

PARISHES DON'T HAVE TO CLOSE: ONE VOICE FROM BOSTON

From the Editor: The eloquent and informative discussion of church closings below is by Sharon Harrington, an attorney who is a member of the parish of Saint Albert the Great in Weymouth, MA.

On September 1, 2004, St. Albert the Great was one of 82 parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston closed or soon to be closed under a reorganization plan implemented by Archbishop (now Cardinal) Sean O'Malley. St. Albert's was a thriving parish with no debt and a healthy bank account, that owned valuable real estate. After months of attempting in vain to negotiate with the Archdiocese, the people of St. Albert's decided to stage a vigil, remaining in their church and preventing its closure. Sharon Harrington was one of hundreds of parishioners who stayed in the church around the clock in shifts, held two prayer services every day, a Communion service on Sundays and other parish activities, as well as organizing with several other "suppressed" churches in the Archdiocese into a Council of Parishes to coordinated efforts.

Anyone who wishes to learn more about the closing and vigiling of St. Albert the Great can find information at www.boston.com/news/specials/last_rites. Letters and other materials in support of St. Albert the Great and other closing parishes can be found at <http://arcc-catholic-rights.net/>. Click on "Resources" and then see "Church Closings."

After ten long months of vigil, negotiation and finally re-assessment by the Meade-Eisner Commission, Saint Albert the Great re-opened, demonstrating what determined response can accomplish in the face of unilateral action by the hierarchy. A number of other closed and vigiling parishes were similarly re-opened

permanently or temporarily. Similar closings or threats of closings are occurring in dioceses all over the country.

What follows is a post Sharon sent to a private email list in January and which she has given *ARCC Light* permission to publish. We thank Sharon for her testimony and incisive analysis of what is one of the most painful issues facing American Catholics today.

Hi Friends,


In the spirit that it's easier to critique than to come up with ideas, I would like to offer some suggestions to consider for church closings. If your diocese hasn't been hit yet, it probably is coming in the future. As someone who is still working on the issue in the Boston area after starting on it in Jan. 04, let me offer my 2¢. Others who have been through it could offer their suggestions and experience.

As members of VOTE, we believe that lay people should have a meaningful voice and participation in these types of administrative, non-dogma or doctrine-type issues. We have a wealth of experience, knowledge, time, treasure and good will to share with OUR church. We should be at the table when the initial discussions take place, and our voices should be heard as well as those of the clergy, religious and hierarchy. "Many hands make light the work" and "Two (thousand or more) heads are better than one."

As the diocese of Santa Fe did, when faced with enormous judgments, each diocese should tell the people the whole truth – financial and otherwise – and enlist the wisdom of the entire people of God in the solution. Sure, it may be messy, but let me tell you vigils and protests and the uproar that many parishes in my diocese have had to go through, are messier – and a solution is still far away, I fear.

When the Administrator of Santa Fe went to his pastors, his parishes and his clergy and worked together with his people, they found a solution that worked. Santa Fe was

PESACH-PASSOVER-EASTER
 Slaves freed from bondage
 Eostre's spring-time feast
 reborn
 Tree of Torture and Death
 green with new leaves of
FAITH
 Despair birthing
HOPE
 Winter's ice of fear melted
 to feed thirsty roots sprouting
LOVE
 Ingrid Shafer



a relatively poor diocese compared to the enormous judgments, but the diocese sold off some of its non-parish property, parishes contributed what they could to the solution, and the judgments were paid in full. No parishes had to close, Mass attendance went up, and there was a two-fold increase in vocations!

They found a solution that worked, but more importantly, they worked TOGETHER and discovered much more about each other and their gifts and talents and their diocese GREW.

If the ordinaries would face their people in the parishes and deal with them as human beings, IN PERSON, it would go a long way. Isn't peace and smooth operation of the diocese a worthwhile goal? In Boston, a number of the vigils began when people were treated in an imperious, callous way at closing and had no way to directly contact our archbishop.

Regarding the priest shortage as an excuse to close parishes, many areas of the world share a pastor, or a group of priests assigned to a cluster of churches, while a deacon, religious or lay person serves as an administrator. Lay people as well as ordained deacons and religious have wonderful gifts to share with their parish communities. Canon law provides a number of solutions to the inability to have at least one priest assigned resident to a parish. And it recognizes parishes as the place where Catholics learn and grow in their faith with one another. These relationships build up gradually over time and should not be lightly thrown away.

There may be some parishes that are unable to continue. If that is truly the case, and the facts have been laid out for all to see, it will be so much easier for all to accept, knowing they have the real truth and they were able to participate in the decision and communicate directly with their ordinary. Closing churches should never be the first option.

Unfortunately, when the true facts of the diocese's situation are hidden, when the closure decisions are pre-ordained, when lay people feel that their role is for show and perfunctory only and the lay people who participated were hand-picked by the clergy and hierarchy, and when clerical "insiders'" politics affects the outcome (or is believed to affect the outcome), you may have a Boston-like result.

Additionally, part of the Boston result has not really registered – the large numbers of practicing Catholics (a dying breed?) who have stopped "practicing" when their parishes were locked and sold. Literature talks of a 1/3 "fall-away" after a parish closure. In Boston, we believe it has been much larger – closer to 90% or more. This is

not a way to "re-build the Church," this is a way to close down the Church. And we in Boston who have gone through this don't believe it has to happen this way. Boston area VOTF has a wealth of information to share on this topic, and a number of very knowledgeable leaders. The Boston "Council of Parishes," an outgrowth of the BVOTF summer meetings, does also. A number of other dioceses are facing or going through the experience now. We are useful resources for others who are facing this issue.

We hope you will be able to profit from our experience.

Sharon Harrington

PRESIDENTIAL REFLECTIONS *DER KAISER HAT RECHT!*



Robert Blair Kaiser
Photograph by Ingrid
Shafer 2005

First of all, Robert Blair Kaiser writes beautifully. He can spin a tale that grabs and keeps your attention. His book *A Church in Search of Itself* (Knopf, 2006, 261 pp. \$21.95 hardback) is not a scholarly book, but clearly is a work of scholarship. Kaiser has read broadly and deeply, interviewed and listened widely, observed and experienced much, all of which he has put into this fascinating distillation of contemporary Catholicism. The book presents a combination of Roman insider intrigue laid bare and analyses of burning issues of contemporary Catholicism and the world.

A Church in Search of Itself ostensibly began a half dozen years ago when Kaiser was given a publisher's advance so he could go to Rome to prepare for the passing of the papal mantle from Pope John Paul II to his successor. In retrospect, that advance should have been considerably larger than it was, for the longevity of JP-II was considerably longer than expected. The book is focused on six cardinals, five of whom represent the five continents: Europe, Africa, North America, South America, and Asia. The sixth is none other than Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, a.k.a., Pope Benedict XVI. In addition, Kaiser has chapters on Karol Wojtyla and three areas of contemporary crisis: the priesthood, social justice, religious and cultural pluralism.

The reader is not surprised to learn at one point that author had covered the first session of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) for *Time Magazine*, for the book lays out carefully the great divide that seismic event caused—positively in the minds and hearts of the majority

of Catholics (and other Christians and non-Christians) who knew anything about it at the time, but negatively in the minds and hearts of the old power-holders who felt their power slipping away. That second group, the pro-status-quo-ante phalanx, worked incessantly before, during, and after the Council to hold on to, and then to recover, and extend that centralizing power. They regained ground already during the latter part of the pontificate of Paul VI (1963–78), and then roared back, and far beyond, during the recently ended pontificate of John Paul II (1978–2005).



The reader learns that the Catholic Church is a political entity, not just *per accidens*, to use the ancient language of the Church, but *par excellence*, to use a more modern jargon. I remember clearly how the then Bishop John J. Wright of Pittsburgh insisted in my history class, where he was a guest speaker after the first session of Vatican II, that there was absolutely no politics in the Council; all was under the sanctifying guidance of Holy Spirit! Well, if anyone still believes such fairy tales, Kaiser's book will disabuse him/her. The political intrigue, often covered over, of course, with pious palaver, is presented factually on the basis of Kaiser's first-rate investigative reporting. As a result, there are lots of clerical emperors running around naked.

The burden of Kaiser's book is not, however, despair—though he does note that many disillusioned Catholics have fallen into that dark pit—but one of hope amidst the murky darkness, borne up by those legions of Catholics who, despite the waves of pre-conciliar recidivism all around them, have been putting the freedom spirit of Vatican II into action all over the world. Kaiser repeats the call of many Vatican II-minded leaders for an antidote to John Paul II's centralizing mania, namely, decentralization— "subsidiarity," to use the acceptable Vatican term (even JP-II advocated it saying: "Public opinion needs to be educated in the importance of the principle of subsidiarity," February 23, 2000), or "autochthony," to use one not in favor in the Center of power. An autochthonous church simply means a church that is organized and governed through its own history, culture, liturgy, law, but is at the same time in union with the Universal Catholic (a redundancy!) Church, as, for example, the Greek Uniate Church. Thus, e.g., an autochthonous U.S. Church would decide, in conjunction with other English-speaking countries, what was appropriate English usage in liturgy—rather than have the recent scandal when Rome decided that the decision of the English-speaking bishops and language experts to use inclusive language in the liturgy was verboten!

To be sure, Vatican II pointed in that direction with its use of a soft term for democracy, "collegiality," but even that

term has been largely de facto verboten. Again, the triennial International Synods of Bishops, which was mandated by Vatican II, was denatured by JP-II and turned into yet further Vatican tool of manipulation. Had it followed its Vatican II-intended course, the Synods would doubtless have led to more and more healthy de-centralization, subsidiarity, indeed, de facto autochthony. In that regard, *der Kaiser hat Recht!* The Kaiser is right!

But then, the key question becomes: How do we then again get moving in that direction? The readers must come up with their own answers; mine is: From below.

Leonard Swidler

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THE "PROBLEM" OF WOMEN DEACONS

One of the more outrageous, in the sense of its gratuitousness, insults to women in the Catholic Church today is the heated debate over the question of the ordination of women to the permanent diaconate. WOMEN DEACONS? How shocking! Who could ever imagine such a thing! The walls of the Church would crumble if women were ordained and granted those mystical powers!

What mystical powers? Deacons cannot "do" anything that every Catholic cannot do, according to the most conservative, orthodox theology imaginable.

Deacons are hospital and prison chaplains and counselors, and so are lay people and religious. Deacons can bless, and so can everyone else. Problem?

Deacons run CCD and RCIA programs, instructing children and adults in the Catholic faith. So do lay people, all over the country. But deacons do it the way Father used to, with authority. And there's the rub.

Deacons witness marriages. Marriage, as we all know, is a sacrament bestowed on each partner by the other, and witnessed by two or more people (the official witnesses) and a representative of the Church (wherein lies the rub).

Deacons baptize. Anyone has the power to baptize, even, according to some, non-Christians. Ah, but it's "official" and not "in an emergency," i.e., it's in the name of the Church. And there's the rub.

Deacons lead prayer and Communion services, just as religious and lay people do. But deacons wear an alb and stole: they look like priests.

Deacons assist the priest at Mass and distribute Communion. Boy and girl children assist the priest at Mass and older lay men and women distribute Communion. Ah, but the deacon stands next to the priest (gasp!), he raises the cup at the minor elevation, he leads the Our Father, and he wears a stole, sideways! A stole – that's a sign of authority. And there's the rub.

Finally, deacons can preach at Mass, from the pulpit, wearing their sideways stole. Religious and lay people, even women, can speak during Mass under certain conditions, as a special exception, with the permission of the priest. The power to teach from the pulpit is the nearest thing to an exception to the rule that Deacons do what anyone can do. This, even though we learn much more of our religion from the nuns and CCD teachers than from 8-15 minutes of stumbling preaching once week (or once a month in a rotation). Yet, again, it involves authority, the ability to teach from the sacred precincts of the altar area, the ability to speak with the recognized authority of the Church.

And that really is the crux of the Catholic Church's unwillingness to ordain women to do what any Catholic has the power to do—baptize, witness, counsel, teach, bless and bring Christ's body to all in Communion. It is an unwillingness to give women the authority to do what their Baptism gives them the right to do anyway, but do

it in the name of the Church. Paul says Baptism makes all believers priests. But the Church says the Word was made male.

That is the unkindest cut of all.

Christine M. Roussel



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**HOMILY OF CARDINAL CARLO MARIA MARTINI FOR THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS EPISCOPATE
FEAST OF THE ASCENSION, MILAN – DUOMO, 8 MAY 2005 .**

TRANSLATION FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN BY BARBARA PIAZZA-GEORGI

Editor's introduction: Many churchmen, including Cardinal/Pope Ratzinger, have commented of late on what appears to them to be an atmosphere of "relativism" in Europe and much of the West. They seem to worry that nothing is permanent, stable or important any more, that people have no long-term "values."

In his brilliant synthesis A Church That Can and Cannot Change (Notre Dame, Indiana, 2005) Judge John T. Noonan addresses this fear directly in a disarmingly simple summary of the ancient principle "Ecclesia Semper Reformanda" (the Church must constantly reform itself).

"Change is not a thing to be ashamed of, to be whispered about, to be disguised or held from the light of day, as grave guardians sometimes think. Change, in continuity with roots, is the rule of human life. It has been the way of life of the Church. It is a way of teaching celebrated in the Gospel itself in the image of the scribe learned in the law of Moses who is "like a householder who produces from his treasury what is new and what is old" (Mt 13:52). The new and the old cannot in life be neatly distinguished as the old slowly comes to fruition in the new." (7)

I would like first of all to express my warmest thanks to His Most Reverend Eminence Archbishop Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi for his invitation to celebrate, in fact to preside at, this Eucharist on the occasion of my 25th anniversary as a bishop. As he recalled, I was ordained as a bishop by John Paul II on 6 January 1980. Archbishop Dionigi would have liked me to celebrate this anniversary on its actual day, and I thank him for his great kindness. But, since I was in Jerusalem, I asked him to let me live this anniversary in the more reserved and devout atmosphere of the holy city, postponing the festive celebration in the Diocese. I see in him the meekness of Moses and the eloquence of Aaron who lead this people towards the Promised Land, and I thank the Lord for this.

I thank you from my heart, all you who are here, starting with the authorities who honor us with their presence – I greet you one by one. I also thank all the Bishops; I am particularly glad to see the auxiliary bishop of Jerusalem, my adopted city. I thank all the Episcopal vicars, the members of the Chapter, the archpriest of the Duomo, the deans, presbyters, deacons, religious men and women, members of Pastoral Councils, and all of you who represent the Ambrosian People of God.

I am grateful that you are united with me in giving thanks, because, as Saint Paul says in the second letter to the Corinthians, "many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to many prayers." (2 Cor. 1, 11). I have received many Divine favors thanks to your intercession, and for these many Divine favors I ask you to join me in gratitude, in singing the Magnificat, thanking God through the intercession of Mary.

But what is in reality the grace for which today we sing the Magnificat, entering into Mary's feelings of gratitude? I don't think it is simply the gift of episcopacy, which remains an external gift, one that can even be left – so to say – to rust or to lie underused. It is not even the gift of this splendid Ambrosian people, from whom I have received so much, much more than what I was able to give; it is certainly an immense grace, yet still somewhat unformed. I think the gratitude to God is above all for that reason that Paul recalls in Chapter 20 of the Acts of the Apostles, that I was somehow given, albeit with many faults, many defects, many weaknesses, "to testify to the Gospel of the Grace of God." This is the reason why we thank the Lord: it was given to us to "testify to the Gospel of the grace of God."

When one renders this witness to God and to Him only, then even a grain of mustard weighs as much as a mountain, and a small effort acquires the value of a great thing. Our Lady says: "The Almighty has done great things for me." And Karl Barth comments: "The Lord always gives great things for those He loves, even if they are small things in themselves."

Therefore I am grateful to you, Lord, God our Father, mysterious God, unknowable and great, immense, eternal, infinite, because you have given me the possibility, me poor and weak, to bear witness to the strength of Your Word, and in particular to bear witness to some extent to the strength of this Word in Scripture, in the Holy Scriptures of the First and the New Testament. And today also, so as not to lose this habit, I would like my thanksgiving to take as point of departure the Word of God that we have just heard, the three readings from the Acts of the Apostles, from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, and from the last chapter of Matthew's Gospel.

First of all, the first reading. I shall retain – for the sake of brevity too – only the last words, where it says: "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." These words tell me much, because from my window in Jerusalem I see the Mount of Olives and I can glimpse the traditional place of the Ascension, marked by a small minaret. And from there I hear these words echo inside me: "Jesus will return, He will return, in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven." Then the prayer arises in my heart: come, Lord Jesus, come back to visit us. Lord Jesus, we love, we wait for your manifestation, we want Your kingdom to come, that our hunger and thirst for justice may be satisfied, that Your will may be done in full. Make us seek before all else, as you taught us in the Sermon on the Mount, the kingdom of God and His justice. I ask for the grace that this kingdom may come, and not just that it may come almost unnoticed, within history, but that it should come in its total and final manifestation, when everything will be clear, when all will appear transparent. It is in the light of that culminating moment in which the whole of history will be judged by God, that we are called to read our little history of each day. The Lord is coming, the Lord will come, to give to everyone according to his deeds.

It is said correctly that in the world there is much relativism, that all things are taken as if they had the same value as all the others; but there is also a "Christian relativism," which is the reading of things in relation to the moment in which history will be visibly judged. And then the works of men will appear in their true value, the Lord will be the judge of hearts, everyone will have his praise from God, we will no longer be listening for applause and hisses, approvals or disapprovals, it will be the Lord to give us the last, definitive criterion of the truths of this world. History will be judged, we will see who was right, many things will be clarified,

illuminated, pacified also for those who are still suffering in this history, who are wrapped in darkness, who do not yet understand the meaning of what is happening to them.

The Lord shall come and I see Him every morning, because the sun rises just behind the Mount of Olives and with the sunrise I feel the certainty of the Lord's coming, to judge our lives in full and make them transparent, luminous, or to purify them where they need purification.

This, therefore, is the lesson that I take from the first reading: all of history will be judged by God. History is not an infinite process that turns around itself without meaning and without outcome: it is something that God himself will gather, judge, weigh on the scales of His love and of His mercy, but also of His justice. In this history we need the gift of discernment, in order somehow to anticipate, to get in tune with the judgment of God on human history, on the events that unfold around us and above all on the events that unfold within our hearts. In the second reading there is an insistence on the gift of discernment, which I have asked for so often during all these years for myself and for all of you, praying to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ that He should give you a "Spirit of wisdom and of revelation for a deeper knowledge of Him."

Of course it was beautiful to see, as I also saw a month ago, the crowds, the millions of people who bore witness in front of the body of John Paul II, waiting perhaps ten hours to see for half a minute this man who was rightly exalted in death as the spiritual father of humanity, as spiritual guide of the entire world. In this globalised world we needed a spiritual father to say words that could move everyone, words of justice, truth and peace, words against war, against violence. And people recognized this and it was beautiful to see their witness. Yet, looking at the people marching past the body of John Paul II, I was thinking that it would be worth little to venerate a spiritual father of humankind if God did not then speak to the bottom of every heart, telling each of us what our task is, our vocation, what it is that we must do, what it is that is asked of us and of no one else. Generic words are not enough, admonishments that are valid for all are not enough; God Himself wants to enter into immediate communion with every human creature, to guide it through the discovery of its mission and its vocation.

For this I have prayed so much for you, saying: Lord, give light to the eyes of our mind, make us know to what hope you have called us, what treasure of glory is contained in your heritage among the saints, what is the extraordinary greatness of Your power towards us believers, and how do you want us to live it, day after day, hour after hour, and put it into practice living our vocation that is irrevocable, unrepeatable and cannot be ceded to others, that which the Lord expects from each one of us. And each one of us can give Him great things, because, as I have already recalled, "the Almighty does great things in us."

Thus I have asked for you and for myself for the gift of discernment, and thus I have insisted so much during all these years on *lectio divina*, that is, the prayerful reading of the Scriptures; because it is through *lectio divina* that we come to understand what God wants of us, if we listen to that Word which, as John Paul II said in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "shapes the Christian individual, illuminates him and forms his conscience."

We need to believe as a Christian community, but we also need to believe strongly as individuals, called, illuminated, and personally touched by the voice of God, by His grace, by His mysterious Word. Because of this, the prayerful reading of the sacred books is an indispensable help to orient us among the events of the world and above all the events of our personalities, of our individual paths.

I come now to the Gospel reading, of which I shall limit myself to commenting on Jesus' command: "go and teach all nations." Perhaps the verb is better translated as "make disciples of" (*matheteusate*) all nations, immersing them in the power of God, teaching them to observe all that the Lord has commanded. And all that He has commanded, in Matthew, is – we know it well – the Sermon on the Mount, and Matthew 25: "Whatever you have done to the least of these my brothers you have done it to me." This is what we must teach, and today this discourse is very important. I observe it, living in a place of particular suffering, where the evils of humankind come to light, in Jerusalem, in the Middle East. We all have an enormous need to learn to live together as different people, respecting each other, not destroying each other, without retreating into ghettos, not despising each other and not even just tolerating each other, because tolerance is too little. But neither – I would say – trying immediately to convert, because this word, in certain situations and with certain people, sets up unbreachable walls. But rather, "fermenting" each other, so that each is pushed to reach more deeply into his own authenticity, his own truth before the mystery of God.

To this end there is no more concrete, no more accessible tool, than the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Words that no one can refuse, because they speak of joy, of beatitude, they speak of forgiveness, of loyalty, they speak of refusing ambition, of being moderate in our desire to accumulate, they speak of coherence in our acts ("let your words be yes, yes; no, no"); they speak of sincerity. These words, said with the force of Jesus, touch every heart, every religion, every faith, and every lack of faith. No one can say: "they are not for me: sincerity is not for me, loyalty is not for me, to fight against dishonorable use of the goods of this world is not for me..." It is a message for everyone, shared by everyone, recalling everyone to his deepest authenticity, and it is this message that will enable us to live together as different people respecting each other, not retreating into ghettos, not destroying each other, and not even keeping due distance, but "fermenting" each other.

Then, if we do this, all people will recognize themselves in these values, they will feel nearer to each other, more like traveling companions, they will feel that they have deep and true realities in common, realities that perhaps they would not have discovered without Jesus' words. Then, beyond ethnic, social, even religious and denominational differences, humanity will find an ability to live together, to grow together in peace, to conquer violence and terrorism, to overcome differences. Then the message of God's grace will be fully manifested, the message given to Saint Paul to bring to his communities, and of which I, too, was made a bearer at my ordination 25 years ago.

And the return of the Lord will be near, nearer the appearance of the heavenly Jerusalem, we will be able to cry: "Blessed is our God, he is the One who comes, He is the one who saves us." Amen.

+ Card. Carlo Maria Martini
Archbishop Emeritus
of the Diocese of Milan.