

Father Charles Curran accepts one-year position at Cornell U

By Richard A. Kiley and Teresa A. Parsons
 Father Charles E. Curran has accepted a one-year position as a professor of religious studies at Cornell University in Ithaca.

University officials notified Bishop Matthew H. Clark on Tuesday, April 14, that Father Curran had recently accepted an appointment to the Rachel Kaneb Visiting Professorship of Catholic Studies.

Later the same day, Cornell University Vice Provost Barry Adams confirmed that the moral theologian, who is currently suspended from The Catholic University of America, will teach three undergraduate courses and offer a series of public lectures at Cornell, beginning this fall.

Father Curran was not available for comment Tuesday, but planned to formally announce the appointment along with Cornell University officials at a Washington press conference Wednesday.

In a statement issued Tuesday, Bishop Clark said that he was aware of Cornell University's invitation, and that as a priest of the Diocese of Rochester, Father Curran was free to accept the position.

"The manner in which Father Curran pursues his status with Catholic University in Washington remains an issue between the administration of the university and himself," Bishop Clark wrote. "As I have said previously, Father Curran is welcome to exercise his priestly ministry in this diocese."

Last summer, the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith notified Father Curran that he was no longer deemed suitable or eligible to teach Catholic theology because of his dissenting views in the area of sexual ethics.

Since January, Father Curran has been suspended from Catholic University, where he taught for more than 20 years, pending the results of an internal academic review of his case. Last month, he filed a civil lawsuit against Catholic University, challenging his suspension.

Judging by a written statement Father Curran addressed to the Catholic University theology department, he intends to proceed with that suit. "Catholic University has given me an academic leave for 1987/88 without prejudice to my tenured contract with Catholic University and without prejudice to the process underway," he wrote.

Father Curran is the first person to be appointed to the Kaneb professorship, re-

cently established by Cornell alumnus and trustee Albert J. Kaneb in memory of his mother. According to Adams, the professorship has been funded on a "partly experimental" basis, as a series of three one-year appointments of distinguished Catholic scholars.

The vice provost said that university officials first approached Father Curran with the proposal nearly a year ago — well in advance of the Vatican's decision to reprimand him.

Even before Father Curran accepted the post, Cornell students were enthusiastic about the courses offered in connection with the new professorship, according to Father Michael J. Mahler, one of the university's Catholic chaplains.

Father Curran's appointment at Cornell came as no surprise to several members of "Friends for Charles Curran," a local group that supports the theologian.

Father James Lawlor, pastor at St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester and a former student of Father Curran, called the news "a blessing" for Cornell University.

"I'm very pleased at (the appointment)," he said. "It's a blessing to have him back in the diocese."

Monsignor William Shannon, an adviser to the local group of Father Curran's supporters, hopes that with the Cornell appointment, the controversy surrounding Father Curran will begin to subside.

"I would hope that his teaching (at Cornell) would not be shrouded in controversy," he said.

Speaking on behalf of at least one group that has opposed Father Curran's theological positions, Joseph J. Murray, chairman of Concerned Roman Catholics of the Diocese of Rochester, said that regardless of Father Curran's new position at Cornell, "he cannot be recognized as a teacher of Catholic theology."

"We accept (the fact) that he can teach, but not as a Catholic theologian," Murray said. "We know he's a public dissenter, and all I can say is that the people I know personally pray for Charles Curran, that he will see the light in Catholic teaching and not his own reasoning. His teachings (on Catholic theology) are not acceptable."

Contributing to this story was Jerry Filteau of NC News Service.



Bishop's Office

DIocese of ROCHESTER
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Easter, 1987

My dear people,

As we enter more deeply into the mysteries of Holy Week, we cannot but be overwhelmed with the selflessness of Jesus as He walks the final steps of His life. His Passion, death and resurrection form the Paschal Mystery, which is the core of our Christian faith. Our annual commemoration of this difficult journey brings to mind the goodness of Our Lord. His self-sacrifice invited from us a generous response.

Throughout the Lenten Season, I have journeyed with the people of this diocese and our sister diocese of Tabasco, Mexico. I have found the faith of our people to be alive and a source of great hope. The people who have gathered with me have come from all walks of life, and yet we all are bound intricately by the common belief that we have been made special in the eyes of God.

We find the reason for this specialness in our common baptism. Through the waters of baptism, we are reborn into the Paschal Mystery. We find our salvation as well as our significance in the sacraments of initiation. Not only are we freed from sin, but we are able to share this freedom in all that we say and do. We are able to bring joy into the lives of those who are joyless, hope into the lives of those who are hopeless, self-worth and dignity into the lives of those who do not know love.

As the strains of "Alleluia" fill the air and we celebrate the annual feast of Easter, let us recall the genuineness of God's call to be sisters and brothers to one another. Let us find in this paschal feast the true source for our joy — and let our lives reflect that joy.

May the Lord bless you and your families during this wonderful season. May the great 50 days of Easter provide time for our newly baptized to rejoice with their new sister and brothers, and may all of us reach out in joy and happiness to reflect what we sing: "Christians, to the Paschal Victim offer your thankful praises!"

Your brother in Christ,

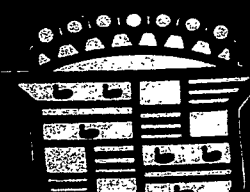
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