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## **Catholic Diocese of Fargo to discontinue seminary program and to review all Fargo, West Fargo, Horace and Kindred parish and school properties**

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After consultation with the College of Consultors, the Diocesan Finance Council, the Seminary Finance Council and the Deans of the diocese, Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Fargo, announced today that the diocese will discontinue its college seminary program at Cardinal Muench Seminary, Fargo, at the end of the 2010-2011 academic year (May 2011). In conjunction with this decision, a review of the seminary properties and all Fargo, West Fargo, Horace and Kindred parish and Catholic school properties will begin this June. The goal of the review, to be completed within one year, is to ensure better stewardship and more effective and efficient use of Catholic facilities in the growing metro area.

### **Cardinal Muench Seminary**

There are two types of seminaries: **college seminaries**, like Cardinal Muench Seminary, 100 35<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE, Fargo, where seminarians work toward a bachelor's degree in philosophy while discerning the call to the priesthood, and **major seminaries**, like Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md., and St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver, where seminarians who already have a bachelor's degree continue formation for the priesthood. There, the men receive the theological training and spiritual formation needed for ordination to the priesthood.

Due to the low number of seminarians at Cardinal Muench Seminary, the annual cost of educating a college seminarian at CMS fluctuates depending on the number and currently averages \$115,000; whereas the annual cost of educating a seminarian in major seminary averages \$35,000. The student at the college level pays \$15,000 per year in tuition, room and board. "It is not good stewardship to underwrite each college-level seminarian at \$100,000 per year," Bishop Aquila stated. "While subsidies would decrease with higher enrollment, the question of stewardship remains."

Bishop Aquila commended those who have provided financial support toward the education of seminarians. "While donors to Cardinal Muench Seminary have been very generous over the years, we are now at the point when we have to recognize that the best use of donations toward seminarian education is to provide scholarships for our seminarians to attend seminaries elsewhere, rather than trying to fund our local program at an excessive level of expense."

Three seminarians will graduate from CMS on May 13, 2010. As of today, April 8, only seven men are registered for studies at CMS for the 2010-2011 school year. "Although the formation program is excellent at CMS, the question also arises as to whether a seminary community of that size can provide appropriate formation for the men in their first years of study and discernment for the priesthood," Bishop Aquila wrote.

CMS is staffed by four priests, five professors (two of whom are retiring this spring) and eight staff members. Four of the current professors teach at North Dakota State University, Fargo, and are paid by CMS, as part of a long-standing agreement with the university. CMS will continue to pay the salaries of four professors through the end of the 2010-2011 academic year, to fulfill agreed upon obligations.

### **Fargo, West Fargo, Horace and Kindred parishes and Catholic school properties**

A review of Fargo, West Fargo, Horace and Kindred parishes and Catholic school properties will commence in June, with completion within one year. "The discontinuation of the seminary program and considerations regarding use of the seminary facility prompts a complete review of all metro area parish and Catholic school properties," Bishop Aquila noted. This includes the parishes of Holy Cross and Blessed Sacrament in West Fargo, Holy Spirit, St. Paul's Newman Center, St. Mary's Cathedral, St. Anthony of Padua, Nativity and Sts. Anne & Joachim in Fargo, St. Benedict's of Wild Rice in rural Horace, St. Maurice in Kindred, and the Catholic schools in Fargo which include Shanley High, Sullivan Middle, Nativity Elementary and Holy Spirit Elementary. Also included in the review will be the undeveloped land in Horace, in the northeast corner of 64<sup>th</sup> Avenue and County Road 17, which will eventually be used for a parish or parish/school combination.

"Several area parishes are considering capital campaigns for facility improvements. It would be irresponsible to approve these projects on an individual basis without looking at how the people of the area as a whole are served by our Catholic churches and schools," Bishop Aquila wrote. "In addition, the cities of Fargo, West Fargo, Horace and Kindred are all growing and this growth must be taken into consideration in the best placement of parishes and Catholic schools to serve the increasing population."

Details to be studied during the review include location in relation to other Catholic parishes and schools, current and potential membership/student numbers, the number of priests needed at each facility, donation history, integrity of the structures, expansion potential, flooding issues, location in relation to residential or industrial properties, demographic developments and other factors. Bishop Aquila noted that an outside consultant will conduct the review to ensure objectivity.

Bishop Aquila concluded his letter with, "We have just experienced the most holy days of the liturgical year, the Triduum, during which time we reflect on the suffering and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and the gift of eternal life his resurrection offers to us. We are in a time of great hope, a time of beginning anew our journey of faith strengthened by the sacraments we have received and the truth of God's revealed love for us. I encourage you to bring this spirit of hope and joy into the coming months so that we may plan well for the future and the proclamation of the Gospel."