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Parish coalition joins priests in questioning Lennon's leadership

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NCR Today

A coalition of parishes that successfully appealed the Vatican to canonically reopen their churches have joined several priests in questioning the leadership abilities of the Cleveland bishop.

"By broad consensus Endangered Catholics strongly endorses Cleveland diocesan priests in their efforts to make known to the Vatican that Bishop Richard G. Lennon's leadership is unpastoral, disruptive to clergy and laity. We urge the priests to continue to make their voices heard in Rome," the group stated in a June 7 press release.

"Furthermore, parishioner representatives also believe that the agenda and discussions at the meetings held by Bishop Lennon were not satisfactory, and failed to achieve progress in the execution of Rome's March 1 decrees that order restoration of parishes and reopening of churches," the statement read.

The decision to back priests who have begun writing letters questioning Lennon and calling for his removal from the Cleveland diocese emerged from a June 5 meeting among parish group representatives, held at the request of the group's membership.

"Evidentially, there's dissatisfaction with the priests, as far as the leadership with Bishop Lennon," said Patricia Schulte-Singleton, leader of Endangered Catholics and a member of St. Patrick's parish.

"And based on meetings, parishioner meetings, we feel the same, as parishioners, so we needed to make a statement that no, not everything is fine here in the diocese of Cleveland," she said, adding that "it was very encouraging" to see priests question Lennon's leadership at this time.

When reached for comment, diocesan representative Robert Tayek said the diocese does not view *NCR* as reputable and does not speak with the publication.

In early March, the Congregation for the Clergy ruled in favor of 12 Cleveland parishes who appealed their bishop's decision to suppress their parishes and shutter their churches. Early reports indicated 13 parishes had received decrees, but Lennon said April 17 he received only 12.

At the June 5 meeting, nearly a dozen parishioners representing seven of the 12 Vatican-decree parishes discussed the context of the meetings Lennon had held with each parish in previous weeks.

Schulte-Singleton said the parish representatives in attendance felt their meetings with the bishop "were not satisfactory and have failed to achieve any progress" in reopening their churches.

A common complaint was the lack of a concrete timetable in moving forward in the process. Schulte-Singleton said no parishes that attended the meeting had been assigned a pastor, an expectation many brought with them to their meetings with the bishop.

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In relation to Lennon's August target date for reopening 11 parishes (one of the 12 requires only its name restored), parish representatives expressed little confidence in his ability to finish the process in that timeframe.

In the case of St. Patrick's parish, Schulte-Singleton said Lennon did not contact her or the parish's other representative with canonical standing in the decrees for a May 31 meeting concerning their church's reopening.

Instead, Lennon met with three members of a former parish cluster team, none of whom have been involved in the appeal process, according to Schulte-Singleton.

"The meeting that took place on the 31st were not true representatives of the parish. And the parishioners are quite upset about it," she said.

Frustrations with the meeting have led St. Pat's and other parishes to pen letters of their own to Rome, to inform the congregation what has transpired in their meetings with Lennon, and to explore what further canonical action exists.

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