

NEWS RELEASE



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Archbishop Lucas shuts down Association of the Hermit Intercessors of the Lamb
Archdiocese to care for 48 displaced members

October 15, 2010 (OMAHA, NE) – Today, Omaha Archbishop George J. Lucas shut down the Association of the Hermit Intercessors of the Lamb, a contemplative, intercessory, and mixed (lay men, women, and clerics) public association of hermits.

Lucas suppressed the Catholic association after a majority of lay directors of Intercessors of the Lamb, Inc., the association's civil corporation, impeded him from helping the association accomplish the necessary reforms identified by a recent canonical visitation.

“What began as a desire for pastoral solicitude and an effort at positive reform resulted in the refusal to accept the assistance and jurisdiction of the Church by a majority of the lay board members,” Lucas said.

Lucas tried on several occasions to meet with directors of Intercessors of the Lamb, Inc. to share his vision and hope for the hermit community. The majority of the board refused his invitations and took steps to undermine his pastoral oversight of the association.

Last winter the newly installed Archbishop Lucas was approached by Nadine Brown, the Intercessors' foundress and former director, to request his guidance in determining the group's future. In an effort to familiarize himself with the association before advancing Brown's goals, Lucas had canon law professor the Rev. James J. Conn, SJ, JD, JCD act as his delegate in conducting a canonical visitation of the Intercessors.

At Lucas' request and with Brown's agreement, Conn examined the association's governance structure, in addition to reviewing the doctrinal, spiritual, moral, and financial aspects of the association. His findings prompted Brown's resignation and the appointment of the Rev. Gregory P. Baxter trustee of the Intercessors for a period of up to 12 months. Baxter, pastor of St. Margaret Mary Parish in Omaha and a former chancery official, was charged with providing the order, structure and vision that were found lacking in the association. A majority of the civil board rejected Lucas' and Baxter's guidance, which prevented the archdiocese from moving forward because it lacked the cooperation of the civil board of directors.

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“It was my hope from the beginning that the Intercessors and the archdiocese would move together on this path to the next step,” Lucas said. “Unfortunately, the canonical visitation revealed a number of alarming issues. For reasons that they have refused to share with me, the board of directors does not want to work with the Church to implement the necessary reforms.”

Lucas further stated the directors’ position is in stark contrast to the members living as a community at the Intercessors’ Ponca Hills campus. He said the community was excited when he agreed to help the association chart a new course for the future.

According to Deacon Timothy F. McNeil, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Omaha, all Catholic institutions and apostolates in the archdiocese must have a connection to the Archbishop of Omaha. “When the association asked to be recognized as a Catholic entity in accord with Church law, it agreed to recognize the pastoral authority of the archbishop and follow Catholic practices,” McNeil said. “In other words, you cannot make the claim you’re a Catholic organization and at the same time separate yourself from the teaching, sanctifying, and governing role of the archbishop.”

Now that the association is suppressed, public worship and the celebration of the sacraments are prohibited on the Intercessors’ property; priests and deacons are forbidden from ministering at the property; donors are advised that their contributions will not go to support the mission of a Catholic organization; Intercessors of the Lamb, Inc, is no longer affiliated with the Catholic Church; and the chapel on the campus is no longer a Catholic chapel. Moreover, the vows of the members ceased at the moment of suppression. McNeil said Catholics worldwide are encouraged to refrain from participating in Intercessors-sponsored activity.

McNeil said Lucas received the consent of the association’s internal governing council before suppressing the association. He further stated that Lucas’ decision was also influenced by Conn’s findings, which reflected negatively on Brown’s leadership. Conn’s findings included: errors in governing documents; serious disunity within the community; widespread dissatisfaction with leadership; lack of safe environment policies; questionable financial practices; violation of its own proper law; use of intimidation tactics to secure obedience from members; inability of members to articulate the Intercessors’ charism; lack of financial transparency; violating norms governing alienation and acts of extraordinary administration; a flawed understanding of prayer and spiritual discernment;

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absence of good human resources; confusion and violation of internal forum and external forum in formation and governance; absence of adequate economic stewardship; illegitimate and irreverent custody of the Blessed Sacrament; and confusion over the administration of Mass offerings.

Lucas said when he assumed governance of the association his primary goal was to use his pastoral role to help the faithful members associate as a community that was in harmony with the Church. When the association's civil board made it impossible for him to exercise his pastoral function, Lucas said he had no choice but to suppress the association.

Lucas is now providing pastoral care in a different manner. He provided a bus Friday morning to transport 48 former members from the Ponca Hills campus to temporary housing in the archdiocese. He is also providing food and clothing for the 48. "My concern is for the welfare of the individuals who joined the Intercessors with the intention of doing the Lord's work," Lucas said.

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Founded as a diocese in 1885, the Archdiocese of Omaha serves spiritual and human needs in a 23-county area of Northeast Nebraska. Through its 147 parishes and missions, the archdiocese reaches out to 225,000 Nebraska Catholics. With two Catholic universities, 57 elementary schools, 18 high schools and a parish-based religious education program within its boundaries, Catholic education enriches the lives of some 58,000 young people. The Archdiocese of Omaha is one of the largest private social service providers in the region. Catholic Charities and the Family Life Office lead a network that ministers to the broadest and most fundamental needs of our community. Generous support to the Annual Appeal is symbolic of the collective faith that allows the Archdiocese of Omaha to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. www.archomaha.org