a seminary community of that size can provide appropriate formation for the men in their first years of study and discernment for the priesthood.

Second, the discontinuation of the seminary program and considerations regarding use of the seminary facility prompts a complete review of all metro area parish and Catholic school properties. Included in this review will be the parishes of Holy Cross and Blessed Sacrament in West Fargo, Holy Spirit, St. Paul's Newman Center, St. Mary's Cathedral, St. Anthony of Padua, Nativity and Sts. Anne & Joachim in Fargo, St. Benedict's of Wild Rice in rural Horace, St. Maurice in Kindred, and the Catholic schools in Fargo: Shanley, Sullivan, Nativity and Holy Spirit. Also included in the review will be the undeveloped land in Horace, in the northeast corner of 64th Avenue and County Road 17, which will eventually be used for a parish or parish/school combination. The goal of the review, which will commence this June and be completed within one year, is to ensure better stewardship of the gifts donors entrust to our care and more effective and efficient use of Catholic facilities in the growing metro area.

Several area parishes are considering capital campaigns for facility improvements. It would be irresponsible to approve these projects on an individual basis without looking at how the people of the area as a whole are served by our Catholic churches and schools. In addition, the cities of Fargo, West Fargo, Horace and Kindred are all growing and this growth must be taken into consideration in the best placement of parishes and Catholic schools to serve the increasing population.

Among the details to be studied in the review are: location in relation to other Catholic parishes and schools, current and potential membership/student numbers, the number of priests needed at each facility, donation history, integrity of the structures, expansion potential, flooding issues, location in relation to residential or industrial properties, demographic developments and other factors. An outside consultant will conduct the review to ensure objectivity. Additional details regarding the review will be available in the next several weeks.

We have just experienced the most holy days of the liturgical year, the Triduum, during which time we reflect on the suffering and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and the gift of eternal life his resurrection offers to us. We are in a time of great hope, a time of beginning anew our journey of faith strengthened by the sacraments we have received and the truth of God's revealed love for us. I encourage you to bring this spirit of hope and joy into the coming months so that we may plan well for the future and the proclamation of the Gospel!