

“The Best Thing That Ever Happened Was His Invitation to the Fils de Marie, About Ten Years Ago...”

LETTER ADDRESSED TO FATHER ERIC ROY,
SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE SONS OF MARY

R.R. 1, Glen Robertson K0B 1H0
June 9, 2005

Dear Father Eric,

We were devastated by what happened to the Fils de Marie in our diocese, where their outstandingly excellent work of the past ten years has done so much good. From our point of view, there was no need whatsoever for the Bishop to take the action he did, but perhaps we cannot see the whole picture.

We felt compelled to tell Archbishop Prendergast what we have known about your work here. Perhaps we should have spoken up sooner, but things seemed to be going smoothly, and we felt, as Archbishop Prendergast was quoted as saying “it will take time”, and the difficulties will be resolved. Surely they will, with



**Fr. Daniel
Gauthier**



**Fr. Luc
Beaudette**



**Fr. Gilles
Devaux**

the help of God’s grace, and the intercession of our Blessed Mother. I just hope we live to see it! You and Fathers Dan and Luc and Gilles. – well, any of the Fils de Marie, will always be wel-

come here at our home, if you have reason to come this way.

With our prayers and warm regards,

Moira & John van Nooten

LETTER ADDRESSED TO HIS EXC. BISHOP PRENDERGAST, S.J.,
PONTIFICAL COMMISSIONER

R. R. 1, Glen Robertson
Ontario K0B 1H0
June 6, 2005

His Excellency Archbishop T. Prendergast
Pontifical Commissioner of the Fils de Marie
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Bishop Prendergast,

We deeply regret the loss this past week of three very fine Catholic priests belonging to the Fils de Marie, from our diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall.

Fortunately for us, our pastor, Fr. Eric Robichaud, chose to leave the Fils de Marie and remain with us. Unlike the others, he was ordained by our previous Bishop Larocque, and has served all his priestly life in this diocese. But it was a heart-breaking, health-destroying decision for him. It was just as dreadful for the other three. Their sudden forced departure has left feelings of dismay, regret, anger and confusion, and has diminished trust in the hierarchy of the Church. It was painful that there was no time to plan and prepare a suitable parting tribute to them, or any official opportunity to express our gratitude to them.

The long and informative Pastoral Letter from our Bishop Paul-André has helped to some extent. It is comforting to know that our Bishop was aware of their work, and states it openly. But we wonder if he was aware of other aspects of their ministry here, before he was appointed Bishop. We think you, as their Pontifical Commissioner, should be informed of our view of things. I think it is safe to say it is the view of the majority of our fellow-Catholics in this area.

First: The preaching, teaching, conversations and actions we have all witnessed in the members of the Fils de Marie who served for the past - almost ten - years in the four parishes here at the eastern end of our diocese, have always been carefully in accord with the teachings of the Catholic Church. (We cannot speak for the Cornwall parishes, because they are far away, but there is no reason to think their experience was any different.)

They were all faithful to the Magisterium in every way and reverently, intelligently and proudly so. Everything they did was directed to strengthening our Catholic faith both in belief and practice, and to increasing our love for Christ and the Church, and to helping us access all the graces available through the Mass, the Sacraments, and traditional Catholic devotion and practices.

AT NO TIME, IN ANY WAY, DID THEY PRESENT A THREAT TO THE UNITY OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH AMONG US.

There has never been the slightest hint of any of those rather bizarre notions of that layman, Marc Bosquart, referred to in the Pastoral Letter. No one here has ever heard of him nor that magazine “Le Royaume”, nor “Our Lady of all Peoples”. Never has their “Foundress” been mentioned, except in response to ques-



Fr. Eric Roy

tions by the odd curious parishioner, and then without any of those notions referred to in the Pastoral Letter.

Some years ago, my husband and I took part in a study group led by Father Dan Gauthier, on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. They took place in the sacristy of St. Margaret of Scotland Church. Father Dan’s deep love for the truth of our faith, and his delight in sharing and spreading it, were inspiring, and a joy to encounter. He encouraged us to explore the *Catechism*, and helped us to understand and value it. He himself wrote a much shorter, simplified Catechism, based on the *Catechism*, which he called “Mon carnet de foi”. A few of us worked with him for a while to translate it, which led to long, interesting theological discussions, and the task was not completed. That experience showed us Father Dan’s great fidelity to the Magisterium, and love for the Church. There was never even the slightest hint of a suggestion that there can be any “new revelation”, as mentioned under “a few thoughts” in the Pastoral Letter. And there were occasions in those discussions when such an idea could easily have been introduced. Those sessions with him were the most helpful and enjoyable of any of the efforts to nourish the faith that we have experienced in our 33 years here.

When the Fils de Marie first came, there was some passing mention of the Army of Mary; but certainly there seemed no effort to encourage anyone to join it, or promote it in any way. We asked questions, and learned that the same woman had founded both it and the Fils de Marie. But in recent years, no mention has ever been made of the Army of Mary, and most of the people in these four parishes did not know (until the Bishop’s letter) that there was any connection between the two. The Pastoral Letter makes it clear that the “Army”’s journal or newspaper does not uphold traditional Catholic teaching. But the Fils de Marie who worked here in our diocese certainly did.

You might wonder from what background I presume to speak strongly about the faith. I had sixteen years of the best Catholic education to be had in Toronto, including four years of Philosophy and Theology at St Michael’s College at the University of Toronto. In the 1950’s, when St Mike’s was enthusiastically faithful to the Magisterium, and Thomistic Philosophy was the norm. I have two brothers priests, and two sisters who devoted their lives to working for the Church (perhaps you know Janet Somerville). Here in our little parish of St Martin de Tours, my husband and I are involved in everything, as is the case with most committed Catholics of our age.

We came to this diocese before Bishop Larocque. It seems that for our part of the diocese, the best thing that ever happened was his invitation to the Fils de Marie, about ten years ago. The Catholics of this area are mostly Francophone, and the country parishes are bilingual. Bishop Larocque wisely installed the Fils de Marie in the big rectory of St. Margaret of Scotland, where they could live in community, and from there serve our parish of St. Martin de Tours, and St Alexander’s and St. Paul’s beyond us. With two parishes each, those young, energetic, hard-working, enthusiastic, dedicated priests completely transformed these four parishes. They revitalized parish life, and rallied us to make our churches beautiful – ours was completely renovated. They expended every effort to make the Sunday liturgy uplifting, inspiring and joyful, and encouraged and increased participation. They celebrated the Mass with great reverence and care and beauty. They got involved with every age group, every activity, every custom or tradition, with genuine respect and appreciation, and won the love and trust of their people. The parishes became financially sound. They made us proud of our church and parishes. They encouraged representatives to go to diocesan meetings in Cornwall, and we felt ourselves part of the diocese as never before. All this took place before Bishop Durocher arrived. It would be difficult for anyone to imagine the difference they have made, if they didn’t know what it was like before they came. It could not have been achieved without a lot of co-operation with the grace of God, and lots of prayers to acquire those graces!

Now it seems they are perceived as schismatics, perhaps even heretics. We certainly do not question our Bishop’s discernment or judgment of the truth of the faith. Perhaps we question the wisdom or the prudence of forcing those good Catholic priests to choose between remaining here where they are needed and loved, and rejecting the just developing religious order (the Fils de Marie) which has made them, with the grace of God, into the dynamic, zealous, committed, and faithful Catholic priests they are.

We hope and pray that you will be able to help them gain the recognition and approval they need from Rome, and that we will live to see them return to our diocese.

Respectfully,

Moira and John van Nooten

cc: Bishop Paul-André Durocher
Bishop Eugene P. LaRocque
Father Eric Roy