



Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Catholic Cemeteries

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January 11, 2011

Mr. Miguel Angel Corzo
President and CEO
LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes
501 North Main Street
Los Angeles, CA 90601

Dear Mr. Corzo:

I am responding to Mr. Chabran's email from yesterday, inviting me to discuss the excavations at La Plaza de Cultura y Artes.

I am putting my concerns in writing in order to best state the position of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles with respect to the excavations and ownership of the property, and to provide a context for further communication between us.

Frankly, I was surprised and disappointed to learn through a story in yesterday's Los Angeles Times that a substantial number of remains had been discovered and unearthed at your construction site. In your only communication with me about the discovery of remains last November, the impression I received was that a few bone fragments were all that had been found, and that a few more might be found during the course of the project. Indeed, we believed that the site was no longer a cemetery, since our records indicated that the people buried there had been removed and reburied elsewhere in the 1840s.

Based on this understanding, I wrote you a letter dated Nov. 17, 2010, in which the Archdiocese of Los Angeles agreed simply to receive and rebury those fragments according to Catholic tradition and custom, even though the Archdiocese had no ownership of the property or involvement in your project.

That you have possibly discovered substantial remains, including full burials, obviously goes way beyond the scope of my Nov. 17 letter to you, and raises for us a number of new ethical and legal questions concerning the current activity at your construction site.

First, if substantial remains, including full burials, have been discovered, we are concerned that the Native American communities need to be more fully involved in this matter. Which Native American representatives have you contacted since making these new discoveries? How will they be given representation in this matter?

Second, if substantial remains, including full burials, have been discovered, have you contacted the appropriate authorities? We share the concern expressed by Wendy Teeter of UCLA, who said that continuing the excavations in light of these new discoveries does not comply with California health code law on cemeteries. How do you respond to this, and have you been contacted by any regulatory agencies?

Third, we are deeply concerned that the remains already recovered are treated with reverence and respect. We were disturbed to learn that an NPR radio report suggested that archaeologists were preserving recovered remains and might be contemplating use in academic study. That was not part of our understanding of what would happen to these remains. Could you please assure us that the remains are not being used for academic study?

Fourth, we are both frustrated and disappointed that media reports, especially yesterday's Associated Press story, appear to cloud the issues of property ownership and construction responsibility. In speaking with the reporter who wrote yesterday's Associated Press story, we learned that your public relations staff apparently indicated that the Archdiocese of Los Angeles was more deeply involved in the project than our offer to rebury fragmentary remains. We must insist that you go back and correct the record, and make clear in all future statements to news media that the Archdiocese neither owns the land nor has any involvement in your project.

Fifth, if there are substantial remains being found and removed, the question is raised about how to rebury these remains. As mentioned above, our original impression was that there would be relatively few fragmentary remains. Obviously, if you have discovered and are removing much more than small fragments, such remains may have to be buried separately. We would need to discuss the logistics of this with you.

I have offered these thoughts and questions hoping to provide a framework for discussing what actions need to be taken at this time. We are not interested in helping to manage your public relations issue in order that the project may continue; we want to see the right steps taken and taken quickly to deal correctly and responsibly with this matter.

Sincerely,



Brian McMahon

Director of Administration

Catholic Cemeteries Department

Cc: Mr. Francisco Chabran