

On Sunday, September 25th, 2011, Archbishop Pettipas delivered this talk at a banquet and meeting of the 4th Degree Knights of Columbus, their wives and invited guests in Fairview at St. Thomas More Church hall.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I want to thank you all for your kind welcome of me this afternoon. I have just come from two retreats – one for our clergy, preached by a Benedictine monk from Munster, SK, and the second that I preached for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, at Star of the North Retreat House in St. Albert. Not to mention the meeting that I was at yesterday in Winnipeg, of the board of directors for the corporation of Catholic dioceses and religious congregations dealing with the Indian Residential School Settlement. Having come back recently from World Youth Day in Spain, you can see that there are a whole variety of topics that I could share with you on this evening. However, in planning for this evening a few weeks ago, Ken Landry suggested that I speak of the proposed move of the chancery offices from McLennan to Grande Prairie. I'd be willing to speak of these other events as well, perhaps on a later occasion. Let me stick for now with the subject that Sir Knight Ken Landry gave me. The move to Grande Prairie ... "if that's not too hot a topic, Your Grace", is how he put it. It is indeed a hot topic.

When studying English composition and the writing of essays in high school, I was taught a guiding principle of composition: that any text without a context is a pretext. So even as I speak of the placement of the chancery office, I want to set it in a context. What can be said about chancery offices generally and the placement of the seat of any diocese. How might we then apply this to the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan?

By definition, the chancery office is the collective of offices and functions by which a bishop governs his diocese. It consists of the bishop's own office, and those of the chancellor, financial officer, accountants, directors of pastoral ministry and welfare to the poor and needy, catechetical offices, and archives. In most circumstances that I know of, such offices would all be located under the same roof, but this is not always the case. The chancery offices are also normally in the same vicinity or town as the cathedral.

Although no stipulation of such exists in Canon Law, the cathedral and chancery offices are usually located in cities, where there is a sizeable population. In the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, under the article entitled Diocese (Eparchy), it states, "In the age

that followed the Apostles, diocesan organization became clearer. Generally all local churches were in the cities, and each city had its own bishop. As the Church spread out into the country areas, these regions remained in the control of the city bishop. In Egypt and Mesopotamia there were churches in flourishing villages under the ecclesiastical control of the city bishop.” In the middle east of apostolic times, dioceses were established in this way; as the Church spread to Europe and other continents, this practice of situating the chancery offices and cathedral in a significant city continued to be the pattern.

In Canada at least, I would say that in several instances, the successful choice of a seat for the dioceses has been a challenge, due to the fact that populations and resources have quickly shifted in our pioneer country. In every instance, the seat of a diocese was established in a given town or city, or in any other place in the firm belief that this place would expand and grow. As time went on, in a number of these cases, a subsequent bishop would move his chancery offices, usually moving the cathedral as well, but not always. Let me enumerate the examples of this in Canada that I personally know of:

- The original Diocese of Harbour Grace in central Newfoundland, was moved to Grand Falls-Windsor in 1953, and renamed the Diocese of Grand Falls;
- The Diocese of St. George’s on the west coast of Newfoundland was moved to CornerBrook, and is now known as the Diocese of CornerBrook and Labrador;
- The Diocese of Saint John, New Brunswick, was begun by including the whole of the Province of New Brunswick, and was located in Fredericton, the provincial capital. Very shortly afterward, however, the seat of the diocese was moved to the port city of Saint John, which is still the larger centre;
- The Diocese of Alexandria in south-eastern Ontario was moved from Alexandria to the city of Cornwall in 1976. The dioceses was renamed the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall, and while the cathedral remained in the town of Alexandria, a co-cathedral was designated in the city of Cornwall;
- The Diocese of Sault-Ste-Marie, Ontario, while it has retained that name to this day, saw a co-cathedral designated in North Bay when the chancery offices were moved there, but the present chancery offices for this diocese are found in the city of Sudbury;
- The Diocese of St. Albert was moved a few short miles and renamed the Archdiocese of Edmonton in 1912;

- The Vicariate Apostolic of Grouard moved its chancery and cathedral to McLennan, and became known as the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan;
- The Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith in the NWT moved its chancery offices to the city of Yellowknife, although the name of the diocese remains the same, and the cathedral is still located in Fort Smith;
- In 1963, the Diocese of Prince Rupert BC was moved to Prince George, and the name of the diocese changed to Prince George;
- The chancery offices for the Diocese of Nelson BC were very recently moved to Kelowna. It seems that the name of that local church will remain The Diocese of Nelson, with the cathedral remaining in Nelson.

So, is there are any precedents in Canada for moving the chancery offices to a different city? As you can see, it has happened many times before. Without having done extensive research into the histories of these many moves, I would conjecture that in most if not all cases, the move was made because the population and resources and travel routes shifted. The town or city that was earlier thought to be or to become significant, no longer held a place of significance. The bishop in each case made a practical decision and moved to a place of greater influence within his diocese.

You will notice that I made mention of Grouard in that litany of moved chancery offices. I'm sure that nobody here needs to be reminded that our diocese did not begin in McLennan, but in Grouard. In 1939, Bishop Langlois wrote to the Offices of Propaganda Fide in Rome, requesting permission to move the cathedral and the seat of the diocese, then a Vicariate Apostolic, from Grouard. When Grouard was chosen in 1903 and the cathedral built there, Grouard was not insignificant. A strategic port on Lesser Slave Lake, it handled a large volume of shipping traffic. Its shops and services were unparalleled in northern Alberta, and it had every sign of becoming a major city. So significant was Grouard, in fact, that it was proposed to become the provincial capital when Alberta became a province in 1905. When that didn't happen, and when railways overtook waterways as the preferred means of transportation, McLennan seemed by the late 1930s as a very logical choice to built a new chancery office and then a cathedral. McLennan seemed poised to become a bustling city and to warrant such a move, as it already had sufficient industry and businesses, the railway being a significant player. It seems to me that when the chancery moved from Grouard to McLennan, it was because the bishop of the day was confident that McLennan would become a booming city, and he wanted the Catholic Church to be already there in a significant

way. Unfortunately, and it is most unfortunate but true, McLennan never became that booming city. It has diminished, while the post-war boom mightily increased the good fortunes of many other communities across the nation and in northern Alberta. Shifts in population are still taking place in this country.

As I have pondered this situation since becoming bishop and residing in McLennan, I have become aware of many realities that have an effect on me and on my functioning, some major and some not so. In presenting my proposal to move to Grande Prairie, I've highlighted what I consider to be two of the more compelling reasons for such a change. On the one hand is my need for access to airlines for travel beyond the borders of our archdiocese; on the other is the ability to meet the personnel needs of the chancery office into the future. Put quite simply, there are several flights I need to catch throughout the year, and I find the two hours' drive from the airport to be a burden. And as our archdiocese develops and grows, the staffing needs of the chancery will increase both in terms of number of staff needed, as well as the particular skills being sought. I am not confident that the McLennan region has an employee base to meet those needs.

It is now over 4.5 years since my ordination as a bishop and my installation as the Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan. In the years since beginning this very singular ministry, I've succeeded in getting around to most all of the communities of the diocese. I've come to know our people and understand our resources and our challenges. There is much that I have been able to accomplish ... all of this with the cooperation and devotion of the clergy and of the baptized in our local church. All the while, I've tried to find an image that might speak of this need to relocate the chancery office and move into different quarters. The image that fits it best in my mind is a potted plant. Anyone who finds joy in potted plants knows of the need to re-pot any given plant as it grows, until it reaches its greatest size. As a mere slip, a small and pretty pot may suffice. But as it grows, a new and larger pot is needed, with fresh soil and nutrients. You don't want the plant to become pot-bound, as that fact in itself will prevent its further growth and development.

I think you all know what I've circulated already in my pastoral letters about this proposed move. I've provided no deadline. The cathedral will remain to be the present St. John the Baptist Cathedral in McLennan. We will still be known as the Archdiocese of

Grouard-McLennan. Most of the meetings and events that draw together people from around the archdiocese will still take place in Peace River or McLennan.

Last summer, realizing that there were many issues to be addressed in making such a transfer, I sensed the need to put together a steering committee. This committee is commissioned with the task of looking at all the possible options in this move, at the same time developing a business plan for the project. Two people from the chancery office in McLennan (Paulette Carrier and Fr. Joseph Jacobson) were joined on this committee by three people from Grande Prairie (Gerry Marcotte, Garth Grubisich and Paulette Patterson). For health reasons, Paulette Patterson has stepped down, and I have found others from Grande Prairie and Peace River to take her place in mounting a fundraising campaign. This steering committee continues to meet and work on the details of this project. The committee informs me that the actual move is most likely about 12 to 18 months away.

As you have heard, at least since I've been bishop, our diocese lives pretty close to the bone. We thankfully have achieved, with some hard work, a balanced budget for the archdiocesan operations. The end of each year shows either a slight deficit or a slight profit. At the same time, I know that the majority of our parishes struggle to survive. I do not foresee the cost of this move to have a negative effect on the financial needs of any parish. A very initial projection of the cost of the move is from \$1.2 to \$1.5M. The plan is to raise this money within a short period of time, and these donations are to come to this project and to this project alone. It will not be taken from any parish holdings in the archdiocese.

The Knights of Columbus have always taken great pride in their support for their priests and their parishes, for their bishop and for this diocese. I am grateful for this support, and I count on it. I cannot deny that my proposed move to Grande Prairie has upset some people in the diocese. There may even be some of you here this evening – faithful Knights and fervent Catholics – who feel opposed to this move. Despite this, I count on your support for me and my office, support that I hope will be expressed in three ways: prayerful, moral and financial.

By prayerful support, I ask you to pray for our archdiocese in all of its needs. Pray for our parish communities and their vitality. Pray for our priests and seminarians and

religious Sisters. Pray for our youth, that they may grow up to be faith-filled and believing Catholics.

By moral support, I ask you to try to speak well not only of me but of all persons. Refrain from repeating to others what may come to your ears as gossip and innuendo. Stand up for the integrity of every person. Give the other person the benefit of the doubt. Whenever you can say something positive about someone, say it in truth and in charity.

By financial support, I ask you to promote a spirit of adequate giving in our diocese. This is not only in terms of cold cash, but also the warmer currencies of time and talent. We have all been blessed; encourage in the people around you a spirit of giving in the measure each one has received. The author of Psalm 116 asks the question, "What return can I make to the Lord, for all of his goodness to me?"

I am open to any questions or discussion, not only on this topic but anything you wish to raise. I thank you for your attention to these words of mine.