



Plain Dealer Story on Diocese Finances Falls Short Through Omissions

On Monday, April 5, 2004, The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer newspaper ran a front page story with the headline "Catholic Diocese's Income Declines." With no apparent reason for its timing, the story attempted to paint a bleak picture of Diocesan finances and operations.

To provide the public with a more complete understanding of several matters raised in the story, here are the Diocese's responses to The Plain Dealer's questions.

1. On the issues of wage and hiring freezes, cutbacks and the closing of offices over Christmas and 4-1/2 day work week in the summer, The Plain Dealer was told **such measures do not appear necessary this year**, although this was never reported. These were measures required in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2004.

Further, The Plain Dealer was told, "Parish offertory income from June 2002 to June 2003, in total, remained constant. Some parishes have seen an increase, some a decrease."

"As has been the case for most investors in recent years, the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland has experienced flat investment income due to the sluggish economy. As good stewards of diocesan resources, the Bishop and the Diocesan Lay Financial Advisory Committee constantly review costs to ensure the greatest efficiencies possible. Budget tightening measures instituted a year ago included a salary freeze and other cost reductions to reflect a marked increase in **health care costs and flat investment income.**"

New hiring was closely scrutinized and outside travel was closely monitored. In an effort to **boost morale**, the Diocese instituted a 4-1/2 day work week during the summer and closed for six days during the Christmas and New years holiday period. This did not produce any cost savings but was done for morale purposes.

The Diocese publishes a complete financial review each year. I would direct you to the November 21, 2003 edition of The Catholic Universe Bulletin for a complete accounting of diocesan finances.

2. The Plain Dealer wrote "But Pilla has had more than just a sluggish economy to overcome. The bishop announced last month that clergy child abuse has cost the diocese \$14.4 million in victims' settlements, treatment and legal fees over 50 years—most of the payouts coming since 1990."

Several Plain Dealer reporters attended a February 27, 2004, news conference when the Diocese disclosed figures concerning the clergy abuse cases. It was explained at that time that the expenditures were allocated from the Diocese's Property and Casualty Reserve Fund; an "emergency fund" established more than 20 years ago and which consists of money **not** otherwise **designated for diocesan operations or social services**. No Catholic Charities money or money designated for Diocesan educational or social services was used for this purpose.

3. Concerning the continued drop in priestly vocations cited in the article, the Diocese gave this full response to that question:

“Vocations to the priesthood and consecrated religious life continue to be a challenge for the Roman Catholic Church. There are several cultural realities that challenge an openness and acceptance of a vocation to priesthood and religious life (i.e. family size and structure; overall religiosity of a child’s home environment, background and economics; the ‘pressure’ for financial success and security; and living in a culture inundated with sex and sexuality).”

“Amid the context of these challenges, the Diocese of Cleveland has been successful in recruiting candidates both for the diocesan priesthood and religious life. For the current academic year, the enrollment for both Borromeo Seminary (college) and Saint Mary Seminary (graduate formation program) increased over the previous year. In May of 2003, the Diocese of Cleveland ordained ten men as diocesan priests – its largest ordination in fifteen years. In addition to the twenty-five college students and twenty-eight graduate students in our diocesan seminary program, there are more than thirty women and men in formation for consecrated religious life.

These numbers do not offset the number of priests and religious leaving ministry by attrition (death and retirement) but they indicate and reflect a very positive vocation trend. More importantly for the future is the significant effort being put forth to create vocation consciousness among the young people. Through a variety of programs and presentations (The Fest, Junior High Power days, High School Vocation Days and retreat programs), thousands of junior high, high school and college students annually pray for and learn about priesthood and consecrated religious life in cooperation with the Diocesan Youth and Young Adult Office, the Diocesan Education Office and Office for Catechetical Ministry, and the Diocesan Vocation office. There is a concerted and coordinated effort to create a vocation culture that will positively impact vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

The Pastoral Plan for the Continental Congress held in Montreal (April 2002) underscores the priority of dynamic youth and young adult ministry and campus ministry creating an environment for young people to hear and respond to God’s call. Bishop Pilla regularly holds dinner/conversation for high school seniors interested in Borromeo Seminary (college). The invited students are active in their parish youth ministry or high school campus ministry program. The most recent gathering brought together the largest number of students since the program was initiated nine years ago.”