

OPEN LETTER
to
The Most Reverend STEPHEN CHMILAR, D.D.
Eparch of Toronto and Eastern Canada

September 27, 2007

RE: The new intended sale of the MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD MONASTERY

Dear Bishop Stephen,

Glory to Jesus Christ!

We, the benefactors, financial supporters and extended spiritual lay community of the Most Holy Mother of God Monastery in Orangeville, Ontario, have learned from Your Grace's letter of notification to Father Marian Struc, the newly appointed spiritual leader of the Monastery, of the intention of the Eparchy to sell the Marian Shrine to the Coptic Orthodox Church as of January 14th, 2008. The main reasons given for the new sale are the ongoing mortgage arrears to the Cistercians, and the imminent danger of losing the Monastery to foreclosure.

We would like to draw attention to three affirmations contained in this letter, which, according to our knowledge, do not reflect the true nature of the situation, and which require further explanation.

- 1. The clear attempt to degrade the true spiritual value of the Mother of God Monastery as an active Marian Shrine and place of ongoing pilgrimage, referring to it in the letter as a "mission parish".**

According to our information, a mission parish is characterized by definite privileges, such as the right to administer the Sacraments of Baptism, Marriage, and the celebration of funerals, while, at the same time, the activity is restricted in scope to its own membership. This is certainly not the reality of the Mother of God Monastery. As holy ground sanctified by many years of monastic prayer, the Monastery continues to function as an active eparchial Marian Shrine, characterized by the preservation of the Studite Tradition in its ongoing liturgical prayer, and its openness to all Christian pilgrims. The best witness to this is the Annual Marian Pilgrimage in honour of the Patronal Feast in September, which this year again successfully attracted over 800 pilgrims, including numerous clergy from various parishes, as well as representatives from many Christian denominations. This Shrine is unique in the Eparchy in its natural setting, and reflects a spiritual charisma and potential that is much greater than the label "mission parish" suggests.

- 2. The misrepresentation of the financial problem, with regards to the non-payment of mortgage to the Cistercians.**

May we remind Your Grace that, with Your blessing, the benefactors and financial donors were instrumental in safeguarding the Monastery from foreclosure in 2005 by the Cistercians, through the Emergency Fundraising Campaign which generated approximately \$ 360,000 in donations and pledges. The monthly mortgage payments to the Cistercians continued uninterrupted, until

the moment that the Eparchy decided to sell the monastery property due to financial problems not associated with the Monastery itself, announcing this intention in writing to all the parishes. This, in effect, is what caused the new non-payment of mortgage as of May 2006, as well as the resignation in protest of the until-then functional Monastery Committee.

We also remind Your Grace, that even while the Eparchy was actively seeking buyers for the Monastery, the benefactors and donors twice submitted in writing an offer to take direct responsibility for the balance of the mortgage owing to the Cistercians, provided that Your Grace would allow the incorporation of the Monastery to preserve it. On both occasions, this proposition was rejected by the Eparchy, consequently prolonging the non-payment of the mortgage, and adding to the arrears.

To our knowledge, the Eparchy has yet to contribute a single dollar towards the mortgage. On the other hand, the benefactors and extended monastery community have not only contributed to the above-mentioned mortgage payments, but have maintained the full operational costs of the Monastery since 1999, which, to date, amounts to approximately \$ 1,200,000 / \$ 150,000 annually/. In response, the Eparchy continues to sell a spiritually active Shrine without the least consultation or cooperation with the financial benefactors, donors, or the extended prayer community.

3. The question of the imminent danger of losing the Monastery to foreclosure.

Interestingly, it was only at the beginning of this summer that Your Grace appointed a new spiritual leader for the Monastery, promising at least a year of new stability, and encouraging the expansion of spiritual endeavour, including the renewal of the plan to host secondary school retreats. In addition, it was made known to us that the Eparchy had decided to preserve the Monastery proper, and to sell only the bulk of the surrounding property. What could have happened so suddenly and unforeseeably within a few weeks, that the Monastery is again in imminent danger of repossession? The only reasonable conclusion is the unexpected apparition of a new buyer.

We, therefore, urgently appeal to Your Grace, not to disregard any further the convictions of the laity, and not to make such important decisions as the sale of the Monastery without open consultations with the communities involved. Our Church is composed of many such faith communities, that have fastidiously funded over many years the parish properties over which the Eparchy presides. You have the opportunity to unite the faithful in the resolution of the financial difficulties of the Eparchy, bringing to bear on them the great human and material resources of the Ukrainian community. Continuing to ignore the laity will only result in greater financial and, more importantly, spiritual problems.

We pray, and continue to believe that, in the end, God's truth and love will triumph for the good of all!

Most Holy Mother of God – Save Us!

The Benefactors and Extended Lay Community of the Monastery.

cc:

His Excellency Luigi Ventura
Papal Nuncio

His Beatitude Lubomyr Husar
Major Archbishop of Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

Most Reverend Hlib Lonchyna
Delegate to the Apostolic See in Rome

His Grace Most Reverend Lawrence Huculak, OSBM
Metropolitan for Ukrainian Catholics in Canada

Most Reverend David Motiuk
Bishop, Eparchy of Edmonton

His Grace Most Reverend Michael Bzdel
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Most Reverend Michael Wiwchar, C.S.S.R.
Bishop, Eparchy of Saskatoon

Most Reverend Kenneth Nowakowski
Bishop, Eparchy of New Westminster

Most Reverend Cornelius J. Pasichny, OSBM

Reverend Richard Soo, S.J.
Chancellor, Archeparchy of Winnipeg

Abbaye Cistercienne d'Oka
Dom Yvon Joseph Moreau, Abbot