



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

4445 Lindell Boulevard
St. Louis, Missouri 63108-2497
314.633.2222
314.633.2333 (fax)
www.archstl.org

January 30, 2009

Mr. Leonard Frankel, President
Ms. Batya Abramson-Goldstein, Executive Director
The Jewish Community Relations Council of St. Louis
#12 Millstone Campus Drive
St. Louis, Missouri, 63146-5776

Dear Mr. Frankel and Ms. Abramson-Goldstein:

I write to you about some recent events that I know are of concern to the Jewish community in the St. Louis region. On January 25 last, Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunication of four bishops who were ordained in 1988 without papal permission, among them Bishop Richard Williamson. This gesture was meant to be a first step toward healing the divisions caused by the ordinations.

It has been widely reported in the news media that Bishop Williamson has made statements denying the Holocaust. His words have shocked and angered many people and have been hurtful to Jewish people everywhere. I want to assure you and all Jewish people that the untrue and preposterous statements of Bishop Williamson denying the Holocaust and the facts of the Holocaust are completely unrepresentative of the position of the Catholic Church. The Archdiocese of St. Louis and the entire Church deplores and rejects any kind of anti-Semitism whenever and wherever it is found and remains firmly committed to the principles of *Nostra Aetate*. The lifting of the excommunications is in no way a change to this commitment.

I wish to point out that some news media reports have misinterpreted the lifting of the excommunications as meaning that the four bishops, including Bishop Williamson, have been readmitted and reinstated into full unity with the Church. This is incorrect. The lifting of the excommunication removes a legal obstacle to full unity and is a step toward reconciliation. There are still a number of "steps" which must be traversed before there can be full unity with the Church. This Wednesday, Pope Benedict XVI stated, "I trust that following from this gesture of mine will be the prompt effort on their part to complete final necessary steps to arrive to full communion with the Church . . . true recognition of the magisterium and the authority of the Pope and the Second Vatican Council."

In recent days the Church has made clear its total rejection of Bishop Williamson's statements about the Holocaust. Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, denounced the words of Bishop Williamson, saying, "They are unacceptable words, stupid words. To deny the Holocaust is stupid, and it is a position that has nothing to do with the Catholic Church."

This week Pope Benedict XVI's remarks to pilgrims at his Wednesday audience strongly reaffirmed his position and that of the Catholic Church. Referring to recent commemorations of the Holocaust, the Pope highlighted how at Auschwitz - a place he has visited several times, the last in May 2006 during his apostolic trip to Poland - "millions of Jews were cruelly massacred, innocent victims of blind racial and religious hatred." The Pope continued:

"As I renew with affection the expression of my total and indisputable solidarity with our brother recipients of the First Covenant, I hope that the memory of the Shoah moves humanity to reflect on the unpredictable power of evil when it conquers the human heart."

With this letter I also wish to express the total and indisputable solidarity of the Catholic people of the Archdiocese of St. Louis with our elder brothers and sisters in the Jewish community. Please know that the efforts of the Archdiocese to remember the Holocaust and the efforts to educate our members about the facts of the Holocaust still continues in our schools and will always continue.

Perhaps each of us, in our own tradition, can pray for the conversion of Bishop Williamson and all those who engage in anti-Semitic speech or behavior. Seeking the help of our God in this way brings us His peace!

With the hope that we can continue to be a blessing to one another, and together a blessing to the world, I am

Devotedly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert J. Hermann".

Most Reverend Robert J. Hermann
Archdiocesan Administrator