

DIOCESAN NEWS

Corpus pastor wants to bridge church, diocese

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark has appointed Father Daniel T. McMullin, 44, to serve as pastor of Corpus Christi Church. The priest will celebrate his first Mass as pastor there Saturday, Oct. 17, at 5 p.m.

The priest comes to the parish at a time when it has been embroiled in controversy over the removal of its former administrator, Father James B. Callan, by Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

Among the reasons for Father Callan's removal, the bishop cited Father Callan's ongoing defiance of church law on various issues including: regularly and publicly inviting non-Catholics to Communion; allowing women to engage in liturgical roles reserved for the ordained; and ministering to gays in ways contrary to church law, including blessing homosexual unions.

Father Callan has been serving a temporary assignment at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Elmira, since Sept. 11.

Father McMullin has served as parochial vicar for the Four City West parishes since 1996. The parishes are Holy Apostles, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Francis of Assisi and Ss. Peter and Paul.

The bishop announced the priest's appointment in a press statement Oct. 10.

"Parishioners tell me Dan is very caring, compassionate and trustworthy," Bishop Clark said of Father McMullin in the statement. "He is also known as an excellent homilist and is held in high esteem by those he served."

Father McMullin, a Minneapolis native and former Benedictine monk, became a Rochester diocesan priest in April. Ordained in 1981, he served in music ministry in Illinois, before being assigned as parochial vicar of Church of the Assumption in Fairport from 1994 to 1996. He had earlier studied at the Eastman School of Music from 1982 to 1987, earning a doctorate in musical arts.

Since Father Callan's removal, the parish has held several public meetings about it, and several parishioners — as well as some staff members — have publicly expressed their unwillingness to change Corpus practices that violate church law. Meanwhile, Bishop Clark, in meetings with the staff, and at a packed public meeting in the church on Oct. 6, has let the parish know it must comply with church law.

"No bishop, no diocese, no parish, no pastor has the authority to change (church laws) on their own initiative, nor does anyone have the authority to engage in pastoral practices that convey a contrary meaning," Bishop Clark told the crowd.

Father McMullin, who said he applied for the Corpus pastorate, announced his new appointment at weekend Masses Oct. 10-11 at each of the Four City West



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Carmela Baleno, a parishioner of Holy Apostles Church, Rochester, for more than 60 years, after Mass Oct. 11 tells Father Daniel McMullin that he will be missed. McMullin has been named as the new pastor of Corpus Christi Church.

churches. He spoke of his mixed feelings about leaving his current assignment and going to Corpus at the conclusion of the 11 a.m. Vietnamese Mass on Oct. 11, at St. Anthony's.

"I know that the task of pastoring Corpus Christi is going to be a challenging one," he said. "The work for reconciliation and healing that is needed here seems to be overwhelming, but I live with the firm belief that nothing is impossible with God."

Following the Mass, Father McMullin told the *Catholic Courier* that he was prepared to work to reconcile the bishop's demands with Corpus concerns. He added that he has made no specific plans yet as to what steps he will ask Corpus staff members to implement when he begins to pastor the church.

"I think part of my job is to find out what we really do have in common, rather than finding the things that separate us, which I think are few," he said.

When asked whether he supported the bishop's decision to reassign Father Callan, Father McMullin responded diplomatically.

"I trust that (the bishop) has made a decision with a great deal of prayer and conversations with people he trusts," Father McMullin said.

He added that he knew that Father Callan, a popular and well-liked administrator, was no easy act to follow at Corpus.

"Father Jim Callan has big shoes to fill," Father McMullin said. "I don't intend to fill them. I intend to bring my own pair."

At least one Corpus parishioner, Lesa

Abbey, said she wanted to let Father McMullin know that a good number of Corpus members are looking forward to his arrival. Abbey showed up at St. Anthony's after the Sunday Mass and gave the priest a cup emblazoned with the words "Corpus Christi Church."

"I imagine he's as scared and apprehensive as all of us are," she said. "I wanted him to know there's a bunch of us who want to make him feel welcome."

Indeed, Father McMullin will walk into a complex situation if the bishop's Oct. 6 public meeting with parishioners is any indication. Although the tone of the meeting was generally civil, parishioners expressed mostly defiance.

The bishop repeatedly stressed that he had no problem with the fact that Corpus disagrees with certain church norms, but that he had a responsibility, nonetheless, to ensure diocesan unity by making sure all parishes follow those norms. However, Corpus parishioners generally argued that defying church norms on certain issues was a matter of justice.

At the beginning of the meeting, the bishop outlined his desire to bring Corpus back in line with diocesan practices by asking parishioners and staff to follow church norms in such areas as liturgical roles, intercommunion and gay ministry. He added that he had asked the parish staff in the past to make changes that would bring it into compliance with church law on these issues, yet none had been made.

"Is your identity as a worshipping, serving Roman Catholic parish near and dear to your hearts?" the bishop asked the crowd. "I always thought the answer to (that) question was a strong 'Yes.'"

But, for the most part, during a follow-up "reflection" period, most of the parishioners present applauded strongly whenever anyone came to a microphone and publicly challenged the bishop's stances.

One woman, Kay Smith, noted that she and another woman, Jeanine Chirico, had had their lesbian union blessed by Father Callan in 1995. She choked up as she talked about the church's willingness to hold blessing ceremonies for pets and animals but not for gays.

"I won't be quiet until everyone has that opportunity," she said of such blessings, a sentiment that drew a standing ovation from the crowd.

Another questioner claimed that his former parish permitted some of the very practices that had gotten Father Callan into trouble. But Bishop Clark responded that he would never willingly allow such practices to take place on his watch.

"Please don't conclude that because something happens in our diocese, it happens with my knowledge and with my approval," he said.

For example, the bishop said, he knows that certain church norms are bound to be violated from time to time.

"I know on any given Sunday, (non-Catholics) approach and share the body and blood of Christ," he said. "My concern precisely is that (Corpus), for all practical purposes, has set aside the norms."

One questioner noted that the church's history was filled with dissenters whose teachings were later incorporated into the church's. Bishop Clark responded, "I can identify with the idea of dissent. I think it's a necessary component of the church's life."

However, the bishop said, "I think without question the trend in our church has been to a more restrictive interpretation of things ... It's not my choice."

After the meeting, parishioners who spoke to the *Courier* generally expressed disappointment over the bishop's presentation. Some expressed concern, also, over his words because Corpus is home to many Catholics on the margins of the church who would not feel at home in another parish.

Charlie Gardner said the bishop's words left him with no sense that there was a middle ground between the bishop and the parish.

"I sense we're back where we were when this all began," he said.

Angela Vukosic echoed some of the questioners' comments when she said the bishop should defy the Vatican line on such issues as intercommunion and women's liturgical roles.

"Jesus lost his life because he took a stand," she said. "(Father Callan) lost his job because he took a stand. Why doesn't Bishop Clark take a stand with us?"

Father Enrique Cadena, associate pastor, resigned in September from the diocesan-appointed transition team that is currently running the parish because he couldn't reconcile his belief in the parish's values with his duties to the team. Father Cadena expressed mixed feelings about how he thought the parishioners would embrace the bishop's demands.

"I think it's very well divided," he said of the parish. "There's a lot of people looking for (compromise). There's a lot of people saying: 'This is my story, I don't want to change.'"

Kathy Cannon, a member of the diocesan transition team, said the team will stay on at the parish for two weeks after Father McMullin's arrival.

Myra Humphrey, the parish's hospitality minister, said the staff was willing to dialogue with the diocese, but compromise was another issue.

"I don't think I have a lot of room in me to compromise with the recommendations that they've given," she said. "I am open to looking at compromises that can meet our needs."

Although he stressed he has a "long fuse" and is a good listener, Father McMullin also noted that he is charged with implementing the bishop's desires for the parish.

"I'm well aware of what his concerns are," he said of the bishop. "I support what his leadership demands."

Recognizing

★ Brother David Wilson, OCSO, made his solemn profession of vows as a Cistercian at the Abbey of the Genesee, Piffard, Aug. 15. Brother Wilson is a graduate of Genesee High School and had attended Holy Name Parish, Groveland, and St. Joseph's Parish, Livonia.

★ Brother Donald Fleischhacker, CSC, who taught at the former Cardinal Mooney High School in Greece, celebrated his 40th jubilee June 20 at Sacred Heart Basilica, Notre Dame, Ind.

★ Sister Seraphine Herbst, SSJ, executive director of School of the Holy Childhood, received the Citizen of the Year award from the Henrietta Area Council of the Chamber of Commerce, June 4.

★ Father James Farrell Didas, a Rochester native, marked 65 years in the priesthood at a May 1 Mass and celebration for Josephite jubilarians in Baltimore. He was ordained at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington in 1933.

★ St. Gabriel's Parish, Hammondsport, has established a scholarship fund at the Nazareth Schools in honor of St. Anne Michelle McGill, SSJ. Sister McGill, the parish's administrator, is a 1947 graduate of Nazareth Academy.

★ Bishop Matthew H. Clark has been named the U.S. bishops' liaison to the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. His three-year term begins in November.

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