

Am-Pol Eagle

Vol. 48 No. 38

Thursday June 7, 2007

The Journey that needs a compass

The viewpoint of

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Part II

Sister Regina Murphy must go but won't be going anywhere. Readers of the Am-Pol Eagle can read the response of the Diocese of Buffalo to Part I of this viewpoint on pages 2 and 3 of this edition. And while it is clear the troops have rallied around Sister Regina Murphy, I'm not done telling my story about my journey into the Journey of Faith and Grace. First another look at the "Journey" and then an explanation of why I've done it.

The frustrated man

I was honestly surprised by it. A rousing round of applause at the May 29 Journey in Faith and Grace vicariate level meeting in Niagara Falls. Was it for a job well done? No. "The proposal that came back from the commission, everything changed," the gentleman said. "I feel I've wasted a year of my time of going to parish groups, cluster groups, the original vicariate meetings when the commission changed everything. Why doesn't the commission just put the proposal together and say here this is it?"

That's what garnered applause from the members of the vicariate meeting.

Sr. Regina then said nothing had changed even though the gentleman just noted that all their decisions were based on 7 priests for the vicariate and suddenly they had 9 and not more than 5 minutes earlier it was mentioned that Holy Trinity, not St. Stanislaus Kostka was the proposed site for the East Side cluster. Also, St. Bernard's in Youngstown wasn't proposed to exist as an independent parish, but now it was.

Then she continued saying "Does St. Bernard's Parish in Youngstown feel it should close?" It was as if to say if you don't like what we gave you we'll take it away. At one point she even said the commission had given the vicariate "more than you asked for." Did they really ask to close or rather merge ten parishes?

The woman from Ascension

"I am a parishioner of Ascension parish and I am very frustrated this evening... First of all our cluster came to an original agreement some time ago that was rejected. Anything that the diocese imposes on us now is not coming from our city representatives. It is being imposed. I share that gentleman's feelings that the work we did didn't count for much."

"I am personally very troubled that the church is very willing to move a church, move a parish out of the poorest section of town. I can tell you what the demographics will be in those cities in another 5 years and they will be worse and those are the people who will not be able to afford to drive to another city as the people from a more affluent parish can.

"And I think that the church is leaving the poorest neighborhoods and I find that more than distasteful. I find it unconscionable to close one of the oldest parishes in North Tonawanda. I feel it is a travesty to the city itself which is predominately Catholic.... You say this was not easy - that doesn't begin to cover it,"

Her final comment: "I think this is a debacle."

And, Sr. Regina's sympathetic response was: "Had the

commission made another decision I would say those views would be expressed by another parish."

During the course of the meeting Sister Regina noted the growth potential for St. Albert's because it bordered new development in Wheatfield but bemoaned the inner city stating: "North Tonawanda is not a lucrative suburbia. It has its problems."

So why bother? Several reasons.

First off, I do have an obligation to tell my readers what I know, when I can especially if the information has impact on their lives. If you're Roman Catholic and Polish American, this certainly fits the bill.

If a church like St. Casimir's in Kaisertown closes, for example, an important part of Polish-American history will be erased. The magnificent church visited by an even more magnificent man Cardinal Karol Wojtyta will only be remembered in photos.

Or the incredible "basilica" of St. Adalbert's Parish could never be built in Buffalo again. The toil and loyalty of the Poles who built it does matter. It matters a lot. We need to remember we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.

Like many things in Buffalo we sell it off or tear it down and then a couple decades later wish we had it back. Once these churches are gone, there is no getting them back.

Secondly, for years I served on the board of the Neighborhood Information Center and frequented Buffalo's East Side. In an area that every American should be ashamed of - one that looks like a third world country - I feel it is the last place the Catholic Church should bail out. These churches are symbols of hope. They stand like sentinels in drug infested neighborhoods and crime ridden streets saying God still lives here, whether it's Buffalo, NT or Niagara Falls.

Finally, I wrote this because I heard these stories about the journey and about parishes resorting to deceit, priests yelling at priests, confusion, distrust, apathy and resignation. It is a sad commentary about this process. It is a sad commentary about Roman Catholics of which I am one. I felt the Spirit inspired me to write "enough," "stop."

I've done that honestly.

One final note: To the priests that pulled our newspapers from their newsstands, please recycle.

Next week: *What two priests had to say.*