

# My Meeting with the Cardinal

I had a very positive meeting with His Eminence Cardinal O'Malley last Saturday, September 18th. We spoke for over an hour regarding St. Brendan Parish and the "safe environment programs" offered by the Archdiocese of Boston. He was open to all of my comments and observations and allowed me to express fully all my concerns. At the same time he responded to many of my points, which meant he was truly engaged in the discussion. Also involved was Fr. Bryan Parrish, Special Assistant to the Vicar General, who helped to prepare His Eminence and myself for this very productive meeting.

The meeting had originally been scheduled for Saturday morning at 10:00 A.M., but was changed to 2:00 P.M. I did not inform people of this change because a Holy Hour had already been planned for 10:00 to 11:00 A.M. and I did not want people to think that they would have to come back at 2:00! I am thankful to all who attended the Mass; I understand that the church was "packed". I am thankful to Fr. Bill Scanlon for celebrating the Mass and for hearing confessions for two hours! I am also thankful to Deacon Hackett for conducting the Holy Hour. I was able to inform His Eminence that there were many people praying for the meeting.

I first shared with the Cardinal my vocation story and a short description of my parish experiences. Then I pleaded with him that he would not ask me to do anything against my conscience. He said that *he would never ask anyone to do anything against his conscience*. I spoke of the value of a program like that of the Diocese of Baker, Oregon, entitled "Healthy Families: Safe Children". Bishop Vasa, ordinary of the Diocese of Baker, is also Episcopal Advisor to the Catholic Medical Association. Their report of a few years ago, entitled "To Protect and to Prevent" is one of the main sources for "Healthy Families: Safe Children". His Eminence pointed out that this program was not approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), which indeed it is not. I encouraged His Eminence to think about how the bishops of the United States should re-visit the issue of "safe environment" programs and the report of the Catholic Medical Association so that they could approve Bishop Vasa's program.

His Eminence holds it as a great responsibility of his to abide by all the standards put forth by the NCCB for the protection of children in all parishes and archdiocesan institutions. He wants all Catholics to know that he is very diligent in pursuing this matter. My concerns have always been threefold: 1) to do all things in a straight-forward manner; 2) to protect the innocence of the children of St. Brendan's in their "latency period"; and 3) to respect the rights of parents regarding their position as primary teachers in the matters of life and love. I believe that he and I were able to come to an agreement so that his concerns and mine were both shared and met. I am happy to submit the Cardinal's wishes in this way.

It was the Cardinal who pointed out that parents can always withdraw their children from a program they don't like. This shows that he is certainly in accord with the rights of parents as the primary teachers of their children. Granted that, it was his wish that an approved program be presented at St. Brendan's.

I asked the Cardinal if he would allow me to *present a program from Ireland entitled "Stay Safe" according to the innocence of the children of St. Brendan's parish, the rights of their parents, and my conscience as a pastor*. With the suggestion of Fr. Parrish, this would include supplementations that I thought were necessary. I mentioned that what is really needed is that parents be aware of the sensitive time of a child's "latency period" and the affirmation that the church has consistently made regarding parents' duties to give their children sexual

information in a time, method, and manner that they judge to be appropriate. I said that such matters would certainly be part of the supplementations I would make. *His Eminence said that he would be happy if I would present the "Stay Safe" program in this way.* He knew that I thought that there were some difficulties with that program and so that I would present it in a way that would seem to solve those difficulties. It was clear that we were in agreement.

I had been told beforehand by some in the know that my concerns that my tenure as pastor was in danger were exaggerated. The Cardinal certainly did not want me to think that I was a problem priest! He was very gracious and complimentary to me regarding the vibrancy of the life at St. Brendan Parish. And I bragged about some of the good things going on here.

I am grateful to His Eminence for his kindness to me and for his concern for the children and families of the Archdiocese of Boston. I am also grateful to Fr. Parrish for facilitating this meeting and to others – you know who you are! – for helping me to put my thoughts in order prior to the meeting. I am uplifted by the prayer that was offered and the notes of encouragement that were sent. And for those who might have a question, these are my words, approved only by me.

Thanks to all!