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Corpus

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However, Father McMullin noted that church law requires the creation of a parish pastoral council that serves a consultative and advisory role to the pastor. Father McMullin said he is exploring incorporating the parish's former model of community-forum decision making into the parish's governance. The pastor also said he will conduct 12 gatherings of 12 to 16 parishioners in the next few weeks to gain their input into changes at the parish.

Father McMullin ended his speech by acknowledging the fears many Corpus parishioners have about the future.

"I know that some of you are worried that we are returning to a pre-Vatican II era in our parish ...," he said. "Let me say clearly: We can never go backward. Today is all we have, and only God knows our future."

Most of those present stood and applauded Father McMullin at the end of his speech. After the speech, Corpus parishioners gave a variety of views on it.

Virginia Werner said she was "heartbroken" when Father Callan was removed, but added that she has decided to remain at the parish and support Father McMullin.

"I don't think he wants to see an arcane parish evolve," she said.

She also said that the turmoil at the parish has made her realize she believes she must obey all the rules of the church if she wants to be Catholic.

"If we are Catholic, we will follow the Catholic doctrine, and I think that's been clearer in my mind since this all started."

A different vision

Obviously, however, hundreds of Corpus parishioners have come to conclusions different from Werner's. And on Jan. 30, more than 600 of them met at Gateway Banquet & Conference Center in Henrietta to discuss establishing a new church they say will probably not be linked officially with any other Christian denomination.

Currently, many of these parishioners have been attending "alternative" Thursday-night services at Downtown United Presbyterian Church in Rochester. Since Feb. 2, the community has been holding weekly noon services on Tuesdays at Immanuel Baptist Church in Rochester, and starting Feb. 13, plans to hold weekend ser-

STILL PUZZLED?

The controversy surrounding Corpus Christi Church has raised any number of questions about matters ranging from doctrine to church governance. Do you have questions relating to Corpus Christi? Send them to us (bona fide information requests only please, not arguments disguised as questions), and we'll get the answers to as many as we can for publication in an upcoming issue. Send questions to: Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624-0379 or e-mail us at cathcour@frontiernet.net.

vices at Salem United Church of Christ in Rochester.

Bill Barry, a facilitator of the Jan. 30 event, said the community wants to form a church "rooted in the Catholic tradition," but that does not adhere to church rules regarding women, ministry to gays, and intercommunion with non-Catholics.

Currently, he said, the Roman Catholic Church is run by an "all-male, all-celibate, all clerical" hierarchy, and the new community wants to stress that its leadership will be shared by all involved. He added that Ramerman as well as Fathers Callan and Cadena will serve as the community's "primary spiritual leaders."

"We have chosen to define 'Catholic' in a new way, not the old way," Barry added. "The old way is exclusive and discriminatory."

In a press statement issued in response to the event, Father Joseph A. Hart, diocesan vicar general and pastoral office moderator, lamented that the community wished to separate itself from the church.

"Although the signs that this moment was coming have been evident for a long time, we had always hoped that some compromise could have been found to keep this community within the Catholic Church," he wrote. "The Church needs its prophets, and prophets need to stay in touch with tradition."

In interviews with the *Courier*, Father Hart added that the church has a long history of members who seriously questioned its rules, but who nonetheless remained within the church. He cited 19th-century French nun St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who felt a calling to the priesthood at a time when no one would have even seriously discussed women's ordination.

But in an interview after the Jan. 30 event at Gateway, Ramerman blamed the diocese for pushing many Corpus parish-

ioners out of the wider church by the way it handled the whole crisis at the parish. Parishioners were never adequately consulted about the changes taking place at Corpus, she argued. In particular, she said that the firing of six Corpus staff members in December was the final straw for many now forming the new faith community.

"It made many people feel they were no longer involved," she said of the firings.

Father Hart added that the diocese currently has no plans to meet with former Corpus Christi members who plan to worship in the new church. Father Kevin McKenna, diocesan chancellor, also pointed out that Catholics who publicly affiliate themselves with the new church run the risk of incurring automatic excommunication under Canon 1364, which covers apostates, heretics and schismatics.

Fellow priests

Father Callan has repeatedly said he will not compromise on the positions that got him fired, and told the *Courier* he has resigned himself to the possibility that he will never work as a priest in the Catholic Church again. Indeed, Father McKenna said if Father Callan chooses to lead services at the new church, it will weigh against him should he ever seek to be reinstated as a priest.

Father Callan also noted that one of the most disappointing experiences of the past several months is the fact that few priests have supported him privately or publicly. But a number of priests told the *Courier* that many diocesan priests are actually disappointed in Father Callan and his supporters for their ongoing refusal to obey Bishop Clark's directives.

For example, Msgr. Gerard C. Krieg, pastor of St. Stephen's Church, Geneva, said he admired Father Callan's work at

Corpus Christi over the years, but he did not admire the defiance of Bishop Clark adopted by the priest and those who share his positions.

Citing Christ's prayer for unity in John 17, the pastor said Catholics have an obligation to seek unity of the church over and above any agendas for change. Echoing Father Hart's sentiments, Msgr. Krieg argued that it would be better if Father Callan and his supporters followed church law, but still presented their arguments for change to other Catholics so that they might become convinced of their positions.

"They are no more nor less than any of the other parishes ...," he said of the break-away group. "If they happen to be much more enthusiastic and fired up about what they are doing, then let the fire spread. But if the fire is burning down things more than anything else, then that fire is out of control."

Father Callan agreed that unity is important to the church. However, "justice is more important than unity," he said, noting he believes his positions are what the Scriptures call him to support.

Father Callan's longtime friend Father William V. Spilly, pastor of Rochester's St. John the Evangelist Church, noted that although he generally agrees with Father Callan on such issues as women's ordination, he does not promote those causes by breaking the church laws as Father Callan did. However, Father Spilly said a number of diocesan priests share Father Callan's views, if not his methods, and could have shown him more support when he was removed from Corpus.

Father Spilly himself resigned from several diocesan boards — including that of the *Catholic Courier* — to protest the way Father Callan was dismissed from his job. Father Spilly said he did not believe Father Callan was given sufficient warning that he was in danger of losing his position and added that he believes Father Callan's removal was engineered, in part, by Vatican pressure on the diocese.

Bishop Clark and other diocesan officials have repeatedly stated that the decision was the bishop's alone. They also note that the bishop and other officials spoke to Father Callan on several occasions about his rule-breaking — a point Father Spilly acknowledges. Yet the priest also criticized the diocese for not foreseeing the firestorm that began with Father Callan's removal.

"To think that by removing him, you're going to have peace and understanding was being naive ...," Father Spilly said. "The people were treated terribly, and so was (Father Callan), and our church suffered because of all the press and all the anger that was going on."

Reconciliation?

Despite the profound differences currently dividing official church leaders and alienated Corpus parishioners, many members of the diocese profess a desire for reconciliation. One priest who shares such hopes is Father James Hewes, who directs the Newman Catholic Community Interfaith Center at the State University of New York College at Geneseo.

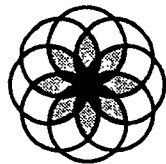
Father Hewes said that if one strips away all the arguments, the supporters of Bishop Clark and supporters of Father Callan essentially want many of the same things — more church roles for women, expanded ministry to gay people, and wider connections with non-Catholics.

"I don't think either side has all the truth," Father Hewes said. "Both are looking at the same reality and seeing it differently."

"Most conflict is usually not handled well," he added. "There's probably mistakes being made on both sides."

Father Hewes said both sides — as well as all diocesan Catholics — need to humbly admit that the conflict has left many with more questions than answers.

He said people should be asking themselves, "What is God doing in all this? What is God trying to invite us to? What is God saying to both sides in this?"

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