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Bishop Lennon gives all-access to alternative Cleveland magazine

by Brian Roewe

NCR Today

Who's that on the cover of the March 27 edition of *Scene* magazine, a Cleveland alternative weekly?

None other than Bishop Richard G. Lennon, the controversial leader at the center of the diocese's parish unrest in recent years.

Lennon granted the entertainment publication all-access to shadow him throughout his day -- the bishop wakes each morning around 3 a.m. -- while he conducted meetings, celebrated Mass for Pope Francis, and confirmed young Catholics in the suburbs.

In the story, he speaks of his love of letter-writing (he's never used a computer), a girls' choir he founded during his time in Boston, and the discord ignited by his decision to close parishes.

Addressing the recent excommunication of Fr. Peter Marrone, Lennon -- who has typically restricted his comments to formal diocesan statements -- restated that he did not excommunicate the him, but rather made it public. He also reiterated that the parish closings were a financial necessity and at times, a request from parishioners themselves:

In Cleveland, Lennon shuttered 50 parishes between 2009 and 2010, citing demographic changes, a shortage of priests and (most importantly) a shortage of cash. He's said that he wanted to "rip the Band-aid off quickly."

He maintains that the closings were a financial measure, that the downsizing was a result of 37 percent deficit spending, and that many of the churches in the city had lost their identities as parishes.

"You've got urban parishes with people who all live out in the suburbs. And what they'd like to do is go to church down the street, but they feel an obligation to come support. In point of fact, that's a not a parish, that's a drive-through chapel," Lennon says.

"They *want* me to close them, so I say, 'sure, I'll close you.'"

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