

April 5, 2006

Most Reverend Raphael M. Fliss, D.D.
1201 Hughitt Avenue
P.O. Box 969
Superior, WI 54880

Dear Bishop Fliss,

The Elders at St. Patrick Parish have reviewed your Four Commitments to Change as they have been developed since our Parish Meeting on January 15, 2006. You are to be commended for the work you have begun to ensure the spiritual and operational health and well-being of our Diocese. We were pleased at the changes you have already set in motion in the areas of priest formation and mentoring. By doing so you have shown leadership in areas where other Bishops have not yet gone.

The purpose of this letter, in addition to the commendation above is twofold. The first is to provide you our collective feedback on the *Four Commitments*. The second is to extend an offer to meet with you personally to continue our dialogue on this important initiative.

Four Commitments to Change: Feedback

Your Four Commitments are worthy of more than a local audience and we suggest that you consider:

- Dissemination within the Diocese of the document (e.g., Catholic Herald, Diocesan Web Site, open letter to all parishes)
- The establishment of a schedule for regular follow-up reports to the Diocese that highlight progress made
- Assigning accountability to Diocesan staff for each commitment related activity and publishing their names so that interested persons can follow up with their concerns or issues
- Sharing the Four Commitments with the USCCB and other appropriate groups as an example of leadership in this area.

Along with the above it would be advantageous to generally educate all parishioners as to who is responsible for what in the Diocese so that all the laity know the appropriate person to contact with input and concerns.

You state that by June 30, 2006 you would like to establish a special “ad hoc” board to address issues outside the Charter. We assume that this board will be consultative in nature and as such, very beneficial for reacting to broader issues. Perhaps if such a board had been in place earlier, the events at St. Patrick Parish could have been avoided.

Yet, just as important (if not more) as the “ad hoc” reactive board, we see an additional need for programs, policies and procedures to be in place which are proactive, rather than reactive. We wholeheartedly agree with Commitment IV, Part D which states that the Bishop “will make more pragmatic use of lay and religious consultation for theological, fiduciary, and public relation risks.” Perhaps you have planned that the “ad hoc” board will recommend the steps necessary to establish such proactive programs, but we have not seen any detailed discussion of this important aspect of proactively reducing risks before they become complaints.

Operating within a proactive model, we ask that you consider giving detailed thought to the Diocese doing each of the following:

- Educating parishes and their leaders about methods for reducing risks;

- Researching “best practices” in parish leadership around the country and sharing these ideas;

(We suggest, if you have not already read the article in the December 12, 2005 issue of America on “Best Practices in Church Management” that you read about the model for Planning used by the Archdiocese of St. Paul. They employ a process developed by Dennis Cheesebrow of TeamWorks International Inc. that responds to a need for continuous transition, growth, and change. Article is included with this letter.)
- Facilitating better communication of concerns and risks, perhaps using an ombudsman model. Thus there would be “eyes and ears” of the Bishop in the local parishes and communities to serve as an early warning system;
- In your upcoming efforts to implement and oversee the commitments, use as consultants and collaborators laity with expertise / talent in various professional areas, outside paid consultants, and existing Diocesan and parish staff. And further we suggest that you consider appointing one or more members of St. Patrick Parish to future boards, given our unique perspective and the progress we have already made on our journey.

We recognize that the Four Commitments and the active involvement of the laity in realizing them is a significant and innovative step towards the gospel truly moving forward for the people of God in northern Wisconsin. We thank you for your leadership in this mission and we are grateful for the guidance of the Holy Spirit during this difficult time. Our role in this process has been a living out of what John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici* states: “The basic meaning of this Synod and the most precious fruit desired as a result of it, is the lay faithful’s hearkening to the call of Christ the Lord to work in his vineyard, *to take an active, conscientious and responsible part in the mission of the Church. . .*”(#3).

Invitation to Meet

As a next step, we would like to have a conversation with you to offer the assistance, experience, expertise, and knowledge of the Team of Elders to aid you in the implementation and success of the Four Commitments to Change. We would suggest a meeting in late April at a time of your convenience. We are willing to meet in Superior, Hudson, or some place in between. Please consider where our specific input would be helpful to your process and be assured that we will do whatever we can to partner with you.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our input.

Sincerely,
The Elders of St. Patrick Parish