

# Operations director fires six on Corpus staff

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Six Corpus Christi Parish staff members were fired Dec. 14 by an interim director of operations who had been in his position less than a week.

Tom Riley, who began working Dec. 9 as part-time operations director at the embattled parish, confirmed Dec. 15 that he fired Michael Boucher, Denise Donato; Sister Marjory Henninger, SSJ; Myra Humphrey; Maureen Nielsen; and Jim Smith. They were notified by registered mail, telephone and/or fax.

Boucher (adult education minister), Donato (family minister) and Humphrey (hospitality minister) were internal staff members. Sister Henninger (Recovery House), Nielsen (Pearl House) and Smith (Rogers House) worked for outreach ministries of the parish.

Riley told the *Catholic Courier* that each person was fired "for refusal to cooperate with the new pastor." Father Daniel McMullin has served as pastor at Corpus Christi since Oct. 17.

The firing came as a surprise to Boucher, who said he had written a letter to Father McMullin Dec. 11 asking for clarification on some of his and Riley's directives. He

said he was notified by fax Dec. 14 on his day off that he had been fired.

"To the best of my knowledge, it was because I failed to comply with the directives. To this point, I am not sure of what (the directives) are," Boucher said Dec. 15. "It's devastating, 10 days before Christmas. I'm still in shock."

Boucher was one of 13 staff members who signed a leaflet of protest about Riley's hiring that was distributed at all weekend Masses Dec. 12-13.

"We as a staff have taken a vote of no confidence in the newly created administrative position to which Mr. Riley has been assigned," the letter said.

Humphrey explained that the letter was written because none of the Corpus Christi employees had prior knowledge of Riley's hiring when he introduced himself at a staff meeting Dec. 9. This move, she explained, bypassed the parish's tradition of involving all staff members in any new hire.

Riley, 60, who operates a business consulting firm, said he was contacted about the position by diocesan officials. He added that he reports to Father McMullin, and estimated that his tenure at Corpus Christi will last approximately two months. His chief roles during that time, he said, are to "improve the parish's financial health

and to establish how a parish organization should function."

This week's firings were the latest chapter of a controversy that began in September when Bishop Matthew H. Clark removed Father James B. Callan, Corpus Christi's priest administrator, due to violations of church law regarding women's roles, the blessing of homosexual unions and intercommunion. Bishop Clark suspended Father Callan from the priesthood Dec. 7 after the priest said he would not change his stance on those issues.

Prior to the Dec. 14 firings, the only other Corpus Christi staff member to recently be fired was Mary Ramerman, pastoral associate. She was dismissed Oct. 15 by a diocesan-appointed transitional administrative team for taking inappropriate roles

at Mass.

Riley said that further dismissals are possible, but not planned at this time.

"That depends on the actions of other employees," Riley said.

Father Joseph Hart, diocesan vicar general, told pastoral center employees at a Dec. 15 meeting that he likened this week's firings to other parish situations in which staff members depart because of their emotional ties to the previous administration.

"You may have to leave. Sometimes, for your psychological health, that may have to happen," Father Hart said.

Father Hart added that the emotions among Corpus Christi staff members "have not calmed down" since Father Callan's removal, and "perhaps things have not moved in a productive direction for the new staff."

## Finger Lakes mission helps hundreds in NW Honduras

By Kathleen Schwar  
Staff writer

The images of hurricane-devastated Honduras remain with members of a medical team from the Finger Lakes.

"I'm having a little hard time adjusting back here just knowing what's going on over there," said Terri Hannan, a physician's assistant and parishioner of St. Stephen's Church, Geneva. "It was hard to leave, so much is left undone."

Eight volunteers spent about a week there early this month, assisting after Hurricane Mitch wrecked much of Central America in October and killed perhaps 20,000. Setting up clinics in lean-tos and schools without running water, they treated people for everything from coughs and colds to parasitic diseases.

They treated some 1,400 people. "Probably the (case) that is really the hardest, was a baby about 15 months old," Hannan said. "We don't know for sure, she was possibly an AIDS baby. She was extremely malnourished and literally would not eat. We held a cookie up to her mouth, and she rolled her eyes and turned her face away, like, 'Please don't do this.' ...I had never experienced in this country a child so malnourished she would not eat."

One mother who brought an ill baby had dropped the baby's twin in the flood waters and saw the baby carried away.

"She just sat there in a daze," recalled Donna Achilles, an LPN and parishioner of St. Michael's Church, Penn Yan. Meanwhile, she added, "The other twin did not look like it would survive."

Throughout the week, Father Peter Deckman, co-administrator of St. Michael's Church, Penn Yan, provided needed ministry, Hannan added.

"Father Peter gave away a lot of rosaries, gave a lot of blessings. His ministry is wonderful. He's really good with people," she said.

He was especially good with two small boys about 10 to 13 years old who came to their makeshift clinic with heart complaints, volunteers said.

"It was all anxiety and loss. They would actually grasp their heart in pain because they were reliving it again," Hannan said. "The first little boy came in grasping his chest. If he was 40 you would have thought he was having a heart attack."

He'd lost his father, volunteers eventually learned. "And as the oldest of four, the reality of life that he now would have to be the man of the house with his younger brothers was overwhelming," Hannan said.

Eric Lewis, of St. Stephen's Church and the Finger Lakes Migrant Health-Care Project, organized the medical help. The volunteers stayed with families in San Pedro Sula and worked in that northwestern area of Honduras.

Lewis had worked in Honduras with various religious groups, and when a group of orphans saw him returning with others on foot, they broke into a chant, "Eric...Eric...Eric."

Hurricane Mitch hardly touched San Pedro Sula, Achilles noted.

"But," she added, "in about a 10 minutes' drive from there in outlying villages, homes were gone, people had lost lives, and had mud four feet thick into their homes. A lot of streets were still flooded. There was a lot of sickness."

"There's so much devastation there, I don't know if they will ever get back to where they were before the flood, and it was total poverty before that," she said.

Lewis' Honduran contact, Lourdes Fernandez, employed by the Christian Brothers, plans to visit the Finger Lakes early next year. The team, heavily supported by area



Greg Francis/Staff Photographer

## Rally for rights

Gilly Burlingham, right, of Perry, N.Y., of Metro Justice and the Sierra Club, participates in a candlelight vigil Dec. 10 on the Sister Cities Pedestrian Bridge over the Genesee River in downtown Rochester to mark the 50th anniversary of the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

organizations and parishioners, plans to continue fundraising, give slide presentations and possibly establish a partnership with a community in Honduras.

The efforts will build on those already mounted back in the Finger Lakes region.

In Geneva, Hannan's daughter Erin, a junior at DeSales High School, asked the student council to collect money for medical supplies. Son Matthew, 11, at St. Francis deSales/St. Stephen School, took his mother's e-mail to class to discuss. A DeSales Spanish class wrote letters in Spanish and St. Michael's School, Newark, wrote out cards the team delivered.

Farmworkers attending a Spanish Mass at St. Francis de Sales Church, Geneva, Nov. 22 contributed \$600 to the cause. Oth-

er church and civic organizations also donated money.

"We all knew we had made a difference for the people in at least a small way," Hannan said. "They lost so much, they need someone to smile on them, to put a hand on their shoulder and give them reassurance someone cares about them."

The care went both ways.

Terry Yonker, a parishioner at St. Michael's, Penn Yan, and a public health registered nurse, said, "One lady, 81 years old, was so positive, grateful and talkative. After blessing her, Father Peter said to her, 'I want you to put your hands over this nurse's head and say a blessing for her.' I got all choked up. It kind of symbolized how we give to each other."

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