NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Bp. Lennon seeks to meet breakaway Catholics

Michael O'Malley Religion News Service | Aug. 18, 2010

CLEVELAND ? Bishop Richard Lennon wants to meet with the priest and lay leaders of a breakaway congregation to try to bring them back into the fold, a spokesman for the diocese said Aug. 16.

The Diocese of Cleveland was reacting to an unauthorized Mass celebrated Sunday by the Rev. Robert Marrone and about 350 communicants in leased commercial space they set up as a church, independent of the diocese.

Diocese spokesman Robert Tayek said Lennon "has an obligation, as shepherd of the diocese, to try and reach out to these folks in the hopes of keeping them in communion with the church."

Leaders of the new Community of St. Peter, facing possible excommunication for disobeying the bishop, have stressed that they still consider themselves practicing Roman Catholics, but disagree with the diocese over the closing of their church, St. Peter, in downtown Cleveland.

When Lennon announced in March 2009 that he was mothballing the 151-year-old St. Peter's as part of a downsizing plan, parishioners began considering other options to stay together.

Eventually, they organized a nonprofit corporation -- the Community of St. Peter -- and raised money to lease space in a century-old building downtown.

In March, Lennon sent letters to each member of St. Peter's, warning them that their salvation was at stake if they worshipped in a space without his approval.

Despite Lennon's admonishment, many, including Marrone, pressed on. In defiance of the bishop, they celebrated their first Mass in their new space Sunday and are planning to continue each week, operating on an annual budget of about $200,000.

Tayek said the bishop is concerned, but not threatened, by the action. "He's trying to do the pastoral thing here," said Tayek.

Marrone could not be reached for comment.

Bob Zack, a member of the new community's board of trustees, said the board had not heard from the diocese. Zack said he did not know whether Marrone or board members would be willing to meet with the bishop.

"We have not gotten together as a group to talk about it," he said.

Asked whether Marrone and the lay leaders could face excommunication for disobeying the bishop, Tayek said, "Eventually it could come to that. It would have to be properly investigated."

[Michael O'Malley writes for the *The Plain Dealer* in Ceveland.]

Source URL (retrieved on *02/07/2016 - 08:33*): http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/bp-lennon-seeks-meet-breakaway-catholics