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Via Facsimile and Certified Mail

Most Reverend Sean O'Malley
Archbishop of Boston
2121 Commonwealth Avenue
Brighton, MA 02135

Re: A Response To Your Letter Concerning "Our Catholic Appeal"

Dear Archbishop Sean:

I am simply astounded! After the pain and sorrow of the past few years during the sexual abuse crisis, followed closely by the incredibly flawed and unjust process employed to close my parish, I was reeling. The only reason I wasn't walking away from my Church – not my faith my CHURCH – was my pastor and his undying faith in the face of such injustice. After the pain of the closing process (in which I actively participated) I thought that my Church and its leaders could inflict no greater pain on me or the people of my parish. Sadly, I was wrong. I am just devastated by the letter I received this week asking for my financial support for "our Catholic Appeal" when you are about to confiscate all of the financial resources of our wonderful, thriving and financially stable parish whose buildings are in excellent condition with no repairs needed. Our parishioners have given consistently and generously to achieve these ends. You have already taken all we have – without due process -- and yet, you come to us to ask for more!

Archbishop Sean, I am going to take the time to write this letter to explain to you what I am feeling, as well as some of the important but as yet unrecognized reasons that so many of our Catholic laity are so angry and in such pain at this time. I am going to do this because I do not believe that you and the hierarchy of this Archdiocese have any true understanding of these reasons, or the true extent of the adverse impact that these actions are having on this Archdiocese and will continue to have on the future of "our" Catholic Church. I do this because I CARE deeply about the future of our Church. I must tell you, however, that even as I take the time to do this **I have absolutely no hope that you will ever personally read this letter, let alone respond in a way that will in any way restore my hope and faith in the hierarchy of this Archdiocese.** Nor do I have any expectation that this letter will effect any change in the process or the outcome of the Church closings. Nevertheless, I am going to write it because as a Catholic Christian I have an obligation – as a concerned Catholic – to help you more fully understand the issues that are inextricably intertwined with the actions you are presently undertaking.

Those actions are resulting in trauma that will forever scar this Archdiocese and the Catholic Church. It is my prayer that you will consider what I and other Catholics take the time to tell you. Whether you read this letter, or take the time to respond to it in a Christian way, is up to you. I recognize that you will only have an opportunity to respond if those who serve you to bring this letter to your attention! I hope that they do.

In order to understand where I am coming from, I will introduce myself: I am a lifelong Catholic. I grew up in a very devout Catholic family, the youngest of 8 children. The Church was the center of my parent's lives and they passed their faith and trust in the Church on to their children. The extent of their devotion to the Lord is measured by the fact that each of their children and most of their grandchildren (25) and great-grandchildren (33) remain actively engaged in the practice of our faith. One of my brothers is a priest in another diocese. I have cousins who are priests, cousins who are nuns, cousins who teach in Catholic schools. I attended Catholic schools my entire life: private Catholic elementary and high schools, a Jesuit University for college, and finished my education at a Marianist law school. I am well versed in my faith, as well as the history and politics of the Catholic Church. I am a product of schools that emphasized the social justice teachings of our faith. I have devoted my life to those values. I have spent the last 20 years in government service.

I am also a mother of a son who graduated from college and who up until now – at age 24 – has attended Mass regularly. Although I have tried to sow the seeds of vocation to the priesthood or diaconate with him – I won't any longer. I do not want him to be a part of the Church hierarchy. I say this now after I have served for more than 25 years as a lector, a Confirmation teacher, and having worked actively in youth ministry. I have participated in these ministries in several parishes and in several Dioceses and in our Collaborative. For the past 8 years I have been a member of my Parish Council here in Framingham. I am the rank and file of our Church. I am the bedrock -- I am not a dissident. I am devout in my faith. I do my best to live it every day. I have defended my Church and my faith in the deepest hours of our recent crises – until now. After the process that resulted in the announced closing of my parish, I was hanging on by a thread. The thread got thinner still when Bishop Lennon responded to a legitimate request for information about our closing by our Parish Counsel with a letter that was cold, scolding and emphasized the empty process that any appeal would involve and the fact that no appeal would result in a different decision. Today, when I opened YOUR letter, that slender thread was cut entirely – by your words and your decision to send such a letter at this critical time in the lives of your devastated people – especially those whose parishes are closing.

In the first paragraph of your letter you state that you are “profoundly aware of the range of emotions” that we “may be experiencing surrounding the closing of your parish.” I respectfully disagree – you do not truly understand what is happening here at the parish level. IF you truly did have some understanding of the reality of the situation at our “ground zero” it would have stopped you from sending that letter -- it did not. You fail to understand that we only survived the sexual abuse crises because of our parish communities, our pastors and our fellow parishioners. We did not survive due to any

actions of the hierarchy; rather we survived despite the actions of the hierarchy and only through our strength locally as a faith community. Now, by closing our parishes you are taking away the source of our strength. Sending that letter to parishioners of parishes that you are closing is akin to the Romans offering to give Christ spoiled wine while he hung on the Cross, while at the same time they cast lots for his clothes.

You may think that this has happened before when churches have been closed and that the people will get over it in time. That line of thinking is terribly flawed. It applies to another place and time. It does not appreciate the fullness of what has occurred in this Archdiocese over these last few years and the extent of the breach of trust felt by the people of the Archdiocese of Boston.

Despite my pain, however, I do understand the present crisis that is facing our Church. You state that you are endeavoring to ensure that the Church's mission is fulfilled. Sadly, the arbitrary and capriciousness of the decision to close certain parishes will not work to fulfill that mission. I too know what it is to be uprooted. I have spent only 14 years in St. Jeremiah Parish. Before moving to Framingham I participated in several different parish communities since I left the one in which I grew up. I have been a member of inner-city parishes, as well as large suburban parishes. Big and small – each had its benefits. I have also happily participated in our Collaborative here in Framingham. I know that participating in a larger group can bring more blessings. I have a great deal of respect for Fr. Frank O'Brien of St. George's Parish – where I will probably worship should St. Jeremiah finally close – that is if I continue to worship in the Catholic Church. I NEVER thought I could think or say those words!

Why am I so angry? Not simply because my parish was selected to be closed -- that hurts -- but what hurts most is that the process here in Framingham was so fatally flawed. (I cannot speak for other clusters). This process has brought about a result that will not serve the mission of the Church in North Framingham efficiently either now or in the future. St. Jeremiah does not meet the criteria set out by the Archdiocese for closing. Taken together with the closing of St. Anselm's in Sudbury, it will have terribly adverse effects on the present and the future of the Church in this small little corner of God's world. We did not have a fair hearing. And now, we will have an empty appeals process that will only add salt to the wounds.

I have spent my life ministering to our people in many places. I have spent my life giving to the Church and the poor who are in need. My parish, St. Jeremiah, is well known for its generosity to any cause that has been asked of us. During the height of the sexual abuse crisis we were asked to conduct our Promise for Tomorrow Campaign and not only met but also exceeded our goal. Ours is a small, thriving, financially secure parish that would gladly continue to support these goals. WE have ALWAYS met our obligations to pay for the retirement of our Church workers. WHY do we have to pay for those parishes that have not fulfilled their obligations to their retired workers by closing our thriving parish? In reality, it would be much more profitable for the Archdiocese to keep our church open and keep our parishioners contributing than to confiscate our money, our Church, our buildings and our land now and close us down. The money that

you get from closing our parish will be spent in a matter of months; the hurt as a result of the injustice is mortally wounding the faith of our people – the effects of that will last for generations. Keeping our parish working and thriving will provide a string of income to the Archdiocese for years. Closing us will cut off that income stream. What is the wise choice here?

As a lawyer and a manager, I have learned that when seeking to obtain people's participation and cooperation to obtain a difficult but necessary outcome, the **process followed** is key to the success of the task. You can lead people anywhere and they will follow you IF they believe that you are being fair and honest with them. During the closing process, our leaders and our Archdiocese were not being fair with us. Recently, when discussing these issues with a priest I know in another diocese, he likened this process to the legal process and told me we had an opportunity to appeal. I pointed out, however that this is not an apt analogy in this instance. In our system of justice in the United States there are strict standards and guidelines set out for all to see both at the trial court level and on appeal. The submissions are governed by rules of evidence that apply to everyone, so that the truthfulness of the information submitted can have some quality control and also can be tested by cross-examination. The demeanor and veracity of witnesses are tested by independent juries or judges who determine who is to be believed. The legal rules and standards are enforced on appeal by a judiciary that can have no interest in the outcome – they are detached and disinterested. Therefore, we expect that the decisions they make will be objective and reasonable. In the case of our parish closings, none of this was true and many of the resulting decisions were wrong, as is the case with St. Jeremiah's. As Americans our judicial system is inextricably intertwined with our belief system. These beliefs are second nature to us. They are part of our core. For the Church to fail to measure up to these essential concepts of fairness and justice results in an objection to the process that makes any result unacceptable.

The priest with whom I was speaking responded that the Church is governed by Canon law and those secular rules don't apply. The Church just doesn't operate that way. Unfortunately, I recognize that that is the truth. This is the genesis of the crisis at hand. What we see is "Our Church," which we are taught to believe conducts itself on an even higher plane and by a higher set of standards than our secular judicial system, operate in a secret, partial, interested, arbitrary and dogmatic way. Our Church teaches us that we must live by "the golden rule" and that we must treat others as we would want others to treat us – but doesn't live up to that standard when dealing with its own people. The Church is applying a medieval Canon law that does not live up to either present-day secular or religious standards. The Canon laws are outdated and simply should not apply in the post-Vatican II era of an enlightened laity. This results in a violation that goes to our core as individuals and as a faithful people. The breach of trust that accompanies such a travesty of justice is too untenable for us to absorb. When all this comes so closely on the heels of the breach of trust by our hierarchy that was a major cause of the sexual abuse crisis in our Archdiocese and elsewhere -- this is simply too painful to bear!

We have seen military and political leaders in history who are legendary because they have overcome the secular standards to impose and live by a higher standard –one that is based on a core respect for the individual and the importance of the greater good. Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and others have lead people through dire times – but they always began with respect for every person with whom they came into contact. Pope John XXIII is on his way to sainthood for leading us through Vatican II in this way. He was a prayerful man who led in a pious and prayerful way. He recognized the importance of the laity in the Church and had a vision – a gift from God – for the future. I wonder, where is that vision now? In my view it is shattered. We have also seen great women of vision: St. Theresa of Avila, St. Clair, and others endured great hardship but spoke out forcefully in times of change and challenge for our faith. They lived the WORD. We ALL must do that now.

There is a rather important distinction between the way these leaders and saints behaved and the way that the leaders of our Archdiocese have behaved during this most recent process. Although our hierarchy has told us that we are governed by Cannon law, our Archdiocese has approached the task of closing our parishes – more like a corporate downsizing than a sacrificial Church who values its people above all else. Despite what you said in your letter, I certainly don't feel valued at the moment – rather I feel more like a human wallet! The people I noted above conducted themselves first and foremost as people of faith. That is not the way that the hierarchy of our Archdiocese has conducted themselves of late. They talk the talk, but don't walk the walk. They put the protection of the hierarchy, the clergy and “their Church” politics above the needs of its people. This is one direct cause of the each of our recent crises – both the sexual abuse crisis and the present crisis in the closing of our churches. The actions of the hierarchy during these crises are more reminiscent of the actions of the clergy during the medieval ages just prior to the Reformation than any other time in history. We cannot forget that our Church leadership is not infallible and that our Church leaders have made mistakes in the past. One example is the Inquisition. I believe we are living through another period of grave error today. Its time to recognize that there is a clear disconnect between the hierarchy and the laity. If this is not recognized and rectified, what we see in the days ahead could be an impending schism between the hierarchy and the laity. PLEASE recognize this before it is too late. PLEASE don't let that happen!

In order for a leader to ask what is most difficult of those whom he/she leads, they must lead by example. If you ask us to love one another – than you must act lovingly toward us. I must say – your **actions** and those of your minions lately have not extended that feeling. Your words are empty words. If you ask someone to engage in a process, you present, it is your responsibility to ensure a process that both measures up to the standards you have set and that the process is implemented fairly and impartially. I can only speak for our Framingham cluster – but I have to say that the process in our cluster did not measure up to those standards. Indeed, the process itself was structured in a way that would not guarantee fairness. It was not impartial, it was not objective, the accuracy and veracity of the information presented by the parishes could not be tested and, the criteria set out by the Archdiocese were not followed. Moreover, the process pitted one

parish against another in an ugly version of “Survivor.” That is certainly not an exercise in Christian charity that Jesus would have condoned or employed. It simply was not fair.

The flaws in our cluster process were most evident in the contrasting behavior and attitude of two of our priests: Our Vicar and the leader of our cluster process. The only hope that I took away from that process came from the genuine Christian values and light brought into the room by Fr. Frank O’Brien. His gentle caring did little, however, to overcome the flaws in the process and the clearly stated determined agenda to close our parish that was evident from the Vicar. In fact, he announced to his parishioners at St. Bridget’s **before the process even began** that St. Jeremiah’s was the parish in Framingham that was to close. In the face of that, how could we walk away believing that we had any fair opportunity to make our case? The decision was made before we began. The process was outcome determinative. How was that fair?

The evidence of the flawed process as to the closing of St. Jeremiah is clear and convincing. I am not going to recite it all here. We would like to present it to you as part of a fair and impartial appeal process. We would only hope that you would listen with an open mind. But, all that we have seen, heard and read to date belies any hope in the fairness of the coming appeal process. We DO have new evidence. The question is, will you bring an open mind to the process? Bishop Lennon’s letter suggests not!

You should know by our history of giving that the people of St. Jeremiah are not people that are unwilling to sacrifice for our God or our Church. We recognize the reasons for this crisis. Although the laity did not cause it, we realize that the laity is the one that has to live with the results. We understand that some parishes have Churches that are in great need of repair and whose numbers are dwindling and that those parishes should be closed. We understand the need to support the poor – we do it all the time! Our parish, however, is growing from the bottom up – in a neighborhood that is in the midst of great demographic growth that will continue for some time. St. Jeremiah does not meet criteria published by the Archdiocese to determine which parishes should close. In fact, examining parishes chosen for closing across the Archdiocese, it appears that other non-public criteria for closing have been applied. This does not comport with a fair process.

Closing St. Jeremiah parish will not permit us to properly minister the people of North Framingham. Closing both St. Anselm’s in Sudbury and St. Jeremiah is not a wise choice. St. George’s does not have the facilities to accommodate the needs of the influx of all these parishioners or deal with the continuing growth in our community. Already there are too many and the facilities of St. George’s will not be able to accommodate the needs without great repairs and additions. With the expected growth in our community, this will only continue to be a problem for the new larger parish. It will cost MORE money to accommodate that growth – and you are taking all we have and already asking for more. It’s just TOO much, TOO often and TOO soon!!!

You speak in your letter to the need of educating our children and the need of new vocations. I pray for this daily. I have ministered to our children for over 25 years. We

who minister to our youth have been directly impacted by the sexual abuse scandal in ways you will never fully understand. We live with it every day. But, if people like me walk away from the Church by deciding not to share our time, talent and treasure because we haven't been treated fairly – in accordance with the Greatest Commandment -- how will our Church mission be fulfilled? If people like me stop teaching Confirmation or speaking to their children -- and those they teach -- about vocations – what future will we have as a Church with no priests? AND, if people who sit in your seat do not begin to treat us with the respect that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ commanded us to do – then, we will walk away. Many are doing so already. The rest of us are struggling with this crisis of faith in our Church.

So, Archbishop Sean, this is where many of your people are at today, the result of all that we have withstood over the past few years. AND, to add insult to injury in the midst of this entirely troubling process, you tell us we shouldn't be angry, or weary or tired. We should just continue to love and to give. We are reeling and we are human – you are asking too much! This is especially so when NO ONE in the hierarchy has apologized to us for getting us into this mess. No one in the hierarchy has taken responsibility for their actions or inactions. Instead you just keep asking us to do more, to sacrifice more, and to give more. This double standard is not in accordance with God's law! So, as a result, this letter is to inform you that we have decided to give NO more to the Archdiocese...unless...hope against hope:

I make a much more plaintive, important and long-lasting “Catholic Appeal” than anything money can buy. I will start giving financially to this Archdiocese again when the following essential needs of the laity are met:

- When our hierarchy starts treating the laity the way OUR Savior commanded;
- When St. Jeremiah and the other closing parishes get a fair, objective and impartial hearing to our appeals;
- When we see evidence that you, as our Archbishop, begin to truly **listen** and open a **constructive dialogue** with the laity about the future of our Church;
- When the laity is treated with the respect that we deserve – this is coextensive with the first request but bears repeating;
- When the laity is effectively and honestly involved in the decision-making process in our Church and parishes; and
- When, and if, I ever begin to believe that I can trust our hierarchy again.

So, I want you to know that although the process of the Church closings has drained me of all hope in my CHURCH, it has NOT, however, injured my faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Actually, these days I more fully understand His sorrow and the depth of His pain during his suffering and death on the cross. Most often these days I picture him during the agony in the garden, suffering while his apostles were asleep – and angry that they weren't present with Him during His suffering and praying with Him. This is how I picture our Church today, only this time the LAITY are awake

and suffering with Christ in the garden, while the APOSTLES (our Church hierarchy) are asleep. I grieve for the harm that your slumber is inflicting on OUR Church. Your actions clearly evidence of this slumber. I am confident that you have no true understanding of the longstanding harm that the unfairness of the closing process is having on our people or the future of OUR Church and OUR Archdiocese.

As my dearly beloved mother would have observed and prayed, “the devil is having a field day! St. Michael, protect us in battle.” This expression is so painfully apt. Our Church is embattled. I have not much hope at this point in our hierarchy and the future of Our Church, but I do continue to have enduring faith and I know that nothing is impossible with God.

The question is where do we go from here? How will you begin to restore our trust and faith in the Archdiocese of Boston? How will you respond to this “Catholic Appeal?”

Please know that I am praying for you. God bless you!

Devotedly yours in Christ,

Mary Elizabeth Carmody

Cc: The Parishioners of St. Jeremiah
Kathleen Heck