

# Curran supporters persevere in endless wait for decision

By Richard A. Kiley

It appears a final decision from the Vatican on whether or not to allow Father Charles E. Curran to remain a professor of Catholic theology at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. will not be made until at least September.

Because the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has kept the meetings strictly confidential, there has been wide speculation as to when the final decision would be handed down.

The Congregation warned Father Curran that he faced loss of his post unless he retracted certain dissenting views on moral teachings of the Church in the areas of sexual morality and medical ethics. This spring he notified the Vatican that he would not retract, and has been waiting for word of a final decision on his case.

"I heard that Cardinal (Joseph) Ratzinger (prefect of the Congregation) said that if there were not a decision by July 15, it would not be made until September," said Monsignor William H. Shannon, who referred to himself as an adviser to Friends for Charles Curran, a group supporting the theologian. "That makes a great deal of sense to me because the Congregation has to meet in a full session before they come to this decision."

Monsignor Shannon said that because members of the Congregation disperse in the sweltering summer months in Rome, it would most likely be September before all members were present to take part in the decision.

Monsignor Shannon wrote an article published in the April issue of the National Catholic Reporter, in which he argued for Father Curran's right to dissent, and was "certainly

in agreement with some of the issues he has taken."

"For instance, I'm in basic agreement with his views on contraception — the right of the Catholic to form his own conscience," said Monsignor Shannon, who also wrote a book on birth control back in 1970. The book entitled "The Lively Debate" took its name from Pope Paul VI, who said he hoped "the lively debate" concerning the encyclical on birth control would "lead to a deeper knowledge of God's will."

Rebecca Gifford, associate director of the diocesan Division of Urban Services and a former student of Father Curran, said the seemingly endless wait has proved especially "painful" for Friends for Father Curran — a group comprised of priests, religious and lay persons within the Rochester diocese.

"We're on hold right now, and that's been one of the real tough things about this process," Gifford said. "It's been painful because there has been no indication on what to expect or when."

The group, which Gifford claims has received overwhelming support since the Curran case evolved, has tried to educate people on the issues rather than try to dissect Father Curran's points of dissension.

"We've tried to help people understand the positions, and to defend the right to theological, public dissent."

Father James Lawlor, pastor of St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester, reiterated Gifford's assessment on the aims of the group.

"Our discussions center on the role of the theologians and their theories, rather than

Charlie Curran's specific points of dissension," said Father Lawlor, who was also a student of Father Curran's. "He (Father Curran) had said that once we start arguing about the specific points of dissension, we've lost the battle."

Gifford added that the group's determination has not dwindled due to the delay for a decision.

"We're still very much alive; it's just a period of waiting," she said.

Recently, parishioners within the Cayuga Team Ministry signed a petition in support of Father Curran and of Bishop Matthew H. Clark's statement of March 12. The petition, which was signed by 288 parishioners of St. Patrick's (Aurora), St. Joseph's (Cayuga), Our Lady of the Lake (King Ferry) and St. Michael's (Union Springs), stated that "theologians may stop exploring the challenging questions of the day in a creative, healthy way because they fear actions which may prematurely end their teaching careers."

Strongly supporting Bishop Clark's statement that urges an agreement be reached that will allow Father Curran to continue serving the church as a theologian, the parishioners "further endorse the right of (all) theologians to responsibly and freely explore the issues of our day without fear of censure or denial of Roman Catholic theologian status."

Copies of the petition were sent to Father Curran; Bishop James Malone, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; Cardinal Ratzinger; Archbishop James Hickey, chancellor of the Catholic University of America; Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, chair- man of the Board of Trustees of the Catholic

University of America; and Dr. Francis Fiorenza, president of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

Malone, of Youngstown, Ohio, issued a statement last March, endorsing the Vatican's efforts to discipline Father Curran, saying that "someone who does not accept the teaching of the Church magisterium on crucial points cannot reasonably expect to occupy a position which requires that he teach what the Church teaches."

But Bishop Malone added that he hoped Father Curran's interests would be considered in any resolution of the controversy.

Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago issued a statement last March that the Vatican should be open to reconsidering an option that Father Curran retain his tenured professorship at the university, but agree not to teach any courses in sexual ethics.

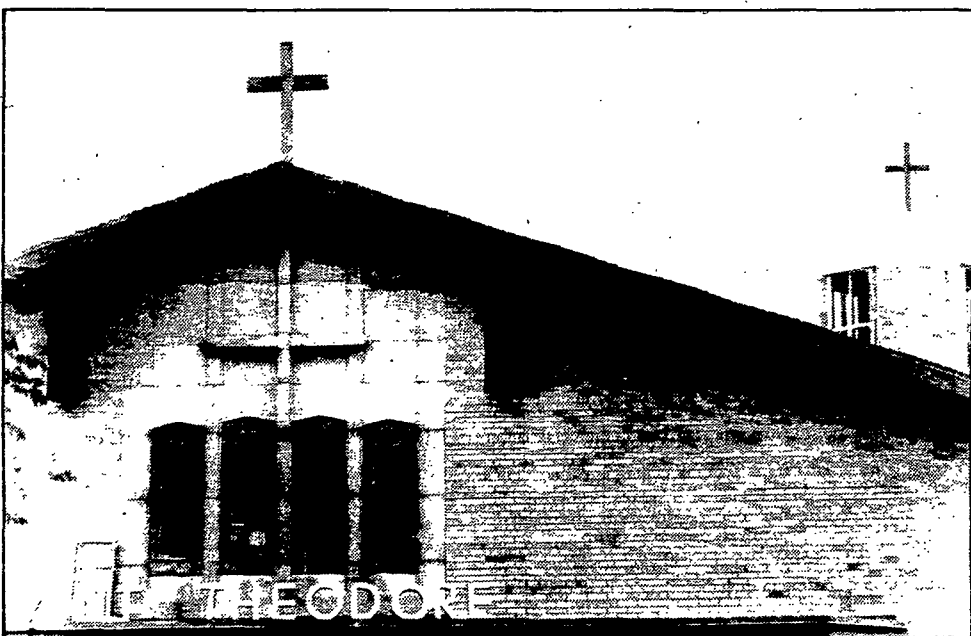
Three weeks ago, in reaction to overwhelming support for Father Curran by a national gathering of American Catholic theologians, a group of other theologians urged the Vatican to "prohibit Father Curran from teaching theology at the Catholic University of America."

The opposition statement, released July 1, was spearheaded by William E. May, a fellow theology professor with Father Curran on the Catholic University staff.

Several signers said they were among the minority opposition at the Catholic Theological Society of America convention in mid-June when it passed a resolution, by a 171-14 vote, urging the Vatican not to remove Father Curran from his teaching post.

## Fire

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Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

When firefighters arrived at the church, 170 Spencerport Road, they saw flames shooting from vents on the sides of the building. A passer-by reported the fire.

the ceiling, where four inches of insulation was smoldering.

The church's sturdy construction also hindered containment of the fire. "It was built with three-inch planks. Then there were four inches of blown insulation on top of that," Rossi said. "The saws took quite a beating cutting through that."

Three firefighters were overcome by heat exhaustion during the blaze. One was treated and released at area hospitals. Hours later, when parishioners arrived for Mass, they were directed to a now-familiar spot — the school gym. They had grown accustomed to worshipping there after the church underwent \$150,000-worth of renovations in 1982. At that time, the sanctuary was redesigned, and new windows, wall coverings, rugs and floors were installed. "You get used to it (the gym)," LoMaglio said. "The only drawback is setting up and tearing down from bingo."

The parish's first building, a combination school and church, was dedicated in 1925 during the pastorate of Father John J. Baier. From 1952 until the present church was finished in 1957, Masses were celebrated in

an adjacent parish hall.

In 1973, the original parish building was also destroyed by fire — on purpose. Gates-Chili firefighters demolished it during a training exercise.

Because he expects that insurance will cover the damage, Father Dunn doesn't anticipate launching a fund-raising effort to restore the church. He expects to have a further assessment of the damage later this week.

Meanwhile, he is tackling "a foot-high stack" of messages from concerned brides who reported to be married in St. Theodore's.

Neighboring churches have offered their facilities for both funerals and weddings.

"We'll muddle through all right, but I feel sorry for the people who are inconvenienced by this," he said. "Pray for the brides."

### Parent self-help support group looks to improve family life

Parents Anonymous of Rochester offers self-help support groups for parents who want to improve their relationship with their children. Day or evening groups are held weekly. For information, call (716)454-2300.

## Abortion ad controversy continues

Vatican City (NC) — Here is the text of the July 21 press release from the Vatican Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes on the current situation of the men and women religious who signed the Oct. 7, 1984, New York Times ad on abortion.

The Holy See has accepted public declarations of adherence to Catholic doctrine on abortion from 25 men and women members of Catholic religious communities whose signatures were affixed to an Oct. 7, 1984, advertisement in The New York Times which alleged that the teaching of the popes and bishops on abortion is not "the only legitimate Catholic position."

The Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes "considers their cases closed," according to Cardinal Jerome Hamer, prefect of the congregation.

"Two Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur refuse to state that they accept the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church on abortion, in spite of pastoral initiatives and invitations from the Holy See," Cardinal Hamer continued.

Moreover, the cardinal explained, the general government of the Notre Dame sisters on June 18 expressed "grave concern in regard to the public pro-choice position"

on abortion, which the two sisters are taking and said they plan to begin a process of clarification and examination of the position of the two sisters.

The cardinal further noted that the Holy See is closely following the efforts of the general government of the Notre Dame Sisters with the hope that the cases of their two sisters will be resolved without having to begin formal disciplinary procedures in accord with church law.

## Human rights discussed at RICIR presentation

Arthur Pelton, director of the Political Asylum Project for the Lawyer's Committee for International Human Rights, will speak in Rochester Friday, July 25.

Sponsored by the Rochester Interfaith Council on Immigration and Refugees (RICIR), Pelton will discuss issues such as political asylum, current litigation and interdiction at the Third Presbyterian Church, East Avenue and Meigs Street, from 12:45 to 2:30 p.m.

A buffet luncheon will be available for \$4.50. For more information, call Gregory Zuroski, (716)328-3210, or Stan Bratton, (716)482-4413.

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