

**Saint John's Seminary
Board of Trustees Special Meeting
23 May 2007
Response of Rector to Proposal**

Several days ago, Cardinal Sean met with me to explain the broad lines of the proposal that is now offered to the Board of Trustees. He explained its overall motivation thus: "This is designed to assure the financial stability and viability of the seminary and of the archdiocese."

I do not consider myself competent to speak about the financial stability and viability of the archdiocese, but I do consider myself competent to speak about those of St. John's Seminary, and that is my intention today. I do not intend to speak against the Cardinal, but I do intend to speak against the proposal that is being submitted for our vote.

There are three points to be considered in voting for this proposal.

- The proposal is mistaken in judging that the seminary is not fiscally stable and viable and it is mistaken in judging that the seminary needs financial assistance.
- It is mistaken in its expectation that the terms of the proposal will assist the seminary. On the contrary, and this is the third point:
- The terms of the proposal will, in my judgment, bring about the demise of the seminary.

I

The fiscal stability and viability of the seminary

In the first place, the proposal assumes that the seminary is not fiscally stable and viable. I would point out, however, that for two years now, since the end of FY05, the seminary has received no appropriation from RCAB, yet is alive and well. During the 8 March 2005 trustee meeting, one member of the Budget and Finance committee observed that "these are the strongest financials in the history of the seminary." Up until FY05, the seminary would receive an annual appropriation from the Archbishop in the amount of its operating deficit. The Archbishop, in acting in this fashion, observed the requirement of Canon Law, which states: "The diocesan bishop must ensure that the building and maintenance of the seminary, the support of the students, the remuneration of the teachers and the other needs of the seminary are provided for" (can. 263). An implication of carrying out his lawful duty in this way was that the seminary never developed fiscal independence; it never began to accumulate an endowment. This lack has come to have weighty importance in current fiscal situations and judgments. Unlike Blessed John XXIII Seminary, St. John's

was not allowed to conduct its own advancement program and plans to hire a Director of Advancement were sacrificed in order to "balance the budget."

Recalling several items from recent history will help clarify our understanding of the current fiscal status of the seminary.

In 1997, an archdiocesan fund-raising campaign was begun by the Cardinal in the name of the archdiocese to pay for improvements in the combined building of St. John's Hall and Bishop Peterson Hall. The eventual cost of the remodeling came to exceed \$23 million. In 1999, when the number of sexual abuse claims against RCAB was increasing seriously, the archdiocese found itself in serious fiscal distress. RCAB abandoned responsibility for the fund-raising and then passed responsibility for it to the seminary. In April 1999, the land (6.5 acres) and buildings facing on Commonwealth Avenue were, on the request of the Cardinal, transferred from the seminary to RCAB, and a payment of \$2.9 million was made. The transaction was motivated because the land and buildings were in jeopardy of seizure if the seminary were to become bankrupt. The proceeds from the sale were placed in a restricted custodial account because the land sold was part of the collateral for the construction loan. Effective 1 January 2001, the seminary entered into a contract with Boston College (BC) to lease St. Clement's Hall for 40 years. The rental fee would be paid immediately: \$15 million. From this, \$13 million was restricted and later used as partial payment for the renovations.

At that time, BC owned its first piece of the property of St. John's Seminary.

In 2004, RCAB was under heavy pressure to pay additional sex abuse claims, and was without the resources to do so. RCAB approached both John XXIII Seminary in Weston and St. John's Seminary for assistance. The approach was totally rebuffed by the trustees of John XXIII. As the trustees will recall, the corporate members of the Board of St. John's, following the favorable vote of the trustees, responded benevolently and ceded title to several seminary assets to RCAB who subsequently added some of its own assets, and these were sold to BC for \$85 million. Of the 48 acre package of land and buildings sold to BC, about two thirds were assets from the seminary. Thus assets of approximately \$56 million were transferred from the seminary to RCAB so that it could pay its claimants. At that time, the Cardinal pledged that \$30 million would be given to the seminary so that an endowment could be begun. As it happened, RCAB received a smaller payment from its insurance companies than it expected, such that it could give the seminary only \$21 million and a promissory note for \$4.8 million (that will come due in 2011).

Thus, \$56 million was transferred from the seminary to RCAB, and \$21 million with a promissory note for \$4.8 million were returned to the seminary. This represents a net loss to the seminary of \$30.2 million, and this in favor of RCAB. Thus the question must be asked whether the financial instability is that of the seminary or of RCAB.

II

The proposal will not assist, but impede, the functioning and growth of the seminary

That the authors of the proposal know little about a seminary, whether its intrinsic nature, or its role within the particular Church, or its governance is an inescapable conclusion. Nor have they ever solicited the recommendations or judgment about the proposal from those who do, including trustees (who are responsible for the seminary) and sending bishops (who should be included in policy decisions). The proposal argues that in order to assure the "financial stability and viability of the seminary" further alienation of property is necessary. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the expert evaluation of the Apostolic Visitation team which visited us as part of the nationwide evaluation of seminaries, their report clearly states: "Neighboring Boston College has purchased large tracts of former archdiocesan land near St. John's. In order to insure the integrity of the seminary, the Visitors recommended that no more property should be sold." Their report refers specifically to "the Seminary's excellent library." Granted the proposal refers only to the sale of the library building, but plans for the preservation and relocation of the collection have never been introduced.

What is clear to me is that if the authors knew the nature of a seminary and its relation to the life of the particular Church, they would know that the seminary is often referred to as the heart of the particular Church – numerous times in this way by Pope John Paul II. If they realized the impact and difference made by sound theological and pastoral formation, they would begin to understand something of the difference between St. John's Seminary and the neighboring WJST and BC.

It strikes me as extremely ironic that the proposal should come at this point in time. As the current rector concludes his term of office and a new rector assumes that role in governance, the leadership will be at a grave disadvantage to deal with changes to the seminary as it has developed over the past four years. It is even more ironic in that the Cardinal has recently received a draft of the post-Apostolic Visitation letter from the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education. From the Visitation carried out in St. John's in February 2006, its findings are singularly positive and laudatory. Its opening paragraph speaks of St. John's as an "excellent seminary." The trustees will recall that I read significant portions of that draft at our March meeting. I have not seen the draft of the letter sent to the Cardinal regarding WJST, but I would be surprised if it did not raise several serious points needing remediation.

Collaboration with WJST or BC is not in the interest of St. John's. We exist to form in the faith candidates for the priesthood who will be good shepherds and fathers of the flock entrusted to their care and we have done that well. The Visitation report has determined that "the doctrine on the priesthood presented by the seminary is solidly based on the Church's Magisterium; this is evident in all course syllabi. The pastoral and spiritual programs, too, reflect a sound doctrine of the priesthood. Faculty and staff readily accept this teaching." In contrast, WJST exists in the model of a research university where opinions of every kind are propagated without adequate identification of the binding articles of faith. A sign of this is found in the fact that several professors of WJST are currently under investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. One was recently transferred from WJST to BC possibly because Weston, being an ecclesiastical faculty, must present the names of professors to receive the *nihil obstat* from the Congregation for Catholic Education, a process that includes the submission of the *curriculum vitae* and publications to the CDF. BC professors, on the other hand, would come under the scrutiny of CDF only if

serious complaints were made about them, since it is a Catholic university, not an ecclesiastical faculty. Several professors at WJST are self-professed gays or lesbians. Collaboration with such an institution is not good policy for St. John's Seminary, in which the Visitors judge that there is an "excellent" moral theology program. If we are urged to reduce expenses by mutual collaboration, this would induce asphyxiation, with the remedy worse than the affliction (if there were an affliction that needed to be remedied).

The Visitation report notes that "The seminary has had a troublesome recent history: moral integrity and fidelity to the Magisterium were both wanting. A new stage in the seminary's life began with the appointment of Bp. Lennon as rector in 1999... [and they] have done a remarkable job reforming St. John's." It will not assist SJS to be in such proximity and "control" of incompatible entities such as BC and WJST.

The Visitation team also reported that "The prayerful atmosphere of St. John's Seminary is one of its most outstanding and noticeable qualities... there is a strong emphasis on fostering an authentic priestly spirituality in all areas of formation." Already, as a result of the sale of seminary assets to BC in 2004, the negative impact on the environment of the seminary has been observed. Based on the increase of vehicular and pedestrian traffic outside chapel, residences, and classrooms, of people entering the seminary to use its facilities and using its remaining grounds as a public park, based on these already intrusive changes, it is evident that the impact of further sale of property would be more detrimental and burdensome to long established practices necessary for maintaining an atmosphere of prayer. For SJS to continue its path of development and growth, it must also be able to accommodate guests attending events such as the lectures of Cardinals Dulles and Stafford and the annual Lessons and Carols which introduce the public and potential benefactors to SJS, gatherings of presbyteral alumni which the Cardinal has applauded and encouraged, or the many retreats and meetings of Vocation Directors and potential vocations whose increasing numbers have also been reported to the Board in the past two years.

To sell Peterson Hall and the library with their contiguous land would destroy the value of what that property has meant in the history of the archdiocese. It would simply become Boston College. There is simply not a sufficient amount of building (or "physical resources" as accrediting bodies put it) in St. John's Hall to hold that history. The sale of the kitchen and heating plant will leave St. John's in perpetual dependence on BC. But more than a building, there needs to be a relationship with the archdiocese. That relationship has been cultivated in increased use for archdiocesan functions and its office of Vocations. In recent months, the Seminary capacity was exceeded when Vocation Directors sponsored a "come and see" weekend, necessitating the use of additional rooms in Peterson Hall.

Harm to the credibility and stability of the archdiocese and the seminary will result from further sale of property and buildings. In fact, the Visitation Report states that "The seminary, therefore, needs to be supported, so that its mission continue to flourish." St. John's Seminary is about to be granted affiliation with the Pontifical Lateran University of Rome and would become the only seminary in New England to offer ecclesiastical degrees which will be recognized as representing a high and integral standard both in North America and throughout Europe. The sale of properties could seriously endanger that affiliation, which judges the stability as well as the academic excellence of the institution.

This proposal, if it advances, will not protect or support the seminary. If the proposal advances to the point of implementation, my estimate for the survival of the seminary is a period of three to five years. It is already a common misconception that SJS "was sold" to BC. Students at WJST were told three weeks ago that they would be moving to Peterson Hall, and similar communications are on the WJST webpage.

III

A Vote for the Demise of the Archdiocesan Seminary

I can only surmise that the authors of the proposal know nothing about the role of St. John's Seminary within New England – otherwise they could not have proffered this proposal which reverses the most significant achievements of the seminary over the past five years.

Most vulnerable is our MAM program which just recently received accreditation and whose recent five year report and recommendations the trustees clearly support. Founded six years ago, MAM was judged to be necessary by the trustees in order to offer a theological and pastoral formation that would counter that being offered by BC's Institute for Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry. The proposal before you calls for the relocation of the MAM program from our campus to Braintree. Will our students find travel to Braintree on two evenings a week, during rush hour and after a day's work, burdensome? Will our faculty, most of whom are resident at the seminary and greatly stretched by their workloads, be able to continue providing high level teaching? How will students meet with their faculty advisor, their spiritual director, with the Dean of Admissions and Records? What library will be available for their use? How will the administrative staff of MAM benefit from services of the seminary's business office at such a distance? Will the accreditation of MAM be prejudiced because professors are no longer available for students? How can such a move at this time be viewed as helping the program? I believe it will cause a setback. Even as we have discussed the need to identify additional sources for scholarships, who among us is so naïve as not to recognize that BC will note the distress and hardship and be ready to offer to take our students in, even offering them substantial financial aid? Quickly the MAM program will be swallowed by BC – whose problematic doctrinal and pastoral formation were the motive for establishing MAM in the first place – and undoubtedly with the spin of "assisting" the archdiocese and the seminary.

If this proposal is approved, neighboring bishops will rightly judge that St. John's is losing ground and that, under the terms of the proposal, it has no realistic possibility of surviving. They will not likely send their seminarians for formation here and the clearly rising number of enrolled seminarians on which our financial stability depends will plummet.

Possible future faculty members will not likely be willing to accept an assignment within an institution whose future is so uncertain. The pressure on St. John's from having the Weston Jesuit School of Theology literally at its back door, separated only by a locked door, will quickly intensify. I predict that the same architects of the current proposal will be quick to point out that the availability of two professors in two closely situated institutions teaching the same course is an unaffordable luxury. St. John's will be pressured to economize further to protect its financial stability and viability, and doctrinal integrity will be sacrificed.

The proposal before you will have a severe impact on faculty, not to mention administrative and service positions. The Cardinal has spoken at every meeting of the Board this year about increasing collaboration with bishops of the region. The Board has discussed regional collaboration while identifying future faculty members. Accepting the proposal would be counter to these objectives because no one of qualification will want to associate with a dying institution.

The effect on seminary faculty, staff, and seminarians of months-long circulation of rumors about the sale of Bishop Peterson Hall and the seminary's library, and now of submission of this proposal, has been serious. New faculty are unwilling or extremely reluctant to accept a position; current faculty speak openly of duplicity and lack of trust in that no one in authority has spoken to us about the rumors; seminarians are dispirited by the prospect that they would have to transfer to another seminary. Some faculty have already been approached by other institutions, aware of the rumors, who are interested in attracting them.

Part of the proposal indicates the commitment of BC to assume responsibility for capital expenses for St. John's Hall, should such be necessary. It is legitimate to reflect on why BC would be interested in making this contribution to St. John's. One possible motive would be to help the seminary. A further motive, however, might be the expectation on BC's part that it is prudent to invest in what will eventually become theirs. It seems to me that the contribution is motivated by the confident expectation that St. John's Hall will soon be property of BC. Thus the progression as in a military campaign of seizure: a toe-hold is established on the seminary property by leasing St. Clement's Hall in 2001; a major territorial advance is secured by the purchase of 48 of the existing 63 acres, with buildings, in 2004; a strangle-hold would be administered to the seminary by purchase of Bishop Peterson Hall and our library in 2007; and simply by waiting a few years the crown jewel, St. John's Seminary, with chapel, would fall into BC's hands. Within three to five years, the conquest and take-over would be complete.

IV

Conclusion and a positive plan

Is this proposal designed to assure the financial stability and viability of the seminary? If by "viable" we mean having the ability to develop and live, the answer can only be No. So, a proposal is made to us to resolve a problem that we do not have, and the remedy proposed is that we alienate assets which are necessary for the survival of the seminary, and this in the name of assuring our financial stability and viability. This proposal is not rational. It does not respect recent history or reasonable expectations of fiscal stability and growth for the next three to five years.

What is often alleged to be the problem of the seminary is a budgetary shortfall for FY08 and the need to strengthen us for the future. But if one considers that the seminary in May is ending academic year 06-07 with 40 students enrolled, and that the seminary in September will open academic year 07-08 with 60 students enrolled, the increase from tuition alone will wipe out any budgetary shortfall that can be foreseen. Further, because the

number of seminarians who will be ordained in 2008 (four) and 2009 (six) is relatively small, it is evident that maintaining the level of enrollment at 60 for two years would not be difficult. (Attached is a page which illustrates the relation of income deriving from tuition to projected budgetary shortfalls.)

Canon 237.1 states: "Where it is possible and expedient, there is to be a major seminary in each diocese; otherwise, the students who are preparing for the sacred ministries are to be entrusted to another seminary, or an interdiocesan seminary is to be erected." The Visitors wished that the bishops of the region would once again send their seminarians to St. John's "in order to boost the current small enrollment." They have done so. St. John's is the only seminary in Region I for younger men. What we need to consider is that the increase in vocations from Boston and from sending bishops is to the seminary *as it is currently configured*.

To quote the report again: "The Visitors unanimously recommended that St. John's Seminary be kept open, despite the financial pressure to sell it. They hoped that Your Eminence would make a strong, clear statement that its future is secure." *The fatal flaw of the proposal before you is that it fails to consider that a seminary is more than property.* The distinction between the financial state of the seminary and that of RCAB is blurred. The board's vote on the proposal cannot be made without knowing whether there is a more comprehensive, future plan. Is there another property? Are we thinking of a new, better location for St. John's Seminary? Unless there is such a plan already in the developmental stage for Boston's Archdiocesan and the region's seminary, approving this proposal counters everything that is stated in our mission. Acceptance of this defective proposal represents an outright rejection not only of the advice of the Holy See and the support of regional bishops, but also the expressed intentions of our Cardinal Archbishop which we have all been privileged to share over the past several years.

The critical question is not to sell or not sell property. The question is: will we project a whole new archdiocesan seminary? Unless we have a suitable structure on which we can rely, even if it means having to leave this historically significant setting, unless there is a suitable alternative so that St. John's can continue to provide priestly formation in line with the teaching of the Church, we are giving up on SJS and this becomes an ill-fated project. As the archdiocese prepares for its bicentennial there could be nothing but shame and embarrassment if we appear to forsake our own mandate, mission, and values for 30 pieces of silver.

Taking our lead from the archdiocesan pledge for transparency in finances and from the archdiocesan presbyterate, we would do well to ask that any plan for the future of SJS be proposed in a way that engenders "trust... with transparency, consultation, communication, integrity, follow-through, and many other desirable qualities..." all of which are found lacking here (*A Church Continually Being Reborn*, Archdiocese of Boston Pastoral Planning Report, Spring 2007).

Trustees will recall what is stated in the Amended By-laws of the Corporation: "Inasmuch as the Board of Trustees... is the managing body of this corporation, the individual members of the Board of Trustees are to insure, as a requirement of their office, that St. John's Seminary will retain in perpetuity its identity as a Roman Catholic institution for the education of candidates for the priesthood."

The Association of Theological Schools, in their standards on Authority and Governance (8.3.1.1; distributed at the meeting of 5 November 2005), states: "The governing board is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of the institution's integrity and its freedom from inappropriate external and internal pressures, and from destructive interference or restraints. It shall attend to the well-being of the institution by exercising proper fiduciary responsibility, adequate financial oversight...."

Because we, as trustees, are responsible for promoting the good of St. John's Seminary, its "financial stability and viability," we need to strengthen and promote all that has been achieved. It is incumbent on us to reject this proposal. I strongly urge you to do so.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Fr. John A. Farren, O.P.
Rector