



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Supporters of Father James Callan staged a rally at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Gates Aug. 21 in support of keeping the priest at Corpus Christi Church. Father Callan and parish staff members were meeting at that time with diocesan officials.

Corpus Christi parishioners vote in support of Fr. Callan

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

More than 3,300 people attending Masses at Corpus Christi Church, 880 E. Main St., Rochester, over the Aug. 22-23 weekend voted to approve a "Statement of Faith" outlining their support for Father James B. Callan, ousted administrator of the parish.

The document also pledged ongoing support for parish positions that implicitly contradict church teaching on women's roles, approaches to gay ministry and intercommunion with non-Catholics.

Voting 3,322 to 7 for the two-page statement, the Mass-goers approved a document that protested Bishop Matthew H. Clark's decision this month to remove Father Callan from his position as administrator and reassign him. In public statements, the bishop cited Father Callan's continuing defiance of church law on women, gays and intercommunion as reasons for his removal.

"This removal of Father Jim from our parish is not just a punishment to him; it inherently punishes us, the body of Christ, for what we believe," the Statement of Faith reads. "As such, we see this action as a serious affront to Jesus Christ and all that He stands for. So we will not rest with this recent decision," it states.

The vote follows meetings of Father Callan and the parish's staff with diocesan officials Aug. 21 at the Diocesan Pas-

toral Center. During the meetings, more than 70 supporters sang and prayed outside the building.

After the Aug. 21 meeting, Father Joseph A. Hart, Pastoral Center Moderator, and one of the diocesan officials who met with the Corpus staff, said they did not discuss where Father Callan might be reassigned; nor did they discuss Father Callan's public defiance of church law on such issues as having women perform unapproved liturgical roles on the altar.

"We had a very good and frank meeting," Father Hart said. "We've got some healing to do, and we're moving toward healing and hope."

After the meetings, Corpus Christi staff members addressed their supporters rallying outside the pastoral center.

"We told (diocesan officials) of our outrage," said Mary Ramerman, the parish's pastoral associate. "We told them of the principles we stand by.... They listened to us respectfully and that's about as far as we got."

Father Callan said he met with Father Robert P. Ring, director of the diocesan Department of Priest Personnel.

"I reiterated my deep desire to return to Corpus Christi," Father Callan said. "Let's keep fighting for that because that's where I want to go."

Father Callan said there was no discussion of sanctions for his behavior or any discussion of him changing his behavior.

Corpus staff members said they will meet again with diocesan officials Sept. 4.

Couple sues diocese over alleged conduct

The Diocese of Rochester is denying charges leveled in a \$1 million lawsuit against the diocese, Father Thomas Statt, Our Mother of Sorrows Church and Father Robert Ring, head of priest personnel, alleging sexual abuse by Father Statt, Our Mother of Sorrows' pastor. The suit was filed Aug. 21 in New York State Supreme Court.

Paul and Joan Grass allege that on Aug. 4 last year the pastor made sexual advances toward Paul Grass in the church rectory, where he had been invited to try on clothes the pastor had offered him.

Because of the alleged sexual abuse and

assault, Grass "suffered severe psychological, emotional and other injuries," the suit claims.

Paul Grass has served on the church school board, parish council, choir and festival set-up committee; his wife has served as a youth minister at the church.

A diocesan release Aug. 24 stated that the diocese had received a complaint from Paul Grass last August "and determined at that time that there was no basis to find misconduct by Fr. Statt. We believe the allegations and demand for money to be baseless and irresponsible, and plan to vigorously defend ourselves in court."

Catholic speaker calls for Christians to unite

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Christians may be divided on certain issues, but they need to unite around Christ if they are to meet the challenges of an increasingly anti-Christian society, according to David Higbee.

Higbee spoke at "Jesus '98," an ecumenical Christian rally that drew 350 people Aug. 22-23 at Sheraton Four Points Hotel. He directs religious education, adult education and the Irenaeus Study Center at St. Thomas the Apostle Church.

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Higbee noted that conservative and liberal Catholics may be divided, for example, over the recent announcement that Father James Callan, administrator of Corpus Christi Church in Rochester, is being removed from his position (see related story this page). But both sides should be careful to remain civil, he stressed, and not turn this moment into one that causes unnecessary damage.

"It's going to be the tender souls and delicate minds that are going to be unsettled by this controversy," he said, adding, "Let's wait and see how this goes. Let's not label our fellow Catholics prematurely."

Mike Salamone, founder of Free Bible Rack Ministry, which sponsored the rally, estimated that about 100 Catholics attended the event. It featured various speakers as well as prayer and music workshops. Higbee headed a Catholic outreach committee at the event that consisted of 20 Catholics from 14 diocesan parishes.

Higbee said that there are certain "non-negotiables" in all church disputes. However, he said, Christians should keep in mind that these disputes take place within a "family," and that such conflicts need to be aired.

"There are no disagreements like family disagreements," he said. "There are

times when there are divorces, when there are deep hurts."

During his speech, Higbee stressed that Christians of all denominations need to focus on Christ's ability to save individuals who can then change society for the better. Such a focus can unite Christians whatever their opinions on issues, he noted.

"We need to present a united witness of Christ," he told his listeners. "Rochester is too far gone to bicker."

He added that the United States needs a strong Christian witness because it is going through a difficult and confusing time.

"In America, unlike much of the Third World, we have a superabundance of goods, and we are being smothered," he said. "We have the know-how, but we don't have the know-why."

He urged his listeners not to become discouraged by the world's problems.

"We all get tired and weary when we get absorbed in the whims and ways of changing circumstance...." he said. "We're anemic Christians because we've stuffed ourselves with the values of the world."

Higbee told the *Courier* that today's society presents a number of threats to civilized life that Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, need to confront together. He decried a debasing of speech in public life, the spread of vulgarity, the lack of business ethics, the availability of abortion and the increasing violence in public schools.

However, Higbee stressed, Catholics and other Christians can not pine for the past when such trends may not have been as prevalent. In particular, he noted that conservative Catholics tend to bemoan the present whereas he believed the present can give way to a better future. Christ is a living presence and can inspire a resurgence of civilization, he commented.

"This is an opportunity for a new world, a new civilization, a new synthesis," he said.

School official accused of abuse

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Stephen M. Ward, an assistant principal at Aquinas Institute, was arrested in Greece Aug. 19, on charges of second-degree misdemeanor sexual abuse and endangering the welfare of a child.

The alleged incident did not involve a student at the school, nor did it take place in conjunction with any school activity or on school grounds, according to Aquinas President Patrick A. Hanley.

Ward, 50, who became an assistant principal in July, is accused of having sexual contact with a boy between the ages of 11 and 17, according to Greece Police Captain William J. Mackin.

Ward remains free pending an appearance in Greece Town Court on Aug. 27.

Mackin would not reveal the age of the boy involved or the nature of the allegation. However, the incident is alleged to have taken place within the past month near Ward's home, Mackin said. He added that each charge carries a penalty

of a \$1,000 fine and/or up to one year in jail.

Hanley said Aquinas had placed Ward on leave and will discuss his future at the school following his court appearance. Ward had taught theology and social studies at the school for 20 years before his appointment as assistant principal and is a well-respected educator, Hanley said. He noted that he learned of the allegations when a local TV reporter called him with news of them.

"My initial reaction was 'You must have the wrong person,'" Hanley said. He added that the staff at Aquinas was equally incredulous.

"People just kind of shake their heads and say: 'This can't be the same Steve Ward,'" he said.

Ward is known for his diligence in teaching, Hanley said, adding that the University of Rochester has twice recognized him with certificates for excellence in secondary school teaching, once in 1987, and also in June of this year.

Michael R. Yackiw
Funeral Home

1270 Norton Street
544-5000



Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580) Vol. 109 No. 49 August 27, 1998
Published weekly except the first Thursday in January.
Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.