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Please Don't Close Our Beautiful Churches!

On the front page of the 12 July issue of *The Wanderer* (America's oldest weekly newspaper expressing a traditionalist Roman Catholic point of view, which was founded and is still operated by laymen) there is a beautiful color photograph of St. Adalbert's Polish Roman Catholic Church. In 1907, Pope Pius X declared that anyone who prays in St. Adalbert's receives the same spiritual favors as those granted by the Holy Father in the Vatican Basilica.

This is why St. Adalbert's, the second oldest Polish Roman Catholic parish in the Queen City, is known as Buffalo's Polish Roman Catholic Basilica. Bishop Edward U. Kmiec, who is a Polish American, recently ordered the closing of Buffalo's Polish Basilica. His Excellency also ordered St. Adalbert's parishioners to register at St. John Kanty Parish, and thereby merge with that parish.

According to Sister Regina Murphy, SSMN, who serves the Diocese of Buffalo as director of research and planning, a total of 41 parishes will be merged, linked, or closed with a total of 19 remaining when the restructuring described in the Diocese's strategic plan, "Journey in Faith and Grace", is completed. Although St. Adalbert's is but one of many Polish Roman Catholic parish churches scheduled to be closed (following the proposed mergers only 6 of the 14 parishes in the Central Buffalo Vicariate will remain); opposition to Bishop Kmiec's plan for the Diocese's future is led by St. Adalbert's parish council.

At least 100 faithful, most of whom are registered at St. Adalbert's and others at parishes in Niagara Falls, Lackawanna, and Black Rock, overwhelmingly voted, on 7 July at the Adam Mickiewicz Literary and Dramatic Circle, to fight the closings and mergers ordered by Bishop Kmiec. "For your freedom and ours" was their rallying cry.

Mr. Stanley Kowalski, who serves as president of St. Adalbert's parish council presented information at this meeting to show that there was but the appearance, not the substance, of decision making by the laity in the two years' process of "Journey in Faith and Grace". Kowalski prudently made back-up arrangements for this meeting at the Adam Mickiewicz hall because he correctly anticipated that Rev. Tadeusz Bocianowski would not allow this insurrectionary meeting to take place on St. Adalbert's parish property — which is owned by the Diocese and not by the Polish people who contribute their hard earned money to pay for this beautiful church.

At the meeting, the official reason why "Journey in Faith and Grace" was launched, to adapt the Diocese of Buffalo today to bleak demographic projections that foresee in 2015 far fewer priests and fewer regular churchgoers, was subjected to critical scrutiny. There was discussion about holding a "one penny Sunday" — the faithful would contribute only one cent to register their dismay with Bishop Kmiec. Why does Bishop Kmiec want to put so much Church property on the market now? Did "Journey in Faith and Grace" omit information about why the Diocese needs to raise so much money today, supposedly to prepare for what is expected to happen in 2015?

Others at the meeting wondered why Bishop Kmiec does not invite young Polish priests who are willing to come to Buffalo to turn around the shortage of priests. Recently, the Pauline Fathers managed to re-invigorate Corpus Cristi parish, located in a tough section of Buffalo. Why can not the same be done, with priests from Poland, throughout the Diocese today?

On 13 July, St. Adalbert's parish council mailed a letter to the Vatican to appeal Bishop Kmiec's decision to close Buffalo's Polish Basilica.

Buffalo's Common Council recently passed a resolution calling on the Diocese of Buffalo to observe the requirements of good ecclesiastical citizenship. This resolution registers the Common Council's apprehension, based on recent past experience, that Church property put up for sale by the Diocese will become eyesores and hazards which will have to be demolished at tax payers expense.

Church of the Transfiguration parish, which the Diocese sold to a real estate developer in 1993, who has allowed this property to deteriorate, is a concrete cautionary example which makes the Common Council wonder if the Diocese has plans to prevent the property now scheduled for sale from becoming hazards and eyesores.

The Diocese agreed to send an official to the 10 July Common Council meeting to answer questions about how "Journey in Faith and Grace" will preclude more situations like the continuing eyesore at the former Church of the Transfiguration. At the last minute, the Diocese claimed a scheduling conflict and did not send an official to the 10 July meeting in order to respond to the Common Council's concerns as expressed in the following Resolution.

- John D. Czop