

## TOWARDS ECUMENISM ON THE CROSS...

"It All Began at the Vatican" was the title of an article published in the last issue of *Le Royaume*, no. 170 of November-December 2004. This article recounted notably the events surrounding the departure, on December 14, 2004, of Father Benoît Picard from the Diocese of Little Rock in Arkansas, in the United States.

In order to understand what will follow, here is a brief summary of the facts. Who is Father Benoît Picard? A Son of Mary, Father Benoît was ordained a priest by His Exc. Archbishop Mario Peressin at L'Aquila on September 12, 1991. He began exercising his ministry in the parishes of that archdiocese, and then he was transferred to Rieti where he was hospital chaplain for a few years. After the return to Canada of the Community of the Sons of Mary and a period of three years spent at Lac-Étchemin because the state of his health forced him to take some time of complete rest, he was assigned – as a visiting priest who was to continue resting – as the chaplain of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in Hot Springs, Arkansas, a responsibility he generously assumed for more than six years.

He instituted perpetual adoration there and helped souls ascend to God. In Hot Springs where there are over fifty different religious confessions, he gained particular experience in the area of ecumenical collaboration.

At the request of His Exc. Bishop Sartain, the local bishop, who was always kindly, Father Benoît never publicly promoted the Army of Mary. On a monthly basis, he would

participate in the Marian meeting which, in a purely evangelical spirit, has been fostering, for more than twenty years, Eucharistic and Marian devotion according to the teachings of the Church and the Holy Father. Father Benoît's teaching, like that of all the Sons of Mary, was strictly the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

At the end of November 2004, events started to move faster. More and more concerned over Father Benoît's belonging to the Community of the Sons of Mary, issued from the Army of Mary, Bishop Sartain summoned him three times regarding a campaign of defamation against the Work led by a single person in the city, this man being himself denounced by his wife. During their third meeting, the Bishop, after "having prayed and sought advice", asked Father Benoît to leave the diocese. Father Benoît returned to Canada the following December 14. The community of Hot Springs was greatly surprised by this and spontaneously, without any such request having been made, people wrote to the Bishop to express their thoughts on Father Benoît's work and to tell him they did not understand such a dismissal. Father Benoît received a copy of these letters, some of which were published in the preceding issue of the paper.

Since then, other letters have followed, addressed to Lac-Étchemin. Among these latter, a letter from Bishop Sartain who presented his season's greetings to Father Benoît, thanking him for his fruitful apostolate. Sister Chantal Buyse

### Season's Greetings from His Exc. Bishop Sartain to Father Benoît Picard

December 21, 2004

Dear Father Benedict,

I hope this brief note finds you well and safe after an uneventful return to Canada. I tried to call you early in the morning of your departure, but I was too late! I am sorry that I did not have the chance to offer you my prayers and best wishes before you left. Those early weeks of December were filled with many activities for me and quite a bit of travel around the state, and I regret that I did not have the chance to tell you in person, once again, that you will be in my thoughts and prayers. I also wanted to tell you, Father Benedict, that I appreciate very much the ministry you offered in the Diocese of Little Rock over the past six years. I understand quite well that the last few months have been particularly difficult for you, and you will remain in my prayers in the years ahead. I hope you understand that my decision to ask you to return to Canada was in no way an easy one for me to make, nor was it motivated by any one factor. As I mentioned to you when we met in your home, I wish you only the best and will ask the Lord to continue to guide you in all you do. All of us in the Catholic Church want to work together for unity as well as growth and holiness. May the Lord continue to lift you up in grace and peace, and may he bless your entire community, particularly in the years ahead as you continue to clarify your status with the Holy See.

With every best wish and prayer, particularly during this Christmas season, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Bishop Peter Sartain

FATHER BENOÎT'S REPLY TO HIS EXC. BISHOP SARTAIN

Lac-Étchemin, January 25, 2005

Dear Bishop Sartain,

Thank you for your nice Christmas card and wishes. I am touched that you took time out of your busy schedule to write



Bishop Peter Sartain

to me. I received it Sunday, January 9. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle I was hoping to answer as soon as I could.

Yes, my trip back to Canada was good. I was happy to see my family and fellow religious Brothers and Sisters.

I always have been touched by your kindness and gentle manner. I appreciate the prayers you offer for me. You say you appreciate very much the ministry I offered for the past six years... Bishop, with sincere love for you, I took the time to tell you how providential the Army of Mary and the Community of Our Lady of All Peoples are. As I told you many times, these Works were the source from which I drew continual inspiration. You saw and recognized the fruits of my ministry...

You speak about the last weeks [of my presence in Hot Springs] being difficult for me... You know what is difficult and painful? It is not the personal and unjustified attacks against me. It is to see that a Providential Work of God for our time is not only not promoted and welcomed, but that it is refused and rejected under false accusations and without any grounded motivations.

As for me, I know, because you told me many times, even on our last encounter, that you were in close contact with the Vatican Liaison. You acted as he suggested by putting severe restrictions on me and finally by asking me to leave the diocese. Consequently, you do not have the greatest share of responsibility in all these events.

I always worked for the unity, the growth and holiness of God's people and that of the whole of mankind. This is the very core of the Army of Mary and of the Community of Our Lady of All Peoples' apostolic activities and mission. I assure you I will keep on doing that.

Marie-Paule offered her life so that many souls would populate Heaven. She asked Jesus to come down from the Cross so that she could take His place and so that He would not suffer anymore. *Life of Love* is full of sacrificial offerings like these. It is in similar examples that I draw the strength to say "yes" to the Cross.

As the New Year begins, I offer you my best wishes for the accomplishment of your apostolic duties. May the souls be set aflame for the love of God.

With all due respect,

Sincerely in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Father Benedict Picard, O.F.F.M.

## A Mass?... “You Will Be Suspended...”

(An archbishop to one of his parish priests)

Since the founding the Army of Mary and for the sanctification of its members, the program of life requested of the Knights of Mary has consisted essentially in interior reform, because one cannot really be effective in the apostolate if one has not emptied oneself of self in order to leave all the room to Jesus and Mary.

This important work which must be begun anew every day is accompanied by the acceptance of the trials and tribulations that are a part of any life. Thus, from the very beginning, the Knights of Mary were formed to accept the crosses, knowing that they were an opportunity “to elevate oneself, to transcend what is human in order to accede to a superior world where all is grace, thus allowing us entry within the mystery of God”. And we are better able to understand Saint Paul’s words when

### Father Benoît Picard’s Account

In 1990, as I and a few Sons of Mary were preparing to be ordained to the priesthood by His Excellency Most Reverend Mario Peressin, Archbishop of L’Aquila in Italy, this latter enquired, following the normal procedures set out in Canon Law, if the Archbishop in my home diocese had any objections to the ordination of this future candidate to the priesthood. His Eminence Cardinal Paul Grégoire was in charge of the Archdiocese of Montreal at the time. It should be noted that neither the Cardinal nor his secretary knew me in any way. I had never met them and they had never contacted me, even once, either by telephone, fax or other means. It is surprising, isn’t it, that at a time when the Church is short of priests, certain Princes of the Church, contrary to the prescriptions of ecclesiastical law, the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the orientation of the Gospel, should reject a candidate a priori by attempting to prevent his ordination. I could say much more in this regard. His Eminence Cardinal Paul Grégoire’s letter is on the right.

As an example, here is the “special treatment” that was meted out to me in October 1991 when, as a newly ordained priest, I was in my family to celebrate that happy event. As promised, the Archbishop called the parish priest in my home parish – this priest knew me very well – to give him the order to forbid me from preaching and hearing confessions. Thus, at my first Mass with my family which is fairly large, without my having any other fault than that of being a Son of Mary, it was a relative who was a priest who gave the homily.

But that wasn’t all. During this same sojourn, a young priest, a friend of Father Normand Forest, O.F.F.M. who had been ordained at the same time I was and who was also visiting his



Fr. Benoît

he declares: “God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong” (1 Cor 1:27).

Thus, Father Benoît’s attitude at the time he was asked to leave the diocese was particularly edifying. Having immediately accepted the Bishop’s decision, he urged the entire parochial community of Hot Springs to do the same, thus predisposing souls to ascend to God.

If Father Benoît Picard’s recent trials were elaborated upon in the paper, this was done, first of all, out of a concern for the truth, given that these events are the bearers of light and lessons which contribute to increasing our love of God. In fact, such an attitude cannot be improvised, but is, rather, the fruit of a long process of interior reform, marked by the cross from the moment of his ordination.

In the desire to help our members to always accept their trials, we are presenting here Father Benoît’s account of a few events related to his ordination.

Sr. Chantal B.

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### His Eminence Cardinal Grégoire’s Letter to His Exc. Archbishop Peressin

V/Ref. N. 54/90

January 30, 1990

Your Excellency:

In a letter dated January 10, 1990, you informed me of your intention to confer Holy Orders upon Mr. Benoît Picard, originally from the Diocese of Montreal. Thus, you have solicited the usual recommendations.

I regret to have to inform you that it is not possible for me to recommend this candidate receive Holy Orders because he is following a course in opposition to the instructions of the Church of Montreal and of Quebec.

Furthermore, it is my duty to emphasize that if this young man were to request a jurisdiction within the Diocese of Montreal, it would not be granted to him.

Sincerely yours, in the Lord,

(Signed) + Paul Cardinal Grégoire  
Archbishop of Montreal

(Signed) Neil Willard, P.H., V.E.  
Chancellor

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His Exc. Archbishop  
Mario Peressin  
Archbishop of L Aquila

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family, invited us to celebrate a first Mass in his parish, a Mass which the members of the Army of Mary could attend. One had to underline this special occasion with solemnity and everything was carefully prepared, including the church in which there were beautiful flowers for the circumstance. The parish priest in this parish, Father X... received quite a surprise when, a little more than a half-hour before the beginning of the ceremony, he received a call from the Archbishop's Offices in Montreal saying: "If the Sons of Mary celebrate Mass in your church, you will be suspended. Do you want to lose your parish?" Upset, Father X... called me and said: "You won't believe what just happened to me." To which I replied: "You just received a call from the Archbishop's Office saying that there would be sanctions if ever Mass was celebrated in your parish." Stunned, he asked me how I could have guessed and I replied that he should not worry about this since this kind of "special treatment" was like daily bread for us. He was quite annoyed! I immediately reassured him, telling him that, in the Army of Mary, there was an excellent calling network, and that we could inform almost

all the members of this complication even before they would get to the church. Several hundred people were expected.

This story ends up that, in spite of his obedience, this priest, unfortunately, lost his parish because of that event. In fact, a few weeks later, when everything was ready for the solemn dedication of his church, he was sent to Europe for six months and another priest, appointed parish priest in his place, received all the merit for the work accomplished in that parish. When Father X... finally returned to Canada, he was assigned office work, contrary to his wishes and to his apostolic aptitudes. He suffered a great deal from this glaring injustice.

In all of this, we, the Sons of Mary, maintain an inner joy of having always loved and always accepted, without complaining or retaliating, this "special treatment" reserved for us. However, the hour of truth has arrived. It is in the Immaculate Heart of Mary that the intimate thoughts of each one are revealed for the joy of some and a time of mercy offered to all.

Father Benoît Picard, O.F.F.M.

## "The Disciple Is Not Above the Master"

Refusals, rejection, interdictions, threats... that was the lot reserved not only to Father Benoît Picard but also to many newly ordained priests, Sons of Mary, who, upon returning to this country, wished to celebrate their first Mass in their own parish. So many similar testimonies could be made public.

Still today, nothing has changed. When Sons of Mary are invited to confer the sacraments of Baptism or Holy Matrimony or to celebrate the funeral Mass of a close relative, the same type of reception awaits them in the parishes.

"The disciple is not above the Master" (Mt 10:24), a phrase from the Gospel which still holds true, but which no longer surprises us when we remember that this has been the lot reserved to the Army of Mary for more than thirty-three years.

Thus, the Army of Mary has become "a sign of contradiction" and we see being fulfilled the Blessed Virgin's prophetic words when she announced there would be division within Christ's Church.

At Akita in Japan, on October 13, 1973, Mary declared: "Pray the rosary every day for the Pope, the bishops and the priests. The work of the devil will infiltrate even into the Church. One will see cardinals opposing other cardinals and bishops confronting other bishops. The priests who venerate me will be scorned and condemned by their confreres; churches and altars will be sacked; the Church will be full of those who accept compromises..." (Shimura Tatsuya, *La Vierge Marie pleure au Japon*, Hauteville, Switzerland, Éditions du Parvis, 1985, p. 12).

Sr. Chantal

## Heart to Heart Between Sons of Mary

Fr. Luc Beaudette's Letter to Fr. Benoît Picard

January 6, 2005

Dear Father Benoît,

I've come to greet you with a little note. I read, in the last issue of the paper *Le Royaume*, Father Pierre's article "It All Began at the Vatican", which brings out in the open the shady backroom dealings of certain authorities which led to your having to leave the Diocese of Little Rock in the United States at the formal request of the local bishop. This action on the part of the authorities to attempt to discredit and even to demolish the Community and the divine Work to which we belong and which we love is so very unfortunate.

On the other hand, what is quite touching are all the testimonies from people you met or worked with there, which attest to and prove that you are a priest after God's Heart. These testimonies are like a hymn of adoration to the Eucharistic Jesus and of love for the Virgin Mary for the work of grace that was accomplished in hearts through your ministry to these people. It is beautiful to read in their testimonies of the deep love you have for the Eucharist, for the Mother of God, as well as for the great mystical doctors of the Church who help souls journey along in God's way. They also speak of all the love you have for the Pope's teaching, of which you strove to be the faithful echo. I was a witness of this action of grace in souls when I spent some time in Hot Springs last May and June to preach a retreat to the Sisters. I was struck by the number of confessions I heard before Masses on weekdays, and even on Sundays, as well as confessions after Mass. That was certainly the fruit of your ministry at Saint Michael's but also of the perpetual Eucharistic Adoration Chapel which you inaugurated.

As one reads these testimonies, one also felt the suffering arising from a situation which, on the human plane, may seem rather absurd. I couldn't help but think also of the suffering



Fr. Luc Beaudette

and the confusion and dismay of many people who belonged to the former parishes of the Sons of Mary in France and Italy because of the departure of their parish priest, a Son of Mary. So much suffering could have been avoided if the Church had wanted to open itself to the Work, but we do not seem to have the right to speak up. Rather we seem to have been presumed guilty or simply already condemned just because we believe in the authenticity of the Work to which we belong. This same Work, in the person of our Mother, Mother Paul-Marie, and in the wake of Jesus, has constantly taught us to forgive and to love those who persecute us. So much suffering could have been avoided if the Church had accepted to examine the Work in all justice, in the truth and with charity. God will triumph, of course, because His light can quite easily penetrate closed hearts in order to cause His truth to shine forth.

What is most remarkable, but at the same time contradictory, is the testimony of Bishop Sartain and his Vicar General, both of whom confirm the good fruit of your presence and your ministry among the people in Hot Springs, while at the same time asking you to leave the diocese. This attitude does not seem to me to be evangelical. It is quite clear that Bishop Sartain asked you to leave his diocese against his will. He simply obeyed the request of a Vatican liaison. In the Old Testament, when the Israelite people did not listen to God and obey His will, God, in His love for His people, would speak strongly in order to call His people back to order. The disaster that occurred in southeast Asia, would that not be the beginning of a terrible worldwide tempest because the Church has closed itself to the divine Work of the Army of Mary, thus bringing about serious consequences for humanity? Those who are stopping the action of this divine Work and who will probably strike us soon with their canonical sanctions, what a terrible responsibility they have! May they know that the Army of Mary is the Work of the Lady of All Peoples who promised that all the powers of hell would be unleashed against her but that they would not be victorious because her power lies in that of God. Let us thank God for this "special treatment" being meted out to us by the Church and let us continue to pray and forgive, while we hope that the Marian triumph promised by Mary at

Fatima and Amsterdam will come quickly. Bravo for your fidelity to your commitments and to the Work, and congratulations for all the wonderful things accomplished through your ministry in Hot Springs. May God bless us!

Father Luc Beaudette

**FATHER BENOÎT PICARD'S REPLY TO FATHER LUC BEAUDETTE**

January 7, 2005

Greetings, dear Father Luc,

I hope you are well. Thank you for your kind e-mail. Thank you for the prayers. I abandon myself to the direction in which God wishes to lead me. I do not feel that I am the one concerned in all the praise heaped on me by people, for it was not so much my doing if God wished and was able to touch their hearts. I am sure that it is all quite circumstantial and that all



Fr. Benoît Picard

the Sons of Mary working here and there merit just as much praise, if not more. If all religious authorities were open, things would be much easier and the charity desired by God would shine forth more easily. That does not prevent it from shining forth, but the closing of hearts and minds to God's Work gives us the opportunity and the good fortune of walking more closely and more intimately in Jesus' footsteps. "The disciple is not above the Master" (Mt 10:24).

What remains in all of this is the Love of a God, who is always true to Himself, and the love of the poor creatures that we are as we strive to correspond to a wonderful plan that is being written, day by day, in the pages of history.

How good it is to love, and how good it will be to die after a life of love, regardless of the price one will have paid, or rather thanks to its high price which will have shown its quality.

May the Mystery of the Eucharist radiate in us, especially in this Year of the Eucharist. Fraternally,

Father Benoît Picard

**Exchange of Letters between Msgr. X... and Father Benoît**

**MSGR. X...'S LETTER TO FATHER BENOÎT**

January 5, 2005

Dear Father Benoît,

I would like you to know that what has happened to you and the persecution that the Work is undergoing touch me deeply, to the point where as I was meditating on the first reading and the Gospel of today, I thought of you and your religious family. I even spoke of you in today's homily.

In substance I said that there was an obvious contrast between God's way of loving us and His desire to give each one of us who wish to be the faithful messengers of the Gospel a place to follow Him, and our way of loving and respecting others in their choice of means to spread the Good News of salvation. I also reminded them of Gamaliel's principle.

Last night, you moved me and edified me when you said that the bishop in Arkansas had done you a "great honor" in treating you as he did. In all that you are living, you strive to imitate Jesus in His attitudes, His manner of understanding and interpreting the signs of the times.

I am convinced that God expresses Himself and speaks only to people who are humble of heart, to people who know that it is by way of the cross that they will be sure to arrive at Easter. Mother Paul-Marie, yourself and many other members of the Work are of that caliber. And, to tell you what I really think, I would truly like to have the time and energy to read through Marie-Paule's writings and those of Marc. I would like to understand things better from the inside and to savor your spirituality as much as I want.

However, when some speak of you as they do now, I remain silent because I know that Jesus Himself and His divine Mother are your true defenders and that their arguments are much stronger than those I could use to defend you. I believe in your Work, I believe in God and I believe you. I would like our Church and especially those who keep relentlessly harming you to take much more seriously the Word of God given us every day as a gift during the Eucharistic celebration. I wish they would quit leaning on their authority, their intelligence and their position within the people of God; that they would ask in-

stead for humility, understanding and the very heart of God in order to better analyze and comprehend the message of God and the signs of the times.

United with you and all those who are dear to you in prayer and ministry, assured that we are all blessed by God.

Msgr. X..., Episcopal Vicar of ...

**FATHER BENOÎT'S REPLY TO HIS FRIEND, MSGR. X...**

January 18, 2005

Greetings, Dear Msgr. X...

You wrote me a beautiful e-mail in reply to mine. I would have liked to have replied earlier, but there was the visit with my family and friends, and on the day I returned to Lac-Etchemin, I began my annual five-day retreat. It was well done and very good.

Anyway, many things touched me in your last e-mail. To mention just one of them: "I wish they would quit leaning on their authority, their intelligence and their position within the people of God; that they would ask instead for humility, understanding and the very heart of God in order to better analyze and comprehend the message of God and the signs of the times."

Yes, when we think that God never abandons His people and that, from all time, every time the people of God deviated either to the left or to the right, He would send messengers, unflinchingly, men or women, to redirect it. I don't think He has changed His manner of proceeding. The presence of messengers who disturb us because they bring us back to the path of LOVE should be of no surprise, then, especially when we consider the widespread apostasy of our time and the fact that people have quit practising religion! God loves His people and He does not tire of calling it, but will He find faith again when He returns?

The Lady of All Peoples asked Ida: "*You, do you see the love of neighbor?*"... Before me, emptiness, a tremendous void... *Equity and justice, but where are they to be found?... We must, here, return to the cross.*" (Messages of the Lady of All Peoples)

Thank you for everything. United in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Fr. Benoît

**Letter addressed to Father Benoît Picard**

by Rev. Larry Davis, Pastor of the Lutheran Church, Hot Springs, Arkansas

**Prince of Peace Lutheran Church**

January 31, 2005

Dear Father Benedict,

Following your departure, I sent a letter to Bishop Sartain expressing my surprise and appreciation for you and what you did

in Hot Springs. Here is substantially what I wrote to him. It may help you better fathom the friendship we have in Christ.

Sincerely,

Rev. Larry Davis

January 4, 2005

Dear Bishop Sartain:

My name is Reverend Larry Davis, serving Prince of Peace Lutheran Church as its shepherd for the past eight years here in Hot Springs. It is with deep regret and sincerity that I would like to

voice my concerns about the recent departure of my good friend, Father Benedict Picard. I am uncertain of all the details, nor do I feel it is my business to know of the circumstances that led to his removal from St. Michael's. But, this is a man of deep conviction and integrity when it comes to his calling as a priest within the Catholic Church. He and I have shared a common vision of love, peace and unity between the various faiths that comprise the Hot Springs community.

Father Benedict was instrumental in starting the Community Thanksgiving Service held at various churches throughout the years on Thanksgiving Eve. He has also, along with one of my good members Mrs. Betty Corcoran, attended many of the worship services held by the different churches in the Hot Springs and outer communities. If there was ever a person who lived and spoke the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, it would be Father Benedict. I have always envied his spirituality, as a person solely dedicated to the finer gifts of the Spirit in prayer and meditation, spending countless hours in the chapel and in the study of the Church doctors. His demeanor has always been that of gentleness, kindness and the love of our Lord.

I am hoping and praying that his removal from St. Michael's was

not one of a sacrificial lamb devoured by the wolves of innuendo and backbiting. Nor do I hope it was brought about through his teaching from his order. I'm sure I can relate to you many stories where I have had to personally deal with such disdain and malice over my sixteen years as a Pastor. What prophet has not been held in contempt and persecuted by those he seeks to serve with love and compassion? The cross of Christ is always our refuge and strength in times such as these. It has been so with me and, I'm sure, with my good friend Father Benedict.

I give thanks to God for the ministry Father Benedict has provided to the Hot Spring community and myself. We will always be friends and maybe, if God so wills, Father Benedict will return to finish the work he started – one of mutual love, peace and unity amongst all of God's people as per the prayer our Lord Jesus gave to his disciples during his final meal with them: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

The Peace of the Lord be with you always!

Rev. Larry Davis

### Letters Addressed to Father Benoît Picard

As soon as Father Benoît Picard's departure from the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas, was announced, testimonials of appreciation and gratitude were addressed to him, both orally and in writing. Since his return to Quebec, he continues to receive such letters every day.

Here are, among so many others, a few "witnesses" of the good Father Benoît did during his six years of discreet but so very fruitful apostolate, rich in graces.

Sr. M.-Chantal

#### From Dr. Roger and Jan Trubey, Seventh Day Adventists

December 22, 2004

Hi Father Benedict,

Wow! It was a very real shock indeed. And a very, very sad one as well. The devil works at every Christian and in every church. If he inspired the church to put the Son of God on the cross, can we expect anything less for us today? You did so much good for your diocese and for the community of Hot Springs. We indeed will miss you and miss seeing your smile and the personal warmth you always brought into the store.

May our God richly bless and keep you in your new assignment. May He watch over you and be your guard and shield; may He lift you up and bless you with His presence, always. We will keep in touch but we have the assurance that if we do not meet here again on this earth, we will surely meet together above. Have a blessed Christmas, my friend.

#### Roger and Jan

[Dr. Trubey and his wife managed a natural health food store where Father Benoît went occasionally.]

#### From Lynn Payette, Episcopal Church

December 13, 2004

I have just learned that you are leaving us and returning to Canada. I can only hope and pray this reaches you in time.



Dr. Roger Trubey

You have been such a blessing to Hot Springs, and to me, in ways I cannot begin to express in mere words. You always brought a sense of *shalom*, that peace of God, that passes all understanding, and shared that peace, as well as God's love, with all you encountered. I still treasure that picture of us with the St Michael's children and the dove, that was in the newspaper [*The Sentinel Record*].

I hope you will take good memories with you, and the assurance that you made a difference in many lives here, and to the spiritual life of this community.

Godspeed as you return home.

Wishing you the hope of Advent and the joys of Christmas, now, and always,

Lynn

#### From Art and Mary Burgstrom of the Catholic Church

January 6, 2005

Father Benedict,

What are you doing back in Canada? You know the sinners in Hot Springs need you! Mary and I miss you and are saddened by the thought of not seeing you before you left and possibly for a long time in the future. You will brighten the lives of those you meet in Canada and for this we are thankful... With love,

Art and Mary Burgstrom

#### From Penny Martin, Catholic

December 2004

Dear Father Benedict,

I missed your Mass last Sunday and didn't know you were leaving. I am so sorry I didn't get to say goodbye. You are probably thinking, Who is this? Well if you saw me you would know who I am... Anyway I was one of your followers so to speak. I had the 7:00 to 8:00 Sat. morning adoration hour... I also came on Saturday for Mass and confession, and then on Sunday my husband came with me. I am really going to miss you as a confessor. Hardly



Art and Mary Burgstrom



Penny Martin

anyone has confessions anymore and it is hard to go very often, but you were so faithful in that department and always gave me food for thought....

You will be greatly missed and I want you to know I have learned to love more since I have met you. God bless you.

/.../ And that leads me to a favor. I lost your last bulletin at St. Michael's and I wanted so much to hang onto it for two reasons. My sister-in-law was also shocked and sad to hear about your return to Canada. And I wanted to let her read the letter you wrote in that bulletin. I am very hopeful you still have a copy of it. The other reason is that I like to refer back to your words. You are such an inspiration to me. I loved going to confession to you. Other priests don't give any spiritual direction and I miss that with you.

You will always be in my prayers.

God bless you!

Penny Martin

[Note from Father Benedict: We must specify that an authority requested that copies of the newsletter be removed in which there was the letter of December 2004 I wrote to the friends of the Convent and the Adoration Chapel. This letter was published on pages 15-16 of the paper *Le Royaume*, no. 170.]

### Ecumenism and the Truth

Hot Springs is an ecumenical and interreligious center par excellence where more than fifty religious denominations are represented. Inevitably, Father Benoît Picard came in contact and worked with these various communities, appreciating a mutual collaboration in the respect of the beliefs proper to each one.

With Father Benoît's departure from Arkansas, several authorities and members of these communities spontaneously wrote to him to express their gratitude for his collaboration, but also their astonishment over such incomprehensible events.

There, like elsewhere in fact, it is advisable to bring out the truth, for can a Year of the Eucharist bear fruit without the truth?...

Sr. M.-Chantal

**Letters addressed to  
Father Benoît Picard**

**From Mr. and Mrs. Robert Fiedler,  
Catholics**

Dear Fr. Benedict,  
We have addressed the following letter to Bishop Sartain, Bishop of Little Rock, Arkansas, with regard to your being sent back to Canada. You can use it as you see fit.



**Robert and Mary Anne Fiedler**

December 4, 2004

Dear Bishop Sartain:

We are members of St John the Baptist Catholic church in Hot Springs. A few years ago a very special priest came into the Hot Springs community and touched the lives of Catholics and non-Catholics also in a very special way. In our eyes his greatest achievement was the opening of the Adoration Chapel at St Michael's. There are, however, so many other things that he was able to accomplish. Since he came to Hot Springs, we have had many blessings like the processions through town honoring Jesus and Mary which have touched not only Catholics but non-Catholics. When you come to his Masses there are always people going to confession to him before Mass and also after Mass. We have learned more about our Catholic faith since he came than we have since going to Catholic school years ago. He also always talks about the letters from the Holy Father and gives us insight into what they mean in our lives. He is a very special gift from God to Hot Springs.

We have found out that you, as Bishop of Little Rock Diocese, are now sending Father Picard back to Canada because of the threats, lies and manipulations of one man. We are praying that, with prayers coming from so many people here, you will find it in your heart to reconsider your decision and allow us to keep one of the most precious gifts God has sent us. Father Picard is one of the most holy and giving priests we have ever had the privilege of meeting.

Sincerely,

**Robert and Mary Anne Fiedler**

**From Annette and James True,  
Bahá'í Church**

December 13, 2004

Dear Fr. Benedict,  
We are so saddened to have to say goodbye to you! Your presence in Hot Springs will be sorely missed.



**Annette and James True**

We have learned much from you, both in what you have said and by your example. We will miss talking with you, and Hot Springs will most certainly miss your efforts at unifying the Hot Springs Community.

We hope this is a positive move for you. We know you will continue to work toward world peace and that your influence will most certainly be felt wherever you go.

With the warmest regard and continued prayers,

**Annette and James True**

[Both are part of "REGARD".]

**From Howard Lee Kilby,  
Member of the Zen Buddhist Tradition**

December 12, 2004

Dear Father Benedict,  
Thank you for the Christmas message and for the news that you are now in Canada. I feel that my life has been blessed by meeting you and working with you, especially in the wonderful ecumenical service you organized at St. John's Church in conjunction with the Holy Father's meeting in Assisi calling together representatives of all the great faiths of the international community.



**Howard Lee Kilby**

My shallow understanding of the Holy Roman Catholic Church has grown by your presence. You may recall that I represented Buddhism at the ecumenical service at St. John's and told about my experiences as a teenager in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

I have only learned a little about the Roman Catholic faith, but it is one that I feel honored to be accepted within...and I find Mass a most eloquent and beautiful spiritual experience. Priests such as Father Leo, Father Thomas, Father Alan and yourself have given me great examples of the priesthood.

I send my best wishes to you, Father Benedict.

God has blessed our city by sending you to minister to our needs.

I hope that the New Year will be a blessing in your ministry in Canada.

**Howard Lee Kilby**

December 30, 2004

Dear Father Benedict,

Today, I had lunch at Cafe 1217 with some old friends who are in town for the holidays. Afterwards, I stopped by St. Michael's and visited for the first time, the Adoration Chapel. What a beautiful chapel. I only stayed for awhile, but enjoyed being there very much. I plan to return.

I know how much you have worked to make the Adoration Chapel available to the people of this community. Thank you for making this such a wonderful chapel.

I didn't know the details of your departure. In the world of business and politics, there are often situations which seem unfair. I am very happy that you came to Hot Springs. I think you have touched many people's hearts and minds.

I will always remember the Ecumenical Service you organized at St. John's and I appreciate the honor of being included in that sacred event.

Keep me in your prayers, dear Father Benedict. I will keep you in mine.

I hope that the new year 2005 will be a year of good health, happiness and prosperity for both our houses.

Your friend in Hot Springs,

**Howard Lee Kilby**

**From Vicki Hollander, Rabbi**

December 21, 2004

Dear Father,

My heartfelt thanks to you for creating space to meet at a time so fraught with movement and change... So generous of you.



**Vicki Hollander**

I carried away from our time together your peace... and humor and kindness... I also felt my loss of your departure, for your friendship here would have brightened my days...

You have great gifts... and wherever you travel, how lucky those will be to be near you. It would be a pleasure in any way to offer support.

Although we didn't have time to cultivate a friendship, it would be a joy to hear of you... depending on your time, desire, energy and the circle whom you tend.

In the meantime, I just wanted to send you my heartfelt thanks... And wishes for goodness... And as the tide this eve turns from darkness to light, so do I wish you all good things. A wonderful holy day to you and passage into the new solar year.

Blessings,

**Vicki Hollander**

**From Tracy and Ken Freeman,  
Members of the Community of Christ**

Dear Father Benedict,

I know this must be exciting news for you ... but very sad for us. I will miss you and your leadership – not to mention all your energy and wonderful contacts. You see things through in harmony and peace. You can really make things happen – and with such a happy attitude all the while.

Peace and kind REGARDS,

**Tracy and Ken too!**

[Tracy was a member of "REGARD", and Ken was a member of the committee "September 21, A Day for Peace".]

**From Dale Whitman, Presbyterian**

December 29, 2004

What a surprise I had when my friend Jim Lockwood told me you were GONE! He shared your last newsletter. You are a remarkable young man, and I regret that I could not know you better. You have been in my daily prayers since we met.

Whatever you are doing, wherever you are, and whatever the reason for your departure, God has been, is, and always will be with you. Take care.

**Your Presbyterian friend, Dale**

Dear Father Benedict,

I shall appreciate your adding me to any distribution list you may use to share your thoughts and activities.

Jim had also shared with me the Adoration Chapel bulletin in which you explained your leaving. He also shared with me some surmises about your leaving. I am confident that any convinced, dedicated believer has to be willing to confront and be subject to judgment by the status quo. Change is painful, and this truth has been proven by reformers through the ages.

You remain high in my esteem, and I repeat that I truly regret that we could not share more time together and perhaps become closer earthly friends. After all, even Jesus had John and the other disciples. At the same time, I respect your personal convictions.

Those of us committed to ecumenical thinking will long remember and appreciate your ministry in Hot Springs. You, as I have said before, are truly remarkable.

I continue to pray for you daily; if you ever return to Hot Springs for a visit, I

should very much like to see you.

In Christian love,

Dale

From Bill Seitz, Assistant Pastor,  
Westminster Presbyterian Church

January 26, 2005

Hello, My Friend!

I must admit my ignorance as to all that has happened in your life. I knew that you had left suddenly and I was taken quite by surprise by the news, but I had no idea the extent! Thanks for these articles!

Other letters of gratitude are still being received by Father Benoît Picard and the secretariat of the Work.

We marvel when we see all these people of various religious denominations defending in such a way a cause that is dear to them. Unfortunately, for lack of space, we cannot publish all

these letters.

Father Benoît left the diocese without there being any contempt or bitterness, encouraging those he left behind, urging them to accept the Church's decision taken by the Bishop of Little Rock.

Through our discussions it became quite clear to me what kind of man you are – a truly dedicated man with a good, strong spiritual heart. Your every word, your thought processes and your presence all testify to this. I say this to let you know that lives outside your parish have been touched by your desire to build God's kingdom... and I live in gratitude for all you have done to strengthen all God's children in Hot Springs. May God's love and light direct your path. You are in my prayers.

Bill Seitz

## A Helping Hand

We, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in Arkansas would like to take the opportunity to publicly express our gratitude to Father Benedict Picard for the wonderful service he rendered to us Sisters as well as to the people in the community of Hot Springs. During the six years he was our chaplain, he did not confine himself to the ministry of the Sisters of the monastery only; he saw the many people who were looking for spiritual direction and spared neither his time nor his talents to help those who came to him, attempting to bring everyone he came in contact with closer to the Lord. No one was refused confession or counseling at any time. It was not uncommon for Father to skip a meal or an event in order to give someone a helping hand.

His dream was to convert the whole of Hot Springs. His good advice, conferences, homilies, counseling (without mentioning

his good example), all were the greatest help for a better way of encouraging us to a more generous effort to reform ourselves. Our monastery became a place where we could understand and help each other better. The community of Hot Springs also benefited in so many ways. The beautiful processions, the ecumenical dialogues, the reaching out to the community at large, in particular through the opening of the Adoration Chapel, all showed Father's love and dedication to those around him.

Father has indeed touched the lives of countless people. We will miss him, but are grateful for the opportunity of having him here in Hot Springs for the six years he was here. We pray that we may continue to benefit from his generous giving of self through our continued attempts to grow in our love through the service of others. Sincerely,

February 3, 2005

Sister Theresa Marie Lalancette, Superior

## The Year of the Eucharist

It was with an unconcealed joy that the members of the Community of the Lady of All Peoples welcomed the news and the gift of the Year of the Eucharist. What a marvelous Pope is John Paul II! He is the Pontiff of many accomplishments. In the midst of an historical framework darkened by the pride and sin of man who cuts himself off from God, he announces that a dawn of Light and Peace is definitely rising before humanity. This year is like the logical follow-up and the summit of a well-established plan<sup>1</sup> that will lead the Church to the springtime that has been announced and glimpsed. It would seem, once again, that with this Year, the Holy Father is responding to the Lady's wishes.

The Lady of All Peoples tells us: "*The time has now arrived. The time is here.... Before the Lord Jesus Christ returned to the Father, and before the Sacrifice of the Cross began, the Lord Jesus Christ gave to all the peoples of the earth the gift of the daily miracle.*" Lowering her gaze, she seems to be searching for something on the globe. Her voice is slow, questioning. It is only after a long silence that she says, "*How many are there for whom this great miracle... is really lived? They disregard it, disdaining the great miracle. The daily Sacrifice must be re-established in the midst of this corrupted world.*" Looking far off, the Lady declares: "*And now I am speaking to the Holy Father: 'You have already done much. The Lady of All Peoples asks you once again, at this moment, to hold firm and to complete all that remains to be finished.'*" (45th apparition, March 20, 1953)

How good it is to think that the God of immortal beauty who never tires of offering His Love and His forgiveness will come, transforming all things. It is through the Eucharist, the source and summit of

Christian life, that God will transfigure our time. It will be like a dream become reality and the fulfillment of ancient prophecies.

In the context of the Year of the Eucharist, a recent decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary, dated December 25, 2004, in answer to the Holy Father's desire, offered a plenary indulgence in order to promote public and private devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Pope John Paul II thus desires that all the faithful acquire a deeper knowledge of and a more intense love for the ineffable "Mystery of the faith", drawing from it spiritual fruits always more abundant.

The document emphasizes to what extent the Eucharist, the greatest of miracles and the supreme memorial of the Redemption, produces, in an indestructible manner, the unity of the Church, sustains it through the power of supernatural grace, floods it with an ineffable joy and is a supernatural aid in nourishing the piety of the faithful and leading them to the perfection of their Christian life.

It indicates that the plenary indulgence is granted under the usual conditions, that is to say, sacramental confession, Communion and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father, while rejecting all inclination to sin, every time the penitent participates with attention and devotion in a liturgy or a pious exercise in honor of the Blessed Sacrament exposed or present in the Tabernacle.

Furthermore, the plenary indulgence is granted under those same conditions to all those who, through their rules, are obliged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as all the faithful who do so through devotion, every time they pray at the end of the day Vespers and Complines in private, in their own homes, or together before the Lord present in the Tabernacle.

The faithful who, because of illness or other just reason cannot receive the Eucharist in a church or a chapel, may gain the plenary indulgence in their own home or wherever they are which prevents them from going to church if, having fulfilled the three usual conditions, they spiritually visit the Blessed Sacrament, pray the Our Father and the Creed and add a prayer to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament (for example: "O Sacrament most holy! O Sacrament divine! All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine.") If even that is not possible for them, they can gain the plenary indulgence by offering to divine Mercy the illness and difficulties of their life and uniting themselves spiritually to those who fulfill, in the ordinary way, the conditions set out to obtain the indulgence.

Local and parish priests must inform the faithful of this Decree in the most appropriate manner and be available to hear the confessions of the faithful and lead the public prayers to the Eucharistic Jesus. The faithful too are encouraged to bear witness publicly to their faith and their veneration of the Blessed Sacrament by means of processions, Eucharistic adoration, as well as spiritual and Eucharistic Communion. **Father Benoît Picard**

1. "A Eucharistic initiative of this kind had been on my mind for some time: it is a natural development of the pastoral impulse which I wanted to give to the Church, particularly during the years of preparation for the Jubilee and in the years that followed it." (Pope John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* / "Stay With Us, Lord", no. 4) "The Year of the Eucharist takes place against a background which has been enriched by the passage of the years, while remaining ever rooted in the theme of Christ and the contemplation of his face. In a certain sense, it is meant to be a year of synthesis, the highpoint of a journey in progress." (*Id.*, no. 10)