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## Pastor's Column

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### The Diocese of San Diego, Chapter 11 and Reorganization, and St. Thomas More Parish

As our Diocese winds its way through Chapter 11 and reorganization, I am sure that many of us are reading the articles that have been appearing in the San Diego Union Tribune.

I would hope that as we read those articles, we are also reading what Bishop Brom has been communicating to us in the past several months. There have been three major pieces he has written. All of these have been included in our bulletin at the time of the issuance of his statements.

If for some reason, you may have missed his communications, you can pick up a copy of all his statements at the Parish Office or at the Information Table on the Plaza after any weekend Mass.

The present situation in our Diocese has a long history, as does the situation in every Diocese across the United States. It is not my desire in this piece to review that history and to comment on the strong positions that people have taken on both sides of the issue over the years.

I simply want to address an issue that could have a direct effect on us here at St. Thomas More. I share my views with you in an attempt to help you in your decision-making.

First and foremost, we continue to pray for all victims of sexual abuse by priests. We pray for

them, and we pray for their families. The victims deserve a just settlement, with the understanding that a financial settlement is only a part of the overall healing process.

In my opinion, though, there are those victims along with their lawyers who seem to not only want a fair settlement, but they are desiring and willing to “burn the house down” in the process.

Bishop Brom is seeking to not only provide a fair settlement to those who have been hurt, but he is also seeking to ensure that the mission of the Church in this Diocese will continue, and not be totally stymied because of the settlement of these lawsuits.

In the Chapter 11, Reorganization Process, this is what Bishop Brom is attempting to do. It is the best process to ensure fairness to the victims and to us, the Church, as we move forward in continuing the mission of Jesus.

It is my personal opinion, as I read the articles that have been appearing in the San Diego Union Tribune and the North County Times, that the Diocese is faring well as we move through the process of Reorganization. As the Judge continues to better understand the “Byzantine” accounting system of the Diocese, she will find nothing illegal or immoral; and this situation is

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going to provide an opportunity for the Diocese to move even more rapidly into better business and accounting practices.

We are holding our own, and I believe that in the end, the Bishop's desire to provide equitable settlement to the victims and to ensure the future viability of our Diocese will in fact happen because of this Chapter 11 procedure.

In the meantime, what do we do on the local level, here at St. Thomas More? I have begun to hear from several people that they are thinking about cutting back on their donations in the fear that this money would be lost in an eventual Diocesan Settlement. What effect will this thinking have on us here at St. Thomas More?

Let me use the Annual Catholic Appeal as an example. All of these funds are designated funds and can only be used for the purpose for which they are intended. Our Parish assessment is \$30,000. This money goes to help provide for the many services that our Parish receives from the Diocese. Any money that we receive over and above our \$30,000 assessment is returned to the Parish for our use. This money is directed toward our Operating Budget.

This year we are \$6,000 under what we collected in last year's ACA. This is due, I believe, to people's fear about the Diocesan Chapter 11 process. But who is being hurt by this? We are. We have made our assessment. The Diocese will receive its \$30,000 but we are \$6,000 under the amount of overage that we collected last year, and in the end this will hurt us in our Operating Budget. So, if anyone is saying, "I am not giving to the ACA because I don't want the Diocese to receive this money", you are mistaken. The Diocese is receiving its assessment. The only entity that is being hurt is us, St. Thomas More Parish. We are receiving less money because of people's choices to not give to this Diocesan Collection.

Several people have indicated that they are thinking about suspending their payments to the Capital Campaign, again, in the fear that this money will be lost in a Diocesan settlement. If

we are not careful, we can create a panic here in our Parish in which people will not only suspend payments to the Capital Campaign, but also to the Operating Budget. Where will this leave us with our ministries and parish activities? Will we have to lay off staff and suspend programs, because of a lack of funds?

In the end, we could do to ourselves what we fear some of the victims and their lawyers are trying to do. We will be burning our own house down!

I am a tithing parishioner, and I am continuing with all my pledges and payments. It is business as usual.

Think about it. When airline went through Chapter 11 and reorganization, it kept flying. It was business as usual.

This is what I am encouraging all of us to do. Let's keep flying. Business as usual. I believe that God's hand is in the mix of all of this, and the end result will be fair, and it will be healing for the victims of abuse and for our Diocese.

I ask you to help keep us flying. Let it be business as usual. And in the meantime, pray, pray hard, and pray every day, knowing that God is with us, and that God's hand will ensure that whatever the results, it will ultimately be the best for the Church.

This is a time of purification and healing for the Church. There is no way of getting around it. It is painful, it hurts, it is embarrassing in the least, for all Catholics, and for all the priests presently in active ministry.

I pray that you will join me, here at our local level, to trust in God, to continue to move forward, to allow business as usual, in order to ensure that the mission and ministry of Jesus continues for this time and this place.

Thank you!

*F. Mike*