

March 24, 2009

The Most Rev. Richard G. Lennon
Catholic Diocese of Cleveland
1027 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44114-2560

Dear Bishop Lennon,

It was with deep sadness and regret that I read Your Excellency's letter to Fr. Sandor Siklodi and the parishioners of St. Emeric Hungarian Catholic Church about the decision to close St. Emeric. I would like to believe that this was a most difficult and well thought out determination by Your Excellency for the betterment of the Diocese and the Hungarian-American catholic community. However, after reviewing the rationale for this decision ***I was stunned to read the reasons for closing St. Emeric.***

The decision seems to have been made upon inaccuracies, misguidance and irrelevant information. While I believe that St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish should remain open (strictly on the fact that they are financially sound, can serve their parishioners with a vibrant program and are served by a priest from outside the Diocese - just as St. Emeric is in the same position), Your Excellency has chosen the one church of the three with the least number of parishioners, the least in attendance at Mass, and because of its location, ***the least likely to attract parishioners from either of the other two Hungarian Churches.*** While it is correct that St. Elizabeth is centrally located relative to the two other parishes, it is St. Emeric that is actually centrally located, and easily accessible by highway, among all Hungarian parishioners who live on both the east and west side of greater Cleveland as you have determined from looking at a map of where the members of the three parishes now live. That is the more important fact when looking at location.

Your Excellency realizes the historical significance of St. Elizabeth in the life of the Hungarian people; *St. Emeric also has a historical significance in the life of the Hungarian people.* One can interpret the historical significance at St. Elizabeth to include the building being listed as a national historical landmark. However, it has been quite clearly impressed upon us that the people are the Church and not the buildings, a statement I unequivocally agree with. But, if we are looking at buildings, St. Elizabeth parish, while I am also sure will welcome other parishioners as any Church would do, *lacks the facilities*, which St. Emeric currently has, to accommodate a more vibrant parish with more vitality in worship, religious education and other parish activities especially for those of the Hungarian youth of St. Emeric who participate in the Hungarian School, the Hungarian Scouts and the Hungarian Folk Ensemble. A large majority of the youth groups are Catholic, and non-Catholics willingly and happily participate.

The young adults and families with young children ***will not***, in the large majority, venture down to the St. Elizabeth neighborhood for attendance in any activities within their own groups or for Mass because of either actual or perceived safety concerns. This is not an issue at St. Emeric. *Nearly 100% of these young members and their families will not move to a Church in the once abandoned Buckeye Road area to continue their affiliation with a Hungarian Catholic Church.* By closing St. Emeric Parish, we are in danger of losing the Hungarian youth and their ties to the Catholic Church practicing their faith in their mother tongue. ***If St. Emeric remains open, the future and vibrancy of our Church is very bright for the long term, very many years, with the continued participation of the youth.*** Any other Hungarian Catholic Church in the Diocese has a very short term future, 4-5 years at best, as by its members own admission. It is not the historical past that we need to look at but the possibilities for the future. St. Emeric remains a key component in keeping the culture and language of our ethnicity alive in Cleveland.

While the **Opportunity Corridor** may significantly improve the St. Elizabeth site in the long term, this highway connecting I-490 to University Circle has been planned for as long as I have been alive and I am nearly 50 years old! Realistically, I do not see it being completed in my lifetime and certainly not in the next five and possibly not even in ten years based on past history of such projects. By then, in the short term, *much will have been lost for it to make an impact on keeping our Hungarian parishioners active.*

Another major reason for closing churches by Your Excellency has been the lack of priests in the Diocese. **Closing St. Emeric will actually result in having one fewer priest serving in the Diocese** as Father Siklodi would either be reassigned by the Archbishop in Transylvania-Romania or he may retire. Taking action that will eliminate a priest (the youngest of the three) presently serving his congregation well would be counter to the goals and objectives that Your Excellency wishes to obtain.

The rationales for closing St. Emeric are very weak to justify such a certain death. In your Sunday morning press conference three main reasons were given for closing parishes. These reasons were population shift, shortage of priests and financial losses. **At St. Emeric the number of parishioners has increased by approximately 10% in the last two years, the priest cannot be reassigned within the Diocese and its finances are in the black even after a recent \$250,000 renovation project.** It has been stated that 42% of the parishes in the Diocese do not have enough yearly income to cover their yearly expenses. Yet, only 24% (52) will close out of 224. Why are churches that are a financial drain remaining open while those, like St. Emeric, which provide funds to the Diocese are asked to close? I, along with many others, am very confused as to why Your Excellency deems this parish unfit to remain open. **It meets no criteria for it to be shuttered.**

Is there some other, unstated but important reason to the Diocese for its closing? *I would much rather know that the Diocese has a good offer for the property and it needs the financial gain from such a sale than to be told it is geographically not between two other churches, not as historically relevant in history or in its building, and that another Church may someday have a highway to it thus making it the better choice.* I would not like that answer but at least I could understand it, something which I cannot do at this time in regards to the current reasoning.

Because of the difficult and unique situation that the Hungarian cluster, unlike all the other geographical clusters, presents to the Diocese, **I would like to support the Parish's appeal to Your Excellency to consider a compromise in regards to St. Emeric.** For all the reasons listed above and in my three previous letters to you, instead of closing St. Emeric forever or keeping it open in perpetuity, **please grant the Parish at least a 7-10 year lease on life.** In the meantime, let us see if that proposed highway actually becomes a reality. Let us see if St. Emeric and St. Elizabeth are still vibrant and viable parishes. After that time, reevaluate the situation at St. Emeric. I believe it still will be a strong and very viable Hungarian-American Church in the Diocese. *Let the Parish's future be guided by God's hand and let no man put it asunder.*

Please consider this compromise proposal. I seriously believe it would be the best immediate solution that could be acceptable to the Cleveland Catholic Diocese, the Parishioners of St. Emeric Church and the Hungarian-American community.

Respectfully yours in Christ,

Michael R. Horvath
St. Emeric parishioner,
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