



THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE USA

NEWS
SPRING 2004

Message From the Regionary

Since June 9, 2003, when the new General Episcopal Synod was formed, under the presidency of the Rt. Rev. Tom Degenars, the energy behind the new movement has become more and more apparent. The source of the change is not a difference of opinion between bishops or the clergy, or an irreconcilable doctrinal opposition, but the genuine desire from the congregations to adjust the practices of their Church to the requirements of our present society, without altering the true values of the Liberal Catholic Tradition.

An increasing number of Liberal Catholics have decided to join the movement because they can remain in the Church wherein they have been baptized, confirmed or received, and therefore they are and will remain members of the Liberal Catholic Church, until they resign or die. There is not a single provision in the Liberal Catholic Canon Law permitting to expel anyone from this Church.

Some people may claim that we have left the Church, because we no longer recognize the General Episcopal Synod presided by the Rev. Ian Hooker. But is such a claim valid? If we consider that the Synod of the Bishops is the governing body, as it is said in Canon Law, the matter becomes quite clear.

We all know that a change of government in the United States, for example, doesn't change the nationality of its citizens. One may claim that things are different when churches are involved. But we know that nobody, ever, questioned the unity of the Church Catholic, Apostolic and Roman, although, at one point of its history, there were three Popes ruling simultaneously. The unity of that church was never questioned because the government of a church is NOT the Church, the people are. As Liberal Catholics, we are the Church and as long as we choose to remain in it, we will be a part of it.

Fortunately, Liberalism allows for freedom of opinions in religious matters, and we claim such freedom. Our movement respects the opinions of other Liberal Catholics, and expects the same tolerance from any other member of our Church.

Brief History of our Movement.

It may seem presumptuous to speak of history in a movement that has just nine months of existence, but so much happened in such a little time, that it may be useful to record the events before they are fading from our memory.

1. Events leading to the creation of our Movement.

From the foundation of the Liberal Catholic Church, Liberalism - or freedom of beliefs and opinions - has been the central idea supported by its government. The Bishops always took great care to include in Canon Law only those rules absolutely necessary to manage the Church, leaving latitude to the Regional Bishops to adapt the government of their provinces to the local cultures and customs. When modern society began to evolve, especially after world war II, and later with the emergence of global communications, the large differences of opinion existing in the Liberal Catholic Church became more apparent, especially in the field of social development.

While certain nations are still struggling with decolonization, and others try to resolve the issues of racial or gender discrimination, and sometimes slavery, other nations have already achieved social equality, and such achievement is reflected in their legislation. Most of these countries are located in Northern continental Europe.

Following the meeting of the General Synod of the Liberal Catholic Church in St Albans (2000), conservative Bishops began to introduce increasingly restrictive provisions in Canon Law, in an attempt to slow the process of adaptation of the Church to the changing modern society. Although the discussions were focused mostly on the position of women in the Church, this issue was only a symptom of the deep social differences existing in the various parts of the Liberal Catholic Church.

By the end of the year 2002, Bp. Philip Draaisma, then Regional Bishop for the Netherlands, decided that the best interest of his province required the ordination of women to Minor Orders. A number of female candidates were ordained in the Order of Cleric, in October of that year. A special emergency session of the GES was called to Camberley, England, with the purpose to expel Bp Draaisma from the Church. In the process, Bp. Frank den Outer was forced to resign, and Bp Hooker became automatically the acting Regional Bishop for the Dutch Province.

Bp. Hooker and his wife remained in the Netherlands for three months after the Camberley meeting. Both left the Dutch Province after attempting unsuccessfully to take control over all the assets of the Church in the Netherlands, by dismissing the elected lay members in charge of their management, and suspending the clergy of the three major congregations of the Province.

Such actions had a strong impact on the Dutch congregations, and during their annual meeting, on June 9, 2003, the decision was made by the lay members, to reinstate their Bishops and their clergy, and to separate from the General Episcopal Synod.

2. The development of the new Movement.

The immediate reaction of Bp. Hooker to this declaration of independence was to declare the exclusion of the entire Dutch Province from the Church (with the exception of two priests and a dozen of members). By that time, Bp. Draaisma had become too ill to continue to work in the Church. He resigned soon after, and appointed Bp. Frank den Outer as his successor. Bp. Tom Degenaaars, the Regionary Bishop Emeritus of Norway and Denmark, was elected Presiding Bishop of the newly created movement. From the very beginning, the decision was made by all the parties to comply with all the Official Documents of the Church as it was the wish of the members of the movement to remain an integral part of the Liberal Catholic Church.

A few months later, in July 2003, an attempt was made to keep the dialog open between the GES presided by Bp. Hooker and the former Dutch Province. I met in Denmark, with Bp. Sten-Bertil Jakobson, the Regionary Bishop of Sweden, and we prepared a *declaration of intercommunion* between the Swedish and Belgian Provinces with the Church in the Netherlands. Although perfectly in accordance with Canon 77, the Interim Committee decided not only to reject this agreement - missing yet another opportunity for unity -, and but it publically announced that any member of the Church, lay person or Clergy, keeping any form of contact with the Dutch Liberal Catholics would become the target of sanctions.

As any form of discrimination based on gender became illegal in Belgium by the 1st of January of this year, under the penalty of loosing incorporation, the members of the Church in Belgium decided to separate themselves from the GES presided by Bp. Hooker, which now had implemented rules against the ordination of women. I was placed before the choice to remain as a member of the GES and abandon the members of my Province, or to resign. I therefore decided to leave the GES, but not the Liberal Catholic Church, and to join the Synod presided by Bp. Degenaaars, with the unanimous consent of the Belgian Liberal Catholics. The majority of the clergy and the members of the Canadian Province asked me to remain their bishop, and they also decided to join the new movement. The two provinces joined officially the Episcopal Synod presided by Bp. Degenaaars on December 1st, 2003.

3. The new Movement in the United States of America.

As I am residing in the United States, the GES presided by Bp. Degenaaars appointed me as Regionary Bishop of Canada (my former title was Bishop Commissary) and of the United States of America. The new movement began to operate immediately under the denomination "*The Liberal Catholic Church in the United States of America*". The first congregation to join the movement was the parish of Our Lady, Mother of the World which had been expelled from the American Province in February 2003, with the Rev. Michael Warnon as Rector.

Very soon, Liberal Catholics from different congregations contacted me mainly to obtain information about the situation in the Netherlands, as very little was published in the United

States. Many rumors were circulating, and misconceptions as well, resulting from ignorance. More and more, it became apparent that a large number of them were concerned with the direction taken by the members of the GES presided by Bp. Hooker. Attempts were made by the Regionary of the American Province, to take control of the assets of congregations managed by



The Church of Saint Francis, Minneapolis, Minnesota

lay members, and to suspend or dismiss clergy and officers who were not in agreement with his opinions and policies. Letters from the American episcopate were sent, forbidding certain topics to be discussed in members' meetings. Within a few months, the representatives of several congregations began to consider our new movement as a valid Liberal Catholic alternative presenting a much larger view on the freedom of thoughts and in the operations of the Church.

The congregation of Saint Francis, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was submitted last Fall by Bp. Downey, their Regionary, to the same tactics used by Bp. Hooker in the Netherlands, namely the arbitrary replacement of clergy, the summary dismissal of the members of the Vestry, the elected lay management of the congregation, in an attempt to take control over the assets of the Parish. These actions resulted in the decision by the members to declare their independence from the American Province. This was accomplished in the Fall of 2003.

The congregation of Saint Francis, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was submitted last Fall by Bp. Downey, their Regionary, to the same tactics used by Bp. Hooker in the Netherlands, namely the arbitrary replacement of clergy, the summary dismissal of the members of the Vestry, the elected lay management of the congregation, in an attempt to take control over the assets of the Parish. These actions resulted in the decision by the members to declare their independence from the American Province. This was accomplished in the Fall of 2003.

The Church of Saint Francis has a long history. It was founded around 1926, and for many years was the pro-cathedral Church for the Province of the United States. Three bishop consecrations took place in Saint Francis: Bp. Newton A. Dahl and Bp. Walter J. Zollinger, on June 8, 1947 and Bp. Ignacio A. R. Munio on Oct. 3, 1948 as Regionary bishop for Cuba. Bp. Dahl became the Regionary Bishop of the American province in 1949. Saint Francis lost the pro-cathedral status, when Bp. Gerrit Munnik moved the seat of the Regionary to the newly built cathedral church of Our Lady in Ojai. The congregation of Saint Francis is very dedicated to the work of the Liberal Catholic Church and to the advancement of Christ's work in the world.

Last January, I was invited to visit St. Francis for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and to present the position of our movement. I traveled to Minneapolis on March 5, 2004 for a 4 day visit. The reception by the congregation was extraordinarily friendly and warm; Judie and David Cargo were gracious and generous hosts. This visit was the occasion to meet the Rector, the Rev. Richard Curney and the other members of the clergy, and the congregation as well. Their concerns about the future of their work in the Liberal Catholic Church were addressed and all participated in the celebration of various services, including Healing services and a High celebration of the Holy Eucharist, with the full participation of the congregation and beautiful music sung and played by skillful artists. A vestry meeting took place after the potluck luncheon that followed Mass. The members of the Vestry agreed to consult all the members about the



Saint Francis' Sanctuary

encing a peaceful return to their work in the service of Christ. Finally left to their own devices and liberated from an authoritarian government, they participate in increasing number, to the celebration of the Liberal Catholic Liturgy. Ministered by Bishops deriving their Apostolic Succession from Bp. Wedgood, and by a devoted Clergy regularly ordained; obviously they have never left the Liberal Catholic Church.

The Liberal Catholic Church in the United States of America.

Parish of Saint Francis
3201 Pleasant Ave South
Minneapolis MN 55408
Rector: The Rev. Richard W Curney
1-612-823-4276

Parish of Our Lady, Mother of the World
King's Garden
460 Station Road
Rock Tavern, NY 12575
Rector: The Rev. Michael Warnon
1-845-496-4344

Mission of the Holy Sophia
PO Box 3
Stockholm, WI 54769
Deacon-in-charge: The Rev. Wallace Zick
1-715-442-2519

future of the congregation. The consultation was scheduled to take place in March.

Most of the Saturday was consecrated to a visit to the town of Stockholm, Wisconsin. The Rev, Wallace Zick and his wife, invited me to spend the day at their home, and to visit the Church they have recently purchased. The story of this church building, and of the arrangements made to have it used for the services of our Church is wonderful, and deserves to be told. I hope to have the opportunity to tell it in the next issue of this news letter, when I'll have more detailed information about its history and destination.

The members of Saint Francis met on March 21, 2004 and decided unanimously to join our movement, and it is with great pleasure that I welcome them all in our organization. Plans are already made for ordinations and for the development of a new Mission in Stockholm, WI. I'll be visiting Saint Francis again on the first weekend in June.

All those Liberal Catholics who have chosen the side of the new Movement are now experi-