

***Clerics Regular of Saint Paul (Barnabite Fathers)***

***Provincial Superior***

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August 24, 2005

Parish Council and Parishioners  
Our Lady of the Assumption  
63 Highway 20 East  
Stoney Creek, ON L8J 2W9

Dear Friends in Christ,

When Jesus had to inform the disciples of his departure to return to the one who had sent him, "their hearts were filled with grief" (Jn 16:5-6) and they were "in anguish" (Jn 16:22). We may rightly assume that Jesus, too, being the sensitive person who was moved to tears by the death of a friend (Lazarus), was deeply affected and saddened by the news he had to break to the persons he had shared his life with for three years.

As Provincial Superior of the Barnabite Fathers, I find myself today in a situation not unlike that of Jesus as I face the hard and painful task of bringing to you very sad news. After 28 years of uninterrupted ministry at Our Lady of the Assumption Parish, the Barnabite Fathers have made the arduous and heartbreaking decision to leave a parish that has been home to them for so long, a parish they love very much and where they are loved unconditionally and appreciated beyond their own merits. The Barnabite Fathers and I are fully aware that this decision will affect you the way Jesus' announcement affected the disciples, that is, it will be for you cause of much pain, grief and anguish. Let me assure you that it has been and is cause of pain, grief and anguish for us, too.

It has not been an easy decision to make, and that decision was made only after much prayer, reflection, study and consultation. The decision was motivated by two simple and objective factors: (1) the aging of the Barnabite Fathers in their small North American Province (of the 16 members of our province, 3 are over 80 years of age, 6 are over 70 and near retirement, and only 2 are below 50); (2) the lack of new vocations (Our most recent ordination was in the year 2000. Presently we have no one in our formation program, and no ordinations to the priesthood in sight in the near future.).

Our province devoted three full and intense meetings to study our situation and to make plans for the future (October 19-21, 2004; December 28-30, 2004; April 12-14, 2005). I met twice with the Fathers of our two Canadian parishes, Oakville and Stoney Creek (April 25 and May 9, 2005). I consulted with my Council on this matter on May 20 and 27, 2005. Together with Fr. Frank Ruzza, I presented the situation to Bishop Tonnos on June 6, 2005. We informed the Bishop that in order to deal with our present difficult situation and to

reorganize our province, we had chosen to withdraw from one of our two Canadian parishes. We indicated to the Bishop that although our preference would be to continue our ministry at St. James Parish in Oakville, our preference was not binding and we would gladly accept his decision, whatever it might be.

After discussion with his Diocesan Consultors, the Bishop wrote to me on June 24, 2005: "We all agreed that we should accept your preferred position, which is to remain at St. James in Oakville. Consequently, we will accept pastoral responsibility for Our Lady of the Assumption, Elfrida, at the end of June 2006. It is naturally with deep regret that we accept your proposal. However, I understand it is necessary. I wish to thank you and the Barnabite priests for all of the excellent work which they have done in the Hamilton Diocese over the years and continue to do."

And so this year will be our last year together. Afterwards, our physical ways will part. Only our spiritual ways will part because our spiritual connectivity will continue. We can choose to spend this transitional year in sorrow and grief, or with God's grace we can try to use the present challenge as an opportunity to grow in our Christian commitment (we are committed above all to Christ more than to his human representatives) and in our awareness of the Church's need for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Knowing the Spirit-filled Christian community you are, I have no doubt that you will see this year as a year of special graces and blessings for both you and for us.

In closing, I would like to return to Jesus' announcement of his departure. After that announcement, Jesus gave the disciples the new commandment to love one another (Jn 13:34); he told them not to let their hearts be troubled and not to be afraid (Jn 14:1, 27); he promised them that they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16) and bear much fruit (Jn 15:8); he even told them they should rejoice (Jn 14:28). I don't think I can ask you and our Fathers to rejoice, but I humbly ask you and them to be open to God's grace, grace that can transform challenges into new opportunities and produce unexpected spiritual fruits, and to continue to keep alive our mutual connectivity of faith and love. Pray for us and help us (especially Fr. Lenssen and Fr. Ruzza) during this transitional year. We assure you of our prayers for you and your families.

Fraternally in Christ Crucified and Risen,

Fr. Gabriel M. Patil, CRSP  
(Provincial Superior)