

---

**146 Tran Hung Dao - Kontum - Vietnam**

**No. 46/VT/15/tgmkt**

**Kontum March 22, 2015**

**To: Catholic Members of Dakto District, Kontum Province;**

Dear our Brothers and Sisters of Catholic Faithful,

I was aware that the Dakto government made a decision to convince all members of Catholic of all parishes to dismantle all temporary chapels erected in the parishes of Dakto District. In order to avoid any confusion and disturbance from happening, on behalf of a shepherd and the official manager in charge of the parishes based on religious order No.515, I am sending you this letter for the purpose of resolving this issue in a peaceful manner in accordance with the spirit of the Vietnamese Constitution which recognizing the religious freedom.

**1- why do we have these “temporary chapels made of tents”?**

In Vietnam each village has a shrine, large or small; in the High Plain, each village (or buon) has a house of assembly (or rong house); in the village where Catholic members live, there is a worshipping place. In Dakto before 1975, all the Catholic villages have churches or chapels. They were all destroyed by the war, except those located in the town provincial of Kontum. After 1975, the villages with faithful Catholics could not conduct regular religious activities for 30 years (1975-2005), because members of the liturgy were not allowed to come there to serve. Catholic members have to walk for hundreds of kilometers to the Main Church of the province for worshipping and receiving Sacraments and blessings. In the Easter and Christmas celebrations, 15,000 to 20,000 have to squeeze in the courtyard of the Diocese office and of the Wooden Church, and staying there for the whole week. Since 2005, the government relaxed somewhat and allowing Catholic priests to come to certain locations to serve. In fact, up to this date, four districts: Dakto, Tumorong, Ngoc Hoi and Dak Glei (with a surface area of 3,682.84 km<sup>2</sup> and Catholic members of 52,132 out of a total population of 142,426\*) have only 2 “official” churches: Dak Mot and Kon Hring built with permits!!! Facing with high religious demand for worshipping places, and construction permits were not granted, the members do not have other means than furtively doing it. In reality, there was some sort of secret consent of the local officials for such works.

**2- How to resolve this issue in a peaceful and reasonable manner?**

Dear our Brothers and Sisters,

In order to advocate and convince the officials to come to a reasonable and peaceful solution you have to fully understand the following principles:

- (1) **the Law:** First of all the law has to be fair and impartial. Human Rights, with Religious Freedom included, shall be respected! Everybody shall obey the law, especially government officials shall lead by example!
- (2) **The Cause** of the current condition of action under the table: **The regime of Request/Approval and Corruption.** Because of the spiritual needs of the faithful is inalienable, once presenting the case and applying for a permit, the government official do not respond in accordance with the law, the faithful has to act “furtively”! If it is necessary, they can accept the martyrdom such as their ancestors did! For example, someone has been pushed under the water for a long time, he has to find ways, including by force, to emerge for breathing to survive! Similarly, a pregnant woman at the time of labor to give birth, she does not have time to “make a request” for so doing! It is a simple matter like that! Do not blame a faithful any offense other than the offense of “want to be free to live a Christian life”!!
- (3) **Who is the official Priest in charge of the parish:** He is the Bishop, the priest assigned to that position to serve the faithful (see the Catholic religious order No.515). Therefore, the dismantle of the “tents serving as temporary chapels” in Dakto district lay upon the responsibility of the Bishop through the assigned priests to the parishes. Once offered to God, it becomes holy; and it can only be dismantled when there is “something more precious” than that. Please help explain this important message to the government officials!
- (4) **Moreover “the national order given by the King must yield to the traditions of a village”** our ethnic people do have the traditions! If this issue could not be resolved, it would become a case of discrimination unfortunately! The tragedy of millions of Vietnamese people fleeing the country to seek freedom elsewhere in 1954 and 1975 is lesson to learn for generations!

### **3- In fact what can we do in this present situation?**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In fact, we should know how to advocate and convince the government officials who came to convince you to dismantle the “tents serving as temporary chapels” to understand and together with you implementing correctly the letters of the law.

3.1- **By law:** Please tell the government officials that: (1) We have the right to religious freedom, please stop the regime of Request/Approval! (2) We have complied with the law through several attempts requesting for permission! (3) Because the officers did not follow the law, that led to the erection of the 22

"tents serving as temporary chapels"! This is strong evidence that the officers did not strictly adhere to the law!

**3.2- Evidence of conducting a good and healthy living.** These "tents serving as temporary chapels" must be dismantled! It is the responsibility of bishop and the parish priests. Your responsibility is to promote programs modernizing living condition in the villages and parishes through Gospel; healthy and spiritual people, beautiful home, beautiful villages, beautiful parishes!

- **Healthy and Spiritual people:** loving and serving others. Avoid all social evils. Stop drinking! Work hard with scientific knowledge! From now on, when coming to the place of worship, wear the most beautiful clothing: your ethnic costumes.

- **Beautiful house, beautiful village and beautiful parish!** Please preserve the culture of your people. Do not leave any piece of land idled! Please straighten the curving roads in the village, and keep them clean! Take care of the children and help them to get a good education. Learning how to conduct a life worth living and to serve others with love!

**Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

When bad news or good news happening in the diocese, I, myself always think about the presence and power of God! "God is the Master of history"! All Christians have "the mission to spread the words of the Gospel of truth and love"! In light of this belief, we must live how to accomplish our mission of "missionary disciples" of Jesus. You should sympathize with local officials and patiently explain to them so all can live in harmony and love to the country. May God give this matter be satisfactorily resolved!

Communion in love and thank to the honorable God.

(Signed and sealed)

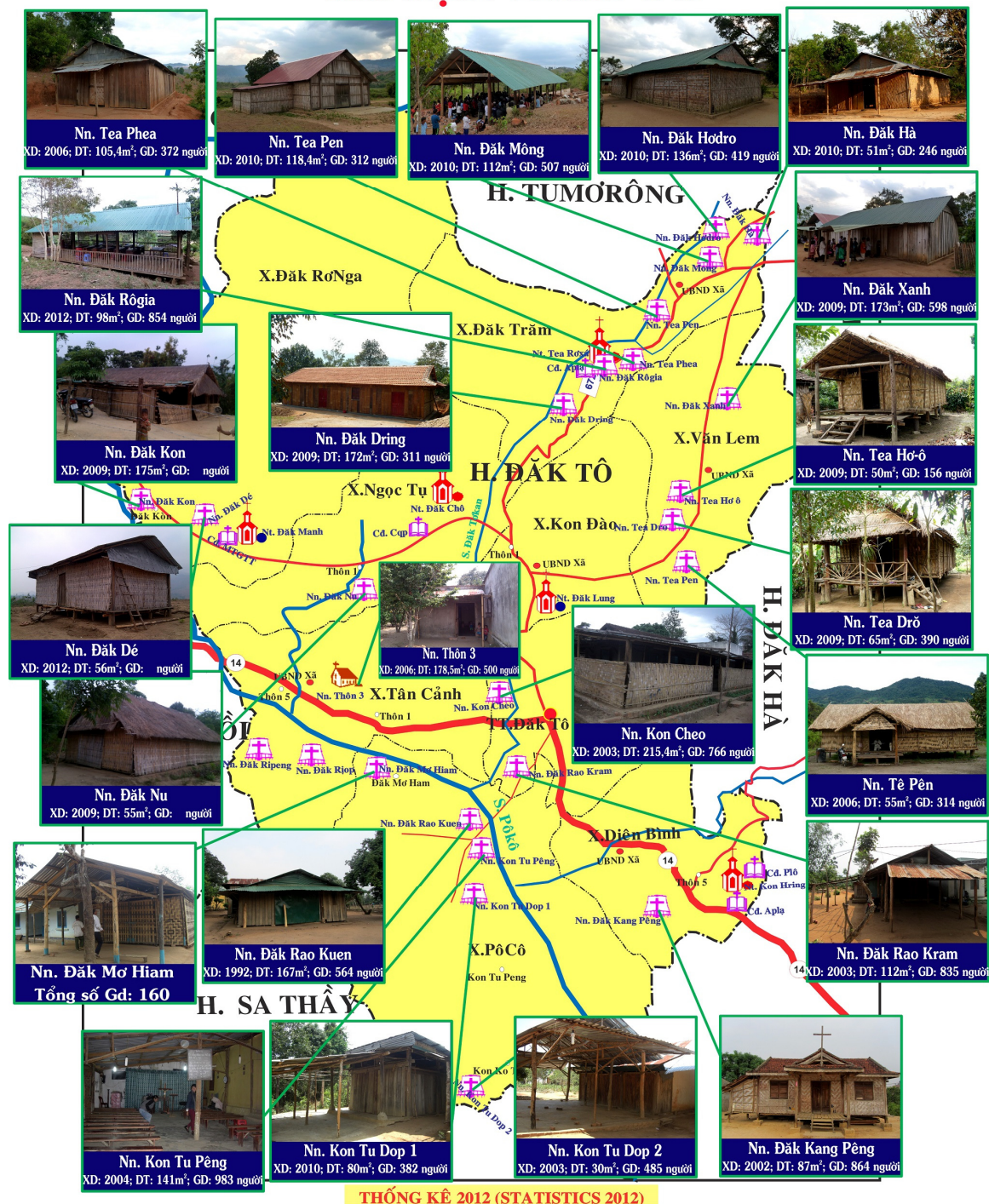
Michael Hoang Duc Oanh  
Bishop of Kontum Diocese






---

\* used the statistics of the year 2014

Nn: chapel, XD: established, DT: surface area, GD: Catholic followers

## HUYỆN ĐẮK TÔ



 Nhà thờ có Linh Mục: 03 (Churches with a resident priest)	 Nhà thờ không có Linh Mục: 02 (Churches without a resident priest)	 Nhà nguyện người kinh: 01 (Kinh Chapel)	 Nhà nguyện dân tộc: 24 (Ethnic chapel)	 Cđ/ Tu viện: 05 (Nun Community)
**Linh mục: 05 (Priests)		**Nhà thờ - Nhà nguyện: 26 (Churches - Chapels)		**Giáo xứ: 03 (Parishes)
**Diện tích (area): 510.2 Km <sup>2</sup>		**Dân số (Population): 36400 người		**Giáo dân (Catholics): 24087 người