

# A MESSAGE FROM ARCHBISHOP TIMOTHY M. DOLAN ON SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES SEMINARY AND MINISTERIAL FORMATION IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE

*April 5, 2006*

Two of the first books I read after my appointment as your archbishop almost four years ago were “In the Richness of the Earth: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1843-1958” by Fr. Steven Avella, and “Halcyon Days, Story of St. Francis Seminary, Milwaukee, 1856-1956,” by the legendary Msgr. Peter Leo Johnson.

Both splendid works detail colorfully the pivotal role our own venerable *Saint Francis de Sales Seminary* has played in the history of the church in southeastern Wisconsin. Two things became clear to me after devouring these two books: one, our seminary has been an inestimable gift to the archdiocese for a century-and-a-half; and two, from the beginning, the seminary has *changed* frequently in its mission, mandate, scope, curriculum, campus, buildings, and make-up of the student body.

Well, it's time for *change* again! History repeats itself!

As you know, I came to you after seven years as rector of a seminary. I was thus thrilled to be appointed to an archdiocese that had its own historic and acclaimed seminary. I quickly learned to admire and appreciate it very much.

I also learned the seminary was at a crossroads, for two main reasons: for one, thoughtful people were asking if we could accomplish the formation of future priests, deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers even better, by collaborating with the other excellent educational institutions in southeastern Wisconsin. The current revision of the bishops' “Program of Priestly Formation,” the ongoing Apostolic Visitation of seminaries, conducted by the Holy See, and the recent bishops' document on lay

ministry, “Co-Workers in the Vineyard,” are all contributing new directions and ideas to this challenge to renew our seminary.

The second reason we had to ask tough questions about the future of our beloved seminary is — guess what? — money! To operate the seminary is a towering expense. Over the last three years, the seminary has had to dip into its reserves just to meet operating expenses. That cannot continue. Simply put, sound stewardship demands that we spend our resources shrewdly and frugally.

What was clear to me is that we could not do business as usual.

The issues facing Saint Francis de Sales Seminary are not new, nor are they unique to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. In 2004, I appointed a group led by Fr. Dan Pakenham to gain better perspective and understanding of the realities facing the seminary. Fr. Pakenham's commission studied how the archdiocese can continue to provide high-quality priestly, diaconate, and lay formation in a fiscally-responsible fashion. The homework that group assigned — strengthening priestly formation; ensuring fiscal solvency; increasing enrollment; collaborating with other institutions; and examining and improving the certificate division — was continued by a second commission that has been working for the past 10 months to delve into these five areas.

This distinguished group discerned some “givens” in our discussion about the future:

■ For the Archdiocese of Milwaukee to have its own seminary to form future priests is a unique gift of inestimable value, a gift that should

continue to be protected and fostered as it has been for the past 160 years.

■ The pastoral needs of the church in southeastern Wisconsin today also call for solid and serious formation of future deacons and lay leaders.

■ Realistic consideration must be given to the towering costs of the present system and structure; sound stewardship demands some substantial change; and we can no longer continue to do “business as usual.” The financial realities of operating a seminary are an important component of providing quality formation. Tuition and revenues are not keeping pace with the ever-increasing costs affiliated with building and grounds maintenance, employee salaries, benefits and health care costs, and other expenses.

■ Cooperation with other local Catholic institutions of higher learning, especially with Sacred Heart School of Theology, is attractive, promising, and imperative. The archdiocese must be a model of collaboration, just as it encourages parishes, schools, and ministries throughout the Archdiocese of Milwaukee to work in partnership with others.

■ The present Certificate Division needs a thorough overhaul, making archdiocesan-sponsored lay formation even more effective and accessible.

■ A distinct advantage of the present system is that lay students, like seminarians, are offered a *holistic* approach that encompasses the four pillars of formation: spiritual, academic, pastoral, and human.

■ To sell the venerable buildings and property now known as Saint Francis de Sales Seminary would be most unfortunate and controversial.

Our goal then became to give *a clear indication for the future* by Holy Week. Here we go:

■ The Archdiocese of Milwaukee remains fully and enthusiastically committed to providing quality formation for its future priests, deacons, lay ecclesial ministers, and laity.

■ Saint Francis de Sales Seminary will remain open. The seminarians in the five-year **Priestly Formation Program** will continue to receive their spiritual, pastoral, and human formation from Saint Francis de Sales Seminary, continuing to reside at the seminary's Henni Hall. Currently, there are 23 seminarians studying at Saint Francis de Sales Seminary, and an additional five seminarians who have been sent for their priestly formation outside the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, including at the North American College in Rome, the American College at Louvain, and at The Catholic University in Washington, D.C., with additional college seminarians studying elsewhere.

■ The academic, or intellectual, formation of seminarians will now be conducted in collaboration with Sacred Heart School of Theology, operated by the Priests of the Sacred Heart, located in Hales Corners, which currently has 154 students.

■ The students (23) in the **Diaconate Formation Program** will receive their spiritual, pastoral and human formation from Saint Francis Seminary. The academic, or intellectual, formation of diaconal candidates will be provided in collaboration with Sacred Heart School of Theology, or other colleges/universities in the archdiocese, or may continue as a stand-alone program. Students in the diaconal program study to be ordained so that they may proclaim the Word of God, witness marriages, preach at liturgies, and minister to Catholics throughout the archdiocese, usually in affiliation with a parish.

■ The students (44) in the **Lay Graduate Program** are candidates for masters of divinity and masters of arts

degrees in pastoral studies, and are preparing for leadership positions in the church. The academic or intellectual, formation of the students will be offered in collaboration with Sacred Heart School of Theology or other local universities and colleges providing degrees in these areas. Opportunities for spiritual, pastoral, and human formation offered through Saint Francis de Sales Seminary will be explored.

■ The **Certificate Division Program**, in which 77 students are currently enrolled, will be restructured and expanded to a broader lay formation program, and renamed the *Pope John Paul II Center for the New Evangelization*. This program prepares men and women for service in the church, whether as members of parish pastoral staff teams, catechists, or in volunteer ministry fields. Formational opportunities will be expanded through collaboration with other educational institutions, as well as through the enhanced use of technology, ensuring accessibility throughout the 10 counties of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The expansion of this program is essential, as the church faces a pressing need for well-trained lay ministers, especially in the Latino community. (Nearly 40 percent of current students are Latino.)

■ The current college seminary program will be discontinued. College seminarians for the archdiocese will now be prepared at residential college seminaries.

■ The archdiocese will work with the current teaching faculty and support staff, whose services will no longer be required at the newly-fashioned seminary, to find alternative employment, hopefully even at Sacred Heart School of Theology.

■ A facilities assessment of the Saint Francis de Sales Seminary property will be conducted with the intention of gradually moving archdiocesan central offices to the vacated space at Henni Hall, and possibly other seminary buildings on the historic campus.

■ While the move of archdiocesan offices and affiliated costs will require a financial investment, this plan will ultimately allow the archdiocese to continue to provide high-quality ministerial formation in a fiscally-responsible fashion. It also opens the door to the possible future sale or development of the Archbishop Cousins Catholic Center property, as recommended by the Archdiocesan Facilities Assessment Commission.

Our work is far from done. The above decisions — while providing a clear direction — also raises a legion of questions which now must be addressed. And that work begins now — I will keep you posted. I have asked Jerry Topczewski from my staff to serve as the leader of our Transition Team to ensure that we effectively address the issues facing us. Jerry has worked on a wide variety of collaborative projects during his time with the archdiocese and I am confident about his ability to lead this effort.

What we tried to do is avoid the two extremes: some wanted us just to close the seminary. We could save a bundle by simply sending our seminarians, deacon-candidates, and future lay leaders elsewhere, and putting the “for sale” sign up at the historic seminary. That I could not do. The other extreme suggested we just keep doing “business-as-usual,” and work to raise money, cut costs, and increase enrollment. This is unrealistic.

My confidence is that we have a practical, prudent, promising *via media*, which preserves, and even strengthens, our excellent seminary and programs of ministerial formation, while exercising collaboration, partnership, and sound stewardship.

You've been with us for 160 years — priests, alumni, deacons, lay leaders, the faithful of this great archdiocese — in your support of the seminary. Thanks! We need you now more than ever!