

## DIOCESAN NEWS

## Bishop suspends defiant Father James Callan

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark has suspended Father Jim Callan, 51, the controversial former administrator of Corpus Christi Church, from the priesthood indefinitely, effective Dec. 7.

Father Callan, while suspended, is not permitted to function as a priest; administer a parish; and celebrate Mass or other sacraments, according to the diocese.

Bishop Clark removed Father Callan from Corpus Christi in August for defying the church's teachings on women's liturgical roles, ministry to gay Catholics, and intercommunion with non-Catholics. The priest got in trouble for regularly inviting non-Catholics to share the Eucharist. He acknowledged blessing gay unions as well.

Meanwhile, Mary Ramerman, his pastoral associate, regularly appeared on the altar during Mass in an alb and half-stole, and performed functions traditionally done by ordained priests.

The diocese has offered to pay the priest his salary during his suspension. But Father Callan said he would take a salary only if Ramerman — fired from Corpus in October for refusing to comply with diocesan directives — received a salary as well.

Father Kevin McKenna, diocesan chancellor, said Father Callan must leave his city home — a house owned by Corpus Christi — but he was free to live at any rectory in the diocese.

Father Callan has also been ordered by the bishop to "not ... attempt to influence the Corpus Christi staff or the pastoral or liturgical practices of the parish."

Father Callan said he did not orchestrate the protests at the parish in recent months, but that he did discuss the protests with parishioners. Parishioners' actions in past weeks have included disrupting weekend



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

After being suspended from the priesthood, Father James Callan, center, flanked by Denise Donato, left, and Mary Ramerman, begins a "supplemental" service Dec. 7 at Downtown United Presbyterian Church.

Masses in various ways and erecting a banner above the altar that says "You Can't Hold Back The Spring," a phrase taken from Father Callan's book on Corpus of the same name.

Father Callan said he initially supported protesting his removal. He said he thought the new pastor at Corpus, Father Daniel McMullin, would then be moved to adopt some of the controversial practices such as allowing women roles on the altar that Father Callan had allowed. But Father McMullin has not done so, and it's time for the protests to end, Father Callan said.

"Those who favor a more inclusive church should go elsewhere," he said. "I think the protests have been a failure."

Father Callan's suspension is intended to be "remedial rather than punitive," a diocesan release stated.

"Father Callan seems to be headed away from being part of the wider Roman Catholic community" the bishop wrote. "My hope is that the suspension will enable him to re-evaluate the positions he has taken."

Father McKenna added that if Father Callan gives "written assurances that he will follow the bishop's directives, revocation of the suspension will be considered."

But it's unlikely "written assurances" will be forthcoming, according to Father Callan. The priest noted he wasn't budging on any issue that Bishop Clark has cited.

"These are issues that are core to me and Corpus Christi," Father Callan said.

At this point, Father McKenna said Father Callan's suspension was open-ended, and that the priest would be given a "reasonable amount of time" to reflect on his stands. However, Father McKenna pointed out that, ultimately, if the priest refuses to comply with church teachings, one option for the church would be to laicize Father Callan. A priest is returned to the lay state through a canonical process of laicization.

Father Callan said he will appeal his suspension. He has 10 days from Dec. 7 to do so. Father McKenna said the diocese hoped that Father Callan would be able to return to his ministry, but that to allow priests to defy the bishop's directives whenever they wanted to would only result in "chaos."

"How does the bishop assign somebody who says 'I will not follow your directives?'" Father McKenna asked rhetorically.

Father Callan's suspension was greeted with sadness by former parishioners who were part of a standing-room-only congregation Dec. 7 at a Communion service in Downtown United Presbyterian Church. Certain Corpus parishioners have been holding "supplemental services" at the church in the wake of the priest's removal.

Noting he was not allowed to celebrate Mass, Father Callan was a presider at the Communion service there — an action Father McKenna called "inappropriate" in light of Father Callan's current suspension.

Peg Rubley, interim president of the Spring Committee, which represents several hundred supporters of Father Callan, said the priest was being punished for not following the church's "slow pace" on the issues that got him in trouble.

"I don't understand how a person who does so much good in their life ... could get fired for not keeping the pace of the church," she said.

## Infected teen shares insights at World AIDS Day assembly

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — He was the tiniest youth at the assembly, but Levar Logan Halter's comments about living with AIDS were powerful.

"As you see, I'm very short. That is because of the virus," Levar, 13, told students from Nazareth Academy and Nazareth Hall Middle School.

However, he emphasized, "I need you to know that just because I have AIDS, I'm still just a regular kid. You can't get this virus from being my friend."

Levar spoke on Dec. 1, World AIDS Day, at Nazareth Academy with his adoptive mother, Roberta Halter. Halter had been a close friend of Levar's birth mother, who died of AIDS after contracting the HIV virus from her husband and passing it on to Levar at birth.

Halter cited some grim statistics about AIDS, saying that 11.7 million people worldwide have died from AIDS-related diseases since the epidemic was discovered in the 1980s.

In addition, she said, 11 people become infected with the virus every minute — and most of the victims are teenagers and young adults.

"I want to scare you. There are some things going on in the world that are re-



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Levar Logan Halter, 13, speaks to students at Nazareth Academy Dec. 1.

ally, really scary, and I want you to know about them," Halter told the audience.

Halter said that although birth-control devices help reduce the risk of contracting the HIV virus through sexual activity, the best prevention method is abstinence.

"The person pressuring you to have sex — are you willing to die for that person?" she asked.

Prior to the assembly, Nazareth high school and middle school students had raised \$1,868 in donations for LAFF (Levar and Friends Fund) as well as the Hale House in New York City. Both organizations support HIV-infected children and their families.

Also at the Dec. 1 program, Nazareth Academy's select choir sang. And its dance company performed to the song "Rise and Shine," which Levar recorded last year with national rock artist Poe.

One dancer, Stacey Royal, said she be-

came emotional performing to "Rise and Shine" in Levar's presence.

"I almost broke out in tears, actually," said Stacey, 14, a sophomore. "I was really overwhelmed."

In addition, the Nazareth Hall boys' dance class recited raps they had composed about Levar and his struggle with AIDS. Norman Strothers, one of the rappers, said he was glad to get the chance to meet Levar, a seventh-grader at Nathaniel Rochester Community School.

"He's such a nice kid. He was like a friend to me," said Norman, 13, an eighth-grader.

The program was also sobering, Norman added, because it made him realize that the AIDS virus can be spread in many ways.

"When you think about it, that's kind of scary, because it can happen to me — not just certain people," Norman said.

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