

World & Nation

No Eucharist for politician

By Laurie Hansen

WASHINGTON (NC) — A Catholic priest in Alexandria, Va., withheld Communion from a local politician who had voted to establish a health clinic that provides contraceptives to teenagers.

When T. Michael Jackson, a member of the Alexandria City Council member, approached Josephite Father Joseph Miller for Communion one Sunday last June, the pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Alexandria, the priest said he could not give Jackson the Eucharist.

Bishop John R. Keating of Arlington, Va., in whose diocese Alexandria is located, declined to comment on the controversy, which became public only recently.

Father Curtis L. Clark, a spokesman for the Diocese of Arlington, said Jan. 30 that Bishop Keating would not address the issue unless a grievance is filed.

According to Father Clark, Father Miller considered Jackson's vote a grave moral offense.

The church's Code of Canon Law states that people who have been excommunicated or who "obstinately persist in manifest grave sin" are not to be given Communion.

The Alexandria City Council voted in December 1987 to establish the clinic, which — among other services — provides birth control advice and contraceptives to teenagers. The clinic opened last fall.

"Father Miller believes what he did was an act of conscience," said Father Clark, who said he was authorized to speak for Father Miller as well as the diocese.

"He feels at peace with his decision, and that it was a good one," said Father Clark.

Father Clark acknowledged, however, that it was an unusual step for a priest to take. "You don't make that kind of judgment lightly," he said.

He said Father Miller's decision had been inspired by a speech given by Cardinal Edouard Gagnon, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, at St. Thomas More Cathedral in Arlington last March.

Referring to Catholic politicians who do not support the church's stand on abortion, Cardinal Gagnon, "I think one who does not hold the church's teaching on life is really taking over God's rights and is putting himself out of the church."

In a Jan. 30 interview, Jackson called being refused Communion "the worst thing that's ever happened to me."

He said his decision to vote in favor of the clinic was "a very difficult decision, the most difficult one (council members) have had to make.

"Seeing hundreds of teenage pregnancies with over half of them ending in induced abor-



Oscar-winner Haing Ngor has produced a documentary entitled, "Beyond the Killing Fields" to draw worldwide attention to the plight of Cambodian refugees.

tions ... the situation cried out to be addressed," said Jackson.

Jackson, 40, attended a Catholic elementary school and graduated from St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa. He grew up attending St. Mary's Parish in Alexandria, where he is a member.

He regularly visits other Catholic parishes in the city, and was making one of those visits the day Father Miller denied him Communion, Jackson said.

Father Clark said Father Miller believes Jackson was "testing" him by coming to church to receive Communion.

He said the two had held a number of meetings in which they had spoken about the clinic controversy.

"They ended up agreeing to disagree. (Jackson) knew (Father Miller) was opposed to the clinic, and that he believed supporting it was grave enough to put him outside the sacramental life of the church," said Father Clark.

Jackson said religion was a "very private thing" for him, and he was reluctant to talk about it publicly. But he said Father Miller's refusal to grant him Communion was "a public act."

Father Clark said Father Miller believed "he

had handled it in such a discreet way that no one knew, not even the priest (distributing Communion) next to him."

Jackson said he did not plan to leave the church despite his displeasure with the priest's decision. "Absolutely not. This is a test. I believe people should stay in the church.

"It was a terribly wrong thing to do," Jackson said of Father Miller's action. "But it's done."

Second placement exam set for DeSales High School soon

Students who are interested in attending Geneva DeSales High School and did not take the entrance/placement exam on Jan. 7, can take the exam on Saturday, Feb. 11, at 9 a.m. Four scholarships will be awarded based on the results of test scores.

As a regional high school, DeSales draws students from areas such as Geneva, Waterloo, Seneca Falls, Penn Yan, Phelps, Canandaigua, Lyons, Newark and Romulus.

Call the school office at 315/789-5111, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. on weekdays for information.

Alfred offering free tuition to top students in the area

Alfred State College officials recently announced continuation of the President's Honors Scholars Program, which provides free tuition for high school seniors in the Rochester-area who rank in the top 10 percent of their classes.

The program is open to high school seniors in Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Steuben, Erie, Genesee, Monroe, Niagara, Orleans, Livingston, Wyoming and Ontario counties.

In addition to ranking in the top 10 percent of their senior class, students must meet admission requirements for the particular program in which they wish to enroll.

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