

**JMJ**

**Letter  
to the  
*Imperial Bishops***

**A Layman Speaks Out on Catholic Church  
Governance in The United States**

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Bloomington, Illinois**

*For the past, present and future parishioners and clergy of Holy Trinity Catholic  
Parish in Bloomington, Illinois*

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## PREFACE

I am writing this pamphlet because I believe it is my duty as an American-Catholic to do so. I am grateful for my Catholic grade school and high school education. I feel especially indebted to the many dedicated teachers who were often nuns and priests. I was taught we, as Christians, should value and embrace American values such as religious freedom, free speech, democracy, self-determination, and the importance of a free press. If we have any questions concerning the benefits of practicing our Catholicism and growing the Church in a representative democracy, it may be beneficial to read what our Founding Fathers thought on the subject. They didn't come here to escape religion; they came here to practice it.

My lessons in history, government and civics taught me to have a healthy skepticism about people in authority. We often heard the old maxim: "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Catholics bear a moral obligation toward keeping their government and church free from corruption. I remember in history class learning that once a dictator comes into power, he immediately does the following three things: (1) weaponize the language (misleading term - "growing disciples"); (2) closes churches (Holy Trinity parish); and (3) shuts down newspapers (the Catholic Post). Consequently, I am concerned that since March 3, 2022, when Bishop Louis Tylka was installed as the new Bishop of the Diocese of Peoria, he has done or proposes to do all three of the above-mentioned acts.

This small pamphlet explores such issues as: (1) why the Church is in decline in the United States; (2) whether bishops have absolute unchecked authority to close a financially healthy parish; (3) how the Church operates in other countries such as China and Germany; (4) how much deference should be given clergymen in matters other than those concerning faith and morals; (5) what happens to a big church, like Holy Trinity, after it closes; (6) given the promises made by Bishop Tylka in his Annual Diocesan Appeal, could he be charged with theft if he closes down a financially viable parish; (7) what Pope Francis thinks about increased lay decision-making and bishop evaluations; (8) gender discrimination; and more.

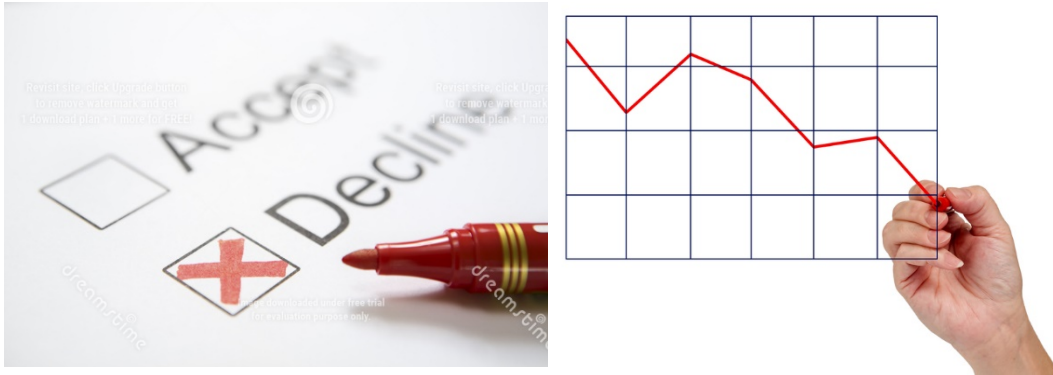
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## THE CHURCH IN DECLINE:



Some time ago, while listening to Bishop Robert Barron I learned that for every one person who joins the Catholic Church in the United States today, roughly six are abandoning their Catholicism. Unfortunately, I was not surprised by the statistics. Depending on your age, gender, or station in the Church, our opinions may differ about the contributing factors for this decline. Like in a divorce, there are many reasons for the breakup; however, high on the list must be unfaithfulness. Once a person cannot trust the messenger, she or he no longer cares about the message. This becomes exacerbated if the targeted listener is a United States citizen, and the messenger is associated with an authoritarian governed church.

## THE PROBLEM: BISHOP LUIS TYLKA'S "GROWING DISCIPLES" PROPOSAL:



What drew me into this donnybrook was the announcement of Bishop Louis Tylka's "Growing Disciples" proposal. On March 3, 2022, Bishop Louis Tylka was installed as the Bishop of the Diocese of Peoria. The Diocese of Peoria serves nearly 135,000 Catholics living in 26 counties comprised of 156 Catholic Parishes.

In Bloomington, Illinois, there are three parishes within a one-mile radius: (1) Holy Trinity; (2) Historic St. Patrick; and (3) St. Mary's. Of these three parishes, Bishop Tylka proposes to close all Holy Trinity's physical structures: the church, parish hall and rectory. Holy Trinity is a financially viable parish. Bishop Tylka claims that he has the unchecked authority to close the parish, a highhanded assertion of power. Photos of Holy Trinity will follow with a brief history of the parish. Next, photos of St. Mary's parish will be provided with a concise description of its history. Bishop Tylka has so far designated it as the "primary site." Finally, photos of Historic St. Patrick parish will follow with a brief account of its history. Historic St. Patrick is Holy Trinity's sister parish. In the bishop's proposal it is designated as the "secondary site."

### **HOLY TRINITY PARISH:**



Photo taken from the choir loft.



The front of the church which faces north. Photo taken facing south from the parish parking lot located across Chestnut Street.



Finished basement, elevator accessible.



Bridal room in basement.



Parish center with parking lot, across Main Street, east of the church.



Photo taken facing east with two additional parking lots. One where the photographer is standing and the other just west of the church.





Parking lot behind the rectory just south of the church. Parking lot east of the church across Main Street.



The rectory faces east on Main Street and is attached to the church to the north.

Taken from the front steps of the church facing north across Chestnut Street looking onto the parish parking lot.

Holy Trinity church and rectory are listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1983. Consequently, we the people of the United States, through our federal government, have deemed Holy Trinity church worthy of preservation for its historical significance or “great artistic value.” Moreover, by being on the National Register our church may qualify for tax incentives to continue to preserve and maintain the church.

Not counting Bishop’s Tylka’s current proposal to physically destroy or sell off Holy Trinity Church, two prior events did result in its destruction. The first physical annihilation occurred in 1869, just as the first continental railroad was opening to the west. In that year, Holy Trinity Church was destroyed by a tornado before it was completed. Nevertheless, the hearty, faithful, and determined parishioners of the day reconstructed the church.

The second event that resulted in our church’s physical ruin came in 1932, during the Great Depression. In that year, Holy Trinity Church was obliterated by a fire. Yet, the unrelenting parishioners dealing with the horrible effects of the depression still found enough strength, resources, and time to rebuild the church. Currently, this beautiful, tall, magnificent, Art-Deco house of worship towers above all other buildings leading to and from downtown Bloomington. At night, with its well illuminated cross fixed atop its towering steeple, an observer is hard pressed to doubt the true beauty of this Catholic Church. Moreover, the parish regularly meets its operating expenses. In fact, the church has 2.1 million dollars in a development loan fund.

Nevertheless, after fronting the deceptive label of “growing disciples,” Bishop Tylka’s plan of action is to close the large cathedral-styled church, handicapped accessible, one hundred yards long, with an attached rectory, ample parking with six available parking lots, a finished basement, and a beautiful parish center. Of these three Bloomington parishes, Holy Trinity is located furthest east where most growth and expansion are possible. The advantages of keeping Holy Trinity open are too numerous to mention in this article; however, a copy of the parishioners’ petition to the bishop can be obtained by contacting the parish center. Additionally, I incorporate by reference the petition into this pamphlet.

The parish's petition document goes into better detail by listing all the objective facts as to why closing Holy Trinity parish's facilities would be an obvious desertion of Bishop Tylka's duty to the Catholic Diocese of Peoria.

## ST. MARY'S PARISH



From back of Church.



From south looking north across Mason Street.



From east looking west near 2<sup>nd</sup> parking lot across Mason Street.



Looking southwest, the red building west of the church is St. Mary's grade school.



Grade school looking north across Jackson Street (Franciscan Way).



Looking north across Taylor Street through the playground at the grade school.

In the year 1869, the same year that Holy Trinity church was destroyed by a tornado and just six years after the assassination of President Lincoln, the parishioners of St. Mary's built a small frame church. In 1881, ten years after the Chicago fire, the Franciscan Friars of Cincinnati, Ohio, were placed in charge of St. Mary's. In 1886, the present Gothic church was built. The church was redecorated in 1944-45. In 1962, while our nation's first catholic president, John F. Kennedy, was in office, the church was completely remodeled. In 1996, a \$250,000 interior renovation was made to the 110-year-old church. That same year, the Most Reverend John J. Myers rededicated the church. As recently as 2016, eight years ago, the Franciscans returned to Cincinnati, and the parish was placed under the care of the Diocese of Peoria. St. Mary's grade school is located west of their church, built by the Franciscan Friars whereas Holy Trinity and St. Patrick's parishes built and support Holy Trinity Elementary School, now known as Corpus Christi. The seating capacity of St. Mary's is significantly less than Holy Trinity. As the proposed "primary site," where all the parishioners from the three parishes are to gather, the two parking lots contain a fraction of the space available in the six available parking lots at Holy Trinity.

**HISTORIC ST. PATRICK PARISH**



From the choir loft.



From southeast looking northwest across West Locust Street. The rectory is located east of the church.



Looking east through the parking lot. Looking northeast at parish center. Looking north, across West Locust Street at the parish rectory.



Photo taken from the choir loft.



Looking at the church from east to west across the parking lot.

The church originally opened in 1883, just two years after St. Mary's Church was built. Historic St. Patrick's rectory is located to the east of the church. There is a small parking lot and parish center east of the rectory. East of the parking lot is Historic St. Patrick's parish center. The church's seating capacity is similar to St. Mary's, but nothing compared to the substantial number of pews available in Holy Trinity Church. Akin to Holy Trinity parish, Historic St. Patrick parish is financially sound. The parish regularly meets its operation expenses. The parish has \$815,000 in a development loan fund.

## THE CHURCH'S UNIVERSALITY:



The Catholic Church is a multinational corporation. It exists in a variety of the world's cultures. Some countries are ruled by socialists and authoritarian governments like communist China. In the United States we enjoy a high degree of freedom in economic, political, and social affairs. Interestingly, in China, the communist party, not Pope Francis, installed Bishop John Peng Weizhao as an "auxiliary bishop of Jiangxi,' a diocese that is not recognized by the Vatican," (see *National Catholic Register, July 30 -August 12, 2023, Pope Francis Confirms Shanghai Bishop Appointed in Violation of China Deal, pg. 5,*). Consequently, it could be argued, that the Pope has surrendered too much of the Church's authority to China's communist party. However, in the United States, there is a good argument that the opposite is true, that in temporal affairs, the laity has surrendered too much of their power to the bishop. Christ endowed the Pope and the Church's shepherds with the charism (a special grace) of infallibility; however, only in matters of faith and morals. (*Catechism, 890*) Likewise, laypeople are also entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their baptism and confirmation. Members of the laity have the right and duty, individually or grouped in association, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by our fellow men throughout the earth. (*Catechism, 900*) The decision to either consolidate two parishes or to close a parish which is financially healthy should not be left entirely to the bishop. Every monetary action is a gamble with unpredictable outcomes. To have one non-democratically chosen leader making final fiscal decisions is both unwise and unfair. Parish priests and parishioners are



more knowledgeable in local economic, political, and social matters. Consequently, the local parish priest and parishioners, not the bishop, are typically better equipped to collaborate and successfully manage such concerns.

#### **EXHIBIT A: THE CLOSING OF ST. ADALBERT'S CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHICAGO:**



The closing of St. Adalbert Church in Chicago's old Polish community is an example of the many difficult issues that can surface when trying to sell a big church. The church is located on 17<sup>th</sup> Street between Paulina Street and Ashland Avenue. The church is named after St. Adalbert of Prague. In June 2019, pursuant to the orders of the archdiocese, St. Adalbert merged into St. Paul's parish. In 2019, the last Mass was celebrated in the cathedral-style church. According to Chicago Cardinal Blasé Cupich, there is only one serious contender interested in purchasing St. Adalbert. That individual is Daniel Davidson. In 2003, Mr. Davidson purchased a synagogue in Miami, Florida. The synagogue is now called "Temple House." Currently used as an event venue, the Temple House hosts same-sex weddings and was the site of a reported "simulated orgy." The sale to Mr. Davidson has not yet been finalized. Former parishioners and St. Adalbert community members have made bids to buy the church. Their bids were rejected, given how much debt St. Paul's has accrued in maintaining the church.

Cardinal Blase Cupich's decision to close St. Adalbert and place the church up for sale has resulted in much resistance from parishioners. On Sundays, many people gather outside of Holy Name Cathedral to protest. Last November, five protesters were arrested when their beloved Pieta statue was removed from St. Adalbert's church. Cardinal Cupich has attempted to downplay the Archdiocese of Chicago's involvement. In a Memorial Day weekend video, Cardinal Cupich advised that concerned parties should speak with St. Paul's priest. Later, he added that St. Paul's parish, not the Archdiocese of Chicago, owns the St. Adalbert property. Yet, when a reporter from the National Catholic Register called St. Paul's, a parish representative said that all questions related to the sale of the St. Adalbert property would need to be directed to the Archdiocese of Chicago's Real Estate Office.

Julie Sawicki with The Society of St. Adalbert said: "The Catholic Church is plagued with issues and this lack of reverence for our sacred spaces is yet another reason that the faithful have turned away from the Catholic Church in droves." (see *National Catholic Register*, July 16, 2023, *Pending Sale of Chicago Church Raises Concerns*, pg. 2).

## HOW THE CHURCH OPERATES IN GERMANY:

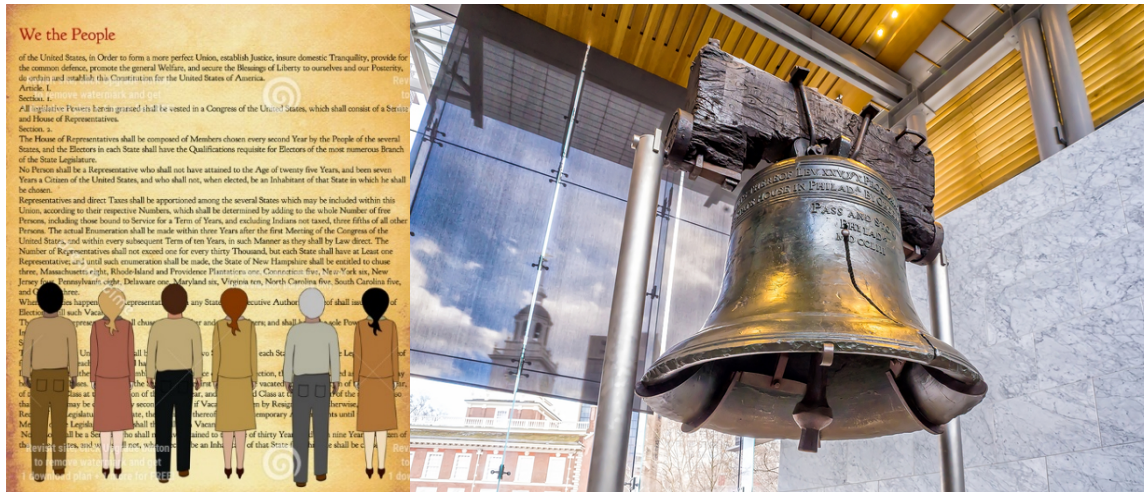


There seems to be no boiler plate business plan or operating procedures that the Church follows in every country where it exists. For example, in Germany, the state mandates that religious organizations are funded by their members. Consequently, by law, working Catholics in Germany are required to pay a church tax that amounts to an additional 8%-9% of what they already pay in income taxes. When Germans are baptized Catholic, they are registered as such with their local government. This church tax is automatically withdrawn from individuals' monthly income by the state and given to their diocese. Additionally, people pay a small handling fee to the state. *(see National Catholic Register, July 16, 2023, Catholic Exodus in Germany: What It Means, pg.12)*

Accordingly, the only way around paying the church tax is to quit your affiliation with the Church. To accomplish disaffiliation, one must go before a local government magistrate and publicly declare that he or she is no longer Catholic. According to the German bishops, reinforced with a 2012 decree, the move does not undo one's baptism, but it does technically make anyone who does it ineligible to receive the Eucharist, to get married in the Church, and to receive

other sacraments. For a disaffiliated Catholic, a funeral Mass is out of the question. Among German Catholics, disaffiliating from the Church is widely described as a “de facto self-excommunication.” Nevertheless, German Catholics are leaving in droves. Why? According to the German Bishops’ Conference (DBK), most are leaving because they do not want to keep paying for a religious entity that either they no longer trust or that represents a faith that they no longer believe or practice. *(see National Catholic Register, July 16, 2023, Catholic Exodus in Germany: What It Means, pg.12)*

## U.S. CITIZENS TRUST DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE:

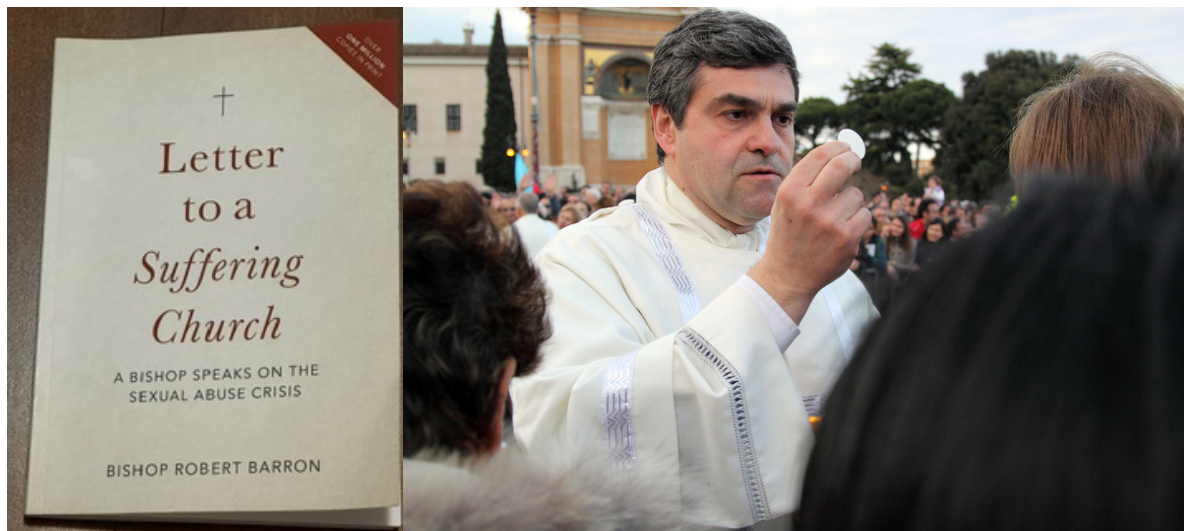


Catholics living in the United States understand and appreciate the blessings of living in a representative democracy. Among its many advantages include the following civil liberties or rights: (1) self-determination, (2) religious freedom; (3) free speech; (4) peaceful assembly; and (5) a free press. Americans generally despise dictators and authoritarian rulers. We also believe it quite unjust to discriminate against women. Additionally, United States Catholics believe in procedural due process of the law, set out in the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868. An example of this “due process” is in criminal cases, all defendants are presumed innocent and are to be represented by counsel. Furthermore, citizens of all denominations are secure in their property by the Fourth Amendment which protects them from “unreasonable searches and seizures” by the government. A criminal defendant is guaranteed both a speedy trial and a trial by jury. These two rights are enshrined in the Sixth Amendment of our constitution. All pre-trial hearings, and the trial itself, are held in courtrooms open to the public.

Citizens of the United States feel comfortable in their federal system of government, which gives the central government certain clearly defined limited powers, reserving the remaining authority to the states or the people. A belief in a system of “checks and balances,” which prevents any one person or institution from becoming too powerful, is embedded in our civil DNA. A point of interest is

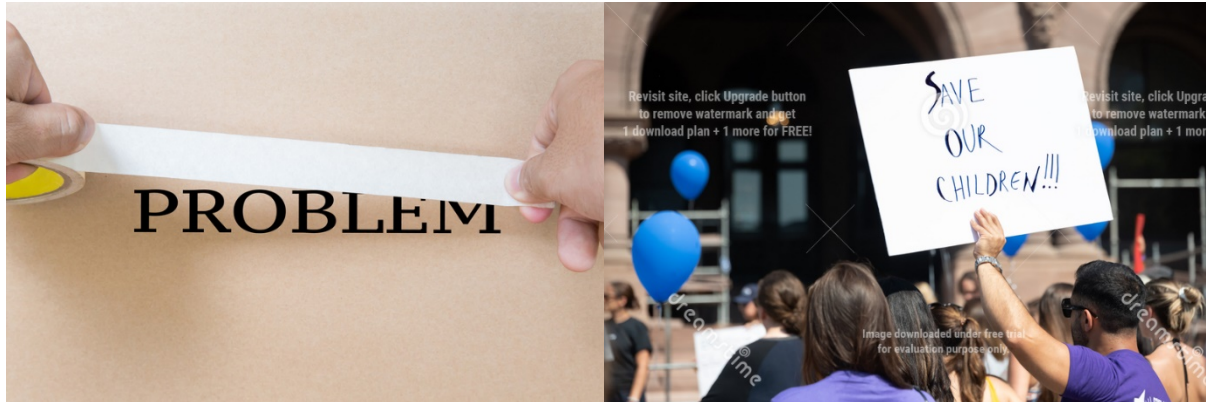
that in deciding on what formal title should be given to the office George Washington was first to occupy, the founding fathers chose “President of the United States” over other more imposing options like, “His Highness.” (see *To Rescue The Constitution – George Washington and the Fragile American Experiment* by Bret Baier with Catherine Whitney, HarperCollins Pub., 2023, pgs. 245-46)

### **BISHOP ROBERT BARRON’S CHALLENGE:**



My objective in writing this *Letter to the Empirical Bishops* is to accept Bishop Robert Barron’s challenge issued in his excellent little book, *Letter to a Suffering Church, A Bishop Speaks on the Sexual Abuse Crisis*. Bishop Barron’s book was published in 2019 by Word on Fire Catholic Ministries. Bishop Barron is the bishop of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota. The bishop has challenged the laity to stay in the Church and fight, regardless of our feelings of betrayal by some clergymen regarding the sex-abuse scandal. I agree with Bishop Barron, the best choice is to stay Catholic and fight. Honestly, as a conservative traditional Catholic, I have never entertained the thought of leaving the Church for the same reasons Bishop Barron enumerated in his afore-mentioned book. On the top of my list is my ability to receive the Eucharist –an encounter that the Second Vatican Council described as “the source and summit of the Christian life.” Christ suffered and died on the cross to afford me this privilege.

## “THE DALLAS CHARTER NEEDS A REDO:”



The United States Conference of Bishops' (USCCB) Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People also known as the Dallas Charter was established in 2002, more than 20 years ago. However, those protocols were meant to only address the Church's sex-abuse scandal. At that time, the U.S. Catholic Bishops called upon former Oklahoma governor Frank Keating to lead a lay-run National Review Board to investigate the scandal. The next year, in 2003, Governor Keating, a Catholic and former criminal prosecutor, resigned out of frustration and disgust. The former governor compared the Catholic bishops to the mafia.

In 2002, the bishops failed to identify an underlying problem. Most culprits were not pedophiles but homosexual predators targeting minors and other men. More importantly, it appears that the "Lavender Mafia" is still alive and flourishing among bishops and priests. *(see National Catholic Register, Advent 2023, "The Dallas Charter Needs A Redo After 20 Years" or at, The Dallas Charter Needs a Redo After 20 Years, National Catholic Register (ncregister.com))*

Janet E. Smith, the author of the above-cited article from the National Catholic Register, is an intense reader on the topic of the Church's sexual-abuse scandal. Additionally, she works with victims, whistleblowers, falsely accused priests, and activists. Her solution is that "a new charter should be written by a commission made up of laity, as well as priests and bishops, to make certain that

all forms of abuse are covered, that the rights of priests are fully protected, that victims receive good pastoral care from the Church, and that bishops are made truly accountable for the abuse they engage in and for the related cover-up.” (see *National Catholic Register, Advent 2023, “The Dallas Charter Needs a Redo After 20 Years”* or at, *The Dallas Charter Needs a Redo After 20 Years, National Catholic Register (ncregister.com)*)

### **ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL KWAME RAOUL’S 2023 REPORT:**



On Tuesday, May 23, 2023, Illinois Attorney General, Kwame Raoul, released his report on the extent of the Church’s sex-abuse scandal in multiple dioceses in Illinois. According to the Attorney General’s report, more than 450 Catholic clergymen abused nearly 2,000 children across all the dioceses in Illinois. The search covered a period of almost 90 years. The investigation also uncovered 149 alleged individual perpetrators who were previously not disclosed. The report identified the number of alleged abusive clerics in each of the following dioceses: (1) 275 in the Archdiocese of Chicago, (2) 43 in the Diocese of Belleville, (3) 69 in the Diocese of Joliet, (4) 51 in the Diocese of Peoria, (5) 24 in the Diocese of Rockford and (6) 32 in the Diocese of Springfield. Some of the claimed abusers worked in multiple dioceses, resulting in a total of 451 accused perpetrators. (see *Report on Catholic Clergy Child Sex Abuse in Illinois (illinoisattorneygeneral.gov)*).



## THE PROPOSAL: IMPLEMENT POPE FRANCIS' CO-RESPONSIBILITY PLAN FOR GOVERNANCE:



Consequently, I am proposing that, in each diocese, representatives of the laity, priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers, be elected by their separate groups to assemble at a specific location, date and time to meet with representatives of the bishops to draft a governing document which would reflect Pope Francis' co-responsibility theology of governance. His is a program which will help curb the potential or current (depending on your diocese) abuses that the above-mentioned parish groups are (or may be) experiencing at the hands of their bishop. The abuses, among others, allege to involve the following: (1) financial abuse, (2) gender-based discrimination; (3) silencing criticism by single-handedly shutting down religious publications, like the Catholic Post in the diocese of Peoria, Illinois, and (4) the lack of a just "procedural due process of law" involving dispute resolutions. Many Catholics feel excluded in the decision-making process of the Church. They simply do not respect or trust the process. I agree with the popular saying: "never push a loyal person to the point where they no longer care."

## POPE FRANCIS FAVORS INCREASED LAY DECISION-MAKING AND BISHOP EVALUATIONS:



Pope Francis' Synod on Synodality is a term which means "journeying together." This synod should not be confused with the Church in Germany's controversial Synodal Way which began in 2019. The German Synodal Way is promoting radical Church teaching related to governance, sexuality, and ordained ministry.

At last October's first session of his Synod, religious sisters and laywomen played a heightened role for the first time at a synodal assembly. The full participation of these non-bishop members was generally welcomed by the assembly. Our 87-year-old Pontiff is calling for greater "co-responsibility" among all believers. "This is the approach of Jesus, to create spaces for everyone so that no one feels excluded," said Cardinal Mario Grech, head of the Secretariat for the Synod. Among Pope Francis' new proposals is to increase lay decision-making and to create processes to evaluate bishops' performance of their ministries. A follow-up meeting will take place in October of this year, 2024. Pope Francis initiated the synodal process in 2021. (*see, National Catholic Register, Nov. 19- Dec. 2, 2023, pg. 7*)

On October 28, 2023, the Synod of Bishops released its summary report, "A Synodal Church in Mission." The term "synodality" is synonymous with "baptismal." The document emphasizes that, by virtue of our baptism, the laity are called to contribute to the mission of the Church. The biblical idea of the priesthood of the baptized enables the laity to make spiritual sacrifices that build

up the one body and have a vote in, for example, whether the local bishop should, by his sole decree, close a financially viable parish. Hopefully, one fruit of the synodal process will be a “heightened awareness of our identity as the faithful “People of God” who are “called to differentiated co-responsibility” exercised across a variety of “charisms, vocations and ministries.” This co-responsibility for mission logically would include co-responsibility for governance. (see *National Catholic Register*, December 3-16, 2023, *Unpacking the Theology of Synodality*, pgs. 7 & 8)

### THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY:



First, I believe Bishop Tylka’s “growing disciples” proposal is at odds with the Church’s teaching concerning the “the principle of *subsidiarity*.” “A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with the view of the common good.” (*Catechism 1883*)

In the United States, excessive intervention by the bishop, in a parish’s day-to-day affairs is both inefficient and tramples on the laypeople’s ability to engage “in temporal affairs and to direct them according to God’s will...” (*Catechism 898*) Nevertheless, who can be against “growing disciples”? We would hope no one would be. However, the title “growing disciples” is opposite in substance to what

the name means in our diocese. For various reasons, by proposing to close Holy Trinity parish, I believe the program will accomplish the opposite of what its name implies.

### THE SIN OF CLERICALISM:



Clericalism is a sin committed by a “belief that priests and bishops should have prerogatives, privileges and entitlements, and that they should be treated as nobility with a clout and authority that demands deference and obedience.” (see: *National Catholic Register, November 19, Priestliness, Not Clericalism pg. 10*) The term also applies to an excessive intrusion of the Church into political and cultural matters. During the recently completed Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis often reminded those in attendance of this cancer of clericalism is obviously prevalent in the Church. Considering Holy Trinity’s financial viability, it seems obvious that Bishop Tylka is committing an excessive intrusion into Holy Trinity’s affairs by shutting it down resulting in a gross and obvious financial mismanagement of the diocese. Any person who believes that Bishop Tylka is entitled to physically destroy Holy Trinity Church, by his own decree, might want to revisit the definition of the sin of clericalism.

## THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL:



Second, I am concerned that Bishop Tylka’s proposal stands at odds with the annual spring pledge made by the diocese to our parishioners via the Annual Diocesan Appeal (ADA) established in 1986 by former Bishop Edward W. O’Rourke. The plan was formerly called the Annual Stewardship Appeal. The program was designed to allow the diocese to continue its valuable services *“while having a minimal effect upon parish incomes” (emphasis added)*. As stated on the diocese’s website, *“While the work of Christ is done chiefly in the parishes, there are many tasks which require the administration and efforts of the larger Church, the Diocese.”* More importantly, articulated on the website is the purpose of the appeal which *“is to provide revenue for the centrally-funded apostolates and agencies and to provide an opportunity for the parish to raise additional revenue” (emphasis added)*. Another statement on the website concerning the ADA reads: *“In addition, any money that is paid over the Parish’s goal is returned to the parish for its own programs and services as extraordinary income.” (emphasis added)*. (See Catholic Diocese of Peoria ADA – Catholic Diocese of Peoria ([cdop.org](http://cdop.org))) As we know, discipleship calls us to more than membership; it calls us to active stewardship. Holy Trinity parishioners have always generously and loyally pledged a portion of their “first fruits” of material

treasure to support the operation and the ministry of both the Diocese of Peoria and their parish. With Holy Trinity parish closing, the parishioners lose their promised “*extraordinary income*” which can no longer be used to financially contribute to support any of their current programs or ministries including their grade school, Corpus Christi, or their high school, Central Catholic. In its commentary on the seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) commandment, thou shall not steal, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “*promises must be kept and contracts strictly observed to the extent that the commitments made in them are morally just....all contracts must be agreed to and executed in good faith.*” (Catechism 2410) I am not arguing that a bishop, at the present time, cannot for the common good of the diocese, close a parish that becomes financially unsustainable; however, this is not the case with Holy Trinity Parish. Holy Trinity Parish is financially healthy, meeting its operating expenses.

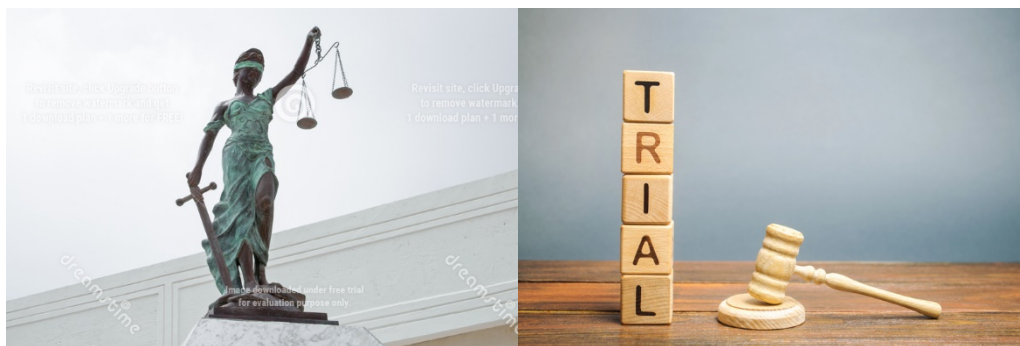
#### **GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE CHURCH:**



One reason for a lack of interest in joining or remaining in the Catholic Church is that women have long suffered gender discrimination. This allegation against the Church can be proven by just one illustration. Bishop Tylka claims that he has the unchecked power to close Holy Trinity parish, even if the parish is financially sustainable. Seemingly, bishops possess absolute powers not only in

matters of faith and morals, but in issues concerning secular affairs. Since only a man can become a priest, it follows that only a man can become a bishop. Consequently, only men in the Church are bestowed with absolute powers. For this reason, the Church discriminates against women because, paradoxically, they do not have the authority to reign with absolute power. However, there is an obvious democratic solution to this two-fold problem of absolute power and gender discrimination. The Church could decree that, if a parish is financially viable it can only be closed by a majority vote of the whole parish. This would justifiably deny the bishop of one of his abusive, unchecked, and absolute powers. (*emphasis added*) Parish councils are routinely comprised of both men and women who are voted on to the council by fellow parishioners. In fact, the elected president of the parish council may be a woman. Likewise, most of the council members may consist of women. Each council member would have one vote in deciding any matter that comes up before the council, eliminating gender discrimination and the tyrannical idea of a bishop's power of absolute rule.

### **THE CHURCH'S QUESTIONABLE DUE PROCESS OF LAW:**



American Catholics are puzzled when they learn about the sudden demise of a notable clergyman. For example, why was pro-life leader Father Frank Pavone removed from the priesthood? In 2022, his dismissal from the clergy was both surprising and sudden. Apparently, he did nothing wrong, other than upset the hierarchy. Nevertheless, Frank Pavone is still a respected national leader in the pro-life movement. Father Pavone's sudden elimination from the priesthood begs the question of what meaningful procedural rights were afforded him, if any? (See

*Abortion – Pro Life - Pro-Life Leader Frank A. Pavone (priestsforlife.org))* Two other members of the clergy have recently been removed or demoted under questionable circumstances of procedural due process: (1) Bishop Joseph Strickland from the Diocese of Tyler in Texas, was removed as bishop on November 11, 2022, and (2) Cardinal Raymond Burke, who on December 1, 2023, had his privileges removed, including his apartment in Rome and his salary. (see *National Catholic Register, December 3 - 16, 2023, Searching for Answers: Why Was Bishop Joseph Strickland Removed?, pg. 1* and *National Catholic Register, December 17-30, 2023, Reports: Cardinal Raymond Burke To Have His Privileges Revoked, pg. 7*) It is important to make clear that neither the bishop nor cardinal, like Father Pavone, have been suspected of any crimes. The possibility of suddenly being evicted from your apartment and losing your salary would make one think twice before speaking his mind or following his conscience.

If any rights are allotted to a faulted member of the clergy, they seem to fall well below the lofty standards set in the United States. This apparent absence of “due process of law” diminishes the degree of public trust the laity has in the Church. This lack in public confidence may be one reason young men do not seriously consider the priesthood. How comfortable is it for a candidate for the priesthood, educated in United States civics and government, to be surrounded by superiors who subscribe to rules of unchecked, absolute power. Likewise, this distrust in “the system” of Catholic church governance may account for why many people do not seriously entertain the idea of becoming Catholic.



## A FRUSTRATED, DISENFRANCHISED LAITY:



I suspect that for numerous truth-seeking Catholics, the problem with the rapid decline in Church membership lies not so much in the theology but in the structure of Church governance. Down deep in our hearts we realize that, although the bishops claim they serve us; we reason otherwise. If the bishops in fact worked for us, they would not need absolute and unchecked powers. Two things that trouble us are: first, we did not vote for our bishop and second, we did not hire him. Additionally, we have no power to fire or impeach him.

## SHOULD WE DEFUND BISHOP TYLKA'S ANNUAL DIOCESAN APPEAL?



I am sure that if I were a family member of a child sexually abused by one of the allegedly fifty-one (51) clergymen, from the Diocese of Peoria, identified by Attorney General Kwame Raoul, I would think twice before contributing to the next annual diocesan appeal (ADA). On the other hand, what should Holy Trinity parishioners do if Bishop Tylka shuts down our financially healthy church? Should we respond as our forefathers did when the British parliament enacted the intolerable acts after the Boston Tea Party in 1773? After parliament levied oppressive taxes on the colonists, without their consent, many citizens of the thirteen colonies simply boycotted British goods. Should we view the unnecessary closing of Holy Trinity parish as an intolerable act? Nevertheless, is it a good idea to stop funding the ADA?

Ed Condon, a canon lawyer, and journalist, believes that this solution might be counterproductive. He believes that in the end the bishop will keep his house and car, while deserving charities and programs will suffer. Nevertheless, Mr. Condon said in an interview during a Catholic Answers podcast, "Catholics have a legal right in canon law to make known their opinion on matters that they have a stake in, including matters of Church governance. That it is not a question that we have to just sit there quietly and pay, pray and obey. We are all living members of the same Body of Christ." (See, Catholic Answers Podcast interview with canon lawyer Ed Condon, *Is Tithing Just a Tax?* 4/12/21)

## COULD THE ACT OF CLOSING HOLY TRINITY PARISH BE CONSIDERED A CRIMINAL ACT IN ILLINOIS?



Arguably, the unnecessary closing of Holy Trinity parish, with the intent to redirect our funds elsewhere, in violation of a promise (contract), by the terms of the ADA, made to the parishioners by the bishop could be viewed as theft. As such, the only person claiming to have absolute authority to commit such an act, Bishop Tylka, would obviously be the defendant. Under Illinois law, there are three elements to the crime of theft. A person commits theft by (1) knowingly taking or obtaining control over another's property, (2) without authorization, and (3) with the intent to permanently deprive the owner of their property. (see, 720 Ill Comp. Stat, Section 5/16-1(a) (2023))

In a criminal case, the parishioners would not be the petitioners in the case. The petitioner would be The People of the State of Illinois against Bishop Luis Tylka, the defendant. Therefore, the parishioners would not be a party in the case, only witnesses who could be subpoenaed to testify for either the state or the defendant, Bishop Tylka.

What county would have venue over the bishop's case is an issue. A proper venue can lie in more than one county. Arguably, the authority to bring the case could include two different State's Attorneys' offices: (1) the State's Attorneys' Office in Bloomington, McLean County, where Holy Trinity parish (the victim) is located, or (2) the State's Attorney's Office in Peoria, Peoria County, where the

defendant, Bishop Tylka and his diocesan offices are located. (see, 720 Ill Comp. Stat, Section 5/1-6(b) (2023))

Penalties for theft in Illinois are assessed according to the value of the property or services stolen, as well as the circumstances involved in the theft. For example, theft of property exceeding \$10,000 and not exceeding \$100,000 in value is a Class 1 felony if the theft was committed in a school or place of worship. (see, 720 Ill Comp. Stat, Section 5/16 -1 (b) (5.1) (2023)) A Class 1 conviction carries a sentence of 4 to 15 years in prison, a fine of up to \$25,000, and payment of restitution for losses associated with the theft. (see, 730 Ill Comp. Stat, Section 5/5-4.5-30 (a) (2023)) Other more serious theft crimes, involving higher property values (Class X Felonies), have jail sentences that include a minimum prison term of six (6) and maximum term of thirty (30) years. In these cases, the offender is not eligible for probation. (see, 730 Ill Comp. Stat, Section 5/5-4.5-25) (2023)

**CONCLUSION:**



The people should not have an adversarial relationship with their bishop. More democracy is needed in the day-to-day operations of the Church. God’s gift to the laity is their bishop. Likewise, the faithful are God’s gift to the bishop, the treasure of the Church entrusted to him. We do not just live with one another; we live for one another. Both bishop and clergy must recognize and respect each other’s special graces and stay in their own lanes. We have never been fearful of challenging times. Like our ancestors who physically rebuilt two churches, our

“co-responsibility” to them and future generations is to help gather new disciples. We must not quit. Our duty is to stay and fight for one another.

Father Jeffrey Stirniman, the pastor of Holy Trinity Church, has assembled an excellent staff of lay employees and advisors. The parish has many competent lay professional volunteers who contribute to the parish’s strategy of co-responsibility. Collectively, Holy Trinity possesses many God-given talents. We do not want to hide our talents in the ground. (*Matthew 25: 14-30*) On the contrary, we wish them to multiply. We are not people willing to throw in the towel. Rather, we are inspired by what Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote in his poem, Ulysses:

“Though much is taken, much abides;  
and though  
We are not that strength which in  
Old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that which we  
are, we are,  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong  
in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to  
yield.”