

DIRECTIVE ON THE PLACEMENT OF THE TABERNACLE

December 3, 2012

To the clergy and lay-faithful of the Diocese of London:

The reservation of the Blessed Sacrament has been part of the tradition of the Catholic Church since we began to write and reflect on how our community worships and how our worship shapes our community. Liturgical historians have showed us how the earliest **A**tabernacles@ were nothing more than unadorned cupboards in the sacristies of churches. As our understanding of Christ=s presence in the Eucharistic Species has evolved, so to has the manner in which we have chosen to honour this presence in regards to reservation.

The shape, size and placement of tabernacles has shifted frequently over the last thousand years. This is evidenced today as the primary space for reservation at most basilicas in the city of Rome are side-chapels, while later constructions often have the tabernacle on the central axis or within close proximity to the altar. Both have equally demonstrated a community's devotion and love.

We must keep in mind that the Blessed Sacrament is reserved for two reasons: to provide Communion to those who are not able to join the Sunday assembly due to sickness or imprisonment and to provide a venue for our worship of Christ Jesus present under the form of bread. The presence of a tabernacle is not needed for the celebration of the Eucharist or the other sacraments.

What is troubling is that in the last few years, the movement of tabernacles and the redesign of sanctuary space has been done by pastors without contacting me or those to whom I have entrusted this task. This has not been in keeping with diocesan policies and statutes. The faithful of our parishes are often confused by such decisions and are left asking where is the normative placement of the tabernacle and what exactly does the Church teach on these matters. These adjustments to Church furnishings have often been unnecessary and have placed an undue financial burden on parish communities.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2002) states in article 387:

The Diocesan Bishop who is to be regarded as the High Priest of his flock, from whom the life in Christ of his faithful in some sense derives and upon whom it depends, must promote, regulate, and be vigilant over the liturgical life in his diocese. It is to him that in this Instruction is

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entrusted the regulating of the discipline of concelebration (cf. nos. 202, 374) and the establishing of norms regarding the function of serving the priest at the altar (cf. no. 107), the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds (cf. no. 283), and the construction and ordering of churches (cf. no. 291). It is above all for him, moreover, to nourish the spirit of the Sacred Liturgy in the Priests, Deacons and faithful.

I have entrusted the evaluation of these requests to Father Michael Bechard, the Director of Liturgy for our diocese and to the members of the Building Commission under the leadership of the chairperson, Mr. David Savel. Therefore, any movement of tabernacles or any renovations of sanctuary spaces are not to take place until permission has been obtained from the Director of Liturgy and the Building Commission of the Diocese of London.

Simply stated, there will not be any blanket rule which will cover all situations. Decisions will need to be made on all the overall shape of the worship space, considerations given to the feasibility of Chapels of Reservation, the ability of parishioners to access the church building for personal prayer, the formation of the parish community on the difference between the **A**dynamic@ and **A**static@ presence of Christ in our gatherings, et cetera. Decisions will not be made based on the personal piety of the pastor nor on letters or petitions that come from groups within the parish.

I have asked Father Bechard to begin the process of revising the guidelines for the building and renovation of churches and places of worship, in keeping with recent directives of the Holy See and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. It is hope that this work will be completed and provided to me for approval by Advent 2013. In the meantime, both Father Bechard and David Savel welcome your questions and concerns.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London
