

Mass pays tribute to anthrax victim

By Tracy Early
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — A funeral Mass for Kathy T. Nguyen, the first person to die of anthrax in New York, was held Nov. 5 at St. John Chrysostom Church, her parish in the South Bronx.

Father Carlos M. Rodriguez, pastor and celebrant of the Mass, told Catholic News Service afterward that he also officiated at her burial at a New York archdiocesan cemetery.

The 61-year-old Nguyen, who according to news reports had immigrated from Vietnam in 1977, worked at Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital. She died Oct. 31 of inhalation anthrax at another area hospital, Lenox Hill.

The two hospitals joined with the woman's friends and some of her fellow parishioners to make arrangements for the funeral, Father Rodriguez said.

He said Nguyen was part of a "close-knit community" in a revitalized area of the South Bronx called West Farms, where residents were primarily Hispanic and African-American.

He called Nguyen a faithful Catholic who attended Mass regularly and was known as a very generous person.

"The sadness to us is that she came to this country to find peace and joy, but could not escape the violence," he said.

Father Rodriguez said about 10 other priests, including a half dozen Vietnamese and a chaplain from Lenox Hill Hospital, came to concelebrate the funeral Mass

with him. More than 500 people attended.

In his homily, Father Rodriguez said, he noted that the response of Nguyen's neighbors to her death in a time of national crisis revealed "the best of humanity in the love and respect they showed for her. We must not lose that."

"Her loss brings us so strong a realization of the world conflict we're in, and of our need to pray as people of peace," he added.

Health officials remained unable to determine how Nguyen became infected. Seven cases of the skin form of anthrax have been confirmed by New York City's health commissioner, although, according to The Associated Press, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed only four of the skin anthrax cases.



Reuters/CNS

The casket of anthrax victim Kathy T. Nguyen is carried from St. John Chrysostom Catholic Church.



Catholic Courier

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 113 NO. 6 ■ THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2001 ■ 75¢ ■ 16 PAGES

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Spiritus Christi 'solidifies' schism

EDITORS' NOTE: On Nov. 17, Mary Ramerman is scheduled to be ordained a priest by Bishop Peter Hickman of the Old Catholic Church, a Protestant denomination that broke from the universal church in the 19th century.

Because it signifies a move by the Spiritus Christi community to create its own clergy, diocesan officials see Ramerman's ordination — as well as the planned diaconal ordination of former Corpus Christi staff member Denise Donato by Bishop Hickman next spring — as "solidifying" the schism begun three years ago.

In an attempt to prepare readers for the ordination of Ramerman, pastoral associate at Rochester's Corpus Christi Church until she was fired in 1998, this article will review developments at the parish from 1998 through the formation of the schismatic Spiritus Christi community. An accompanying article discusses implications of the Nov. 17 ordination. And next week's Catholic Courier will present a history of the Old Catholic Church to which she and Donato are to be ordained.

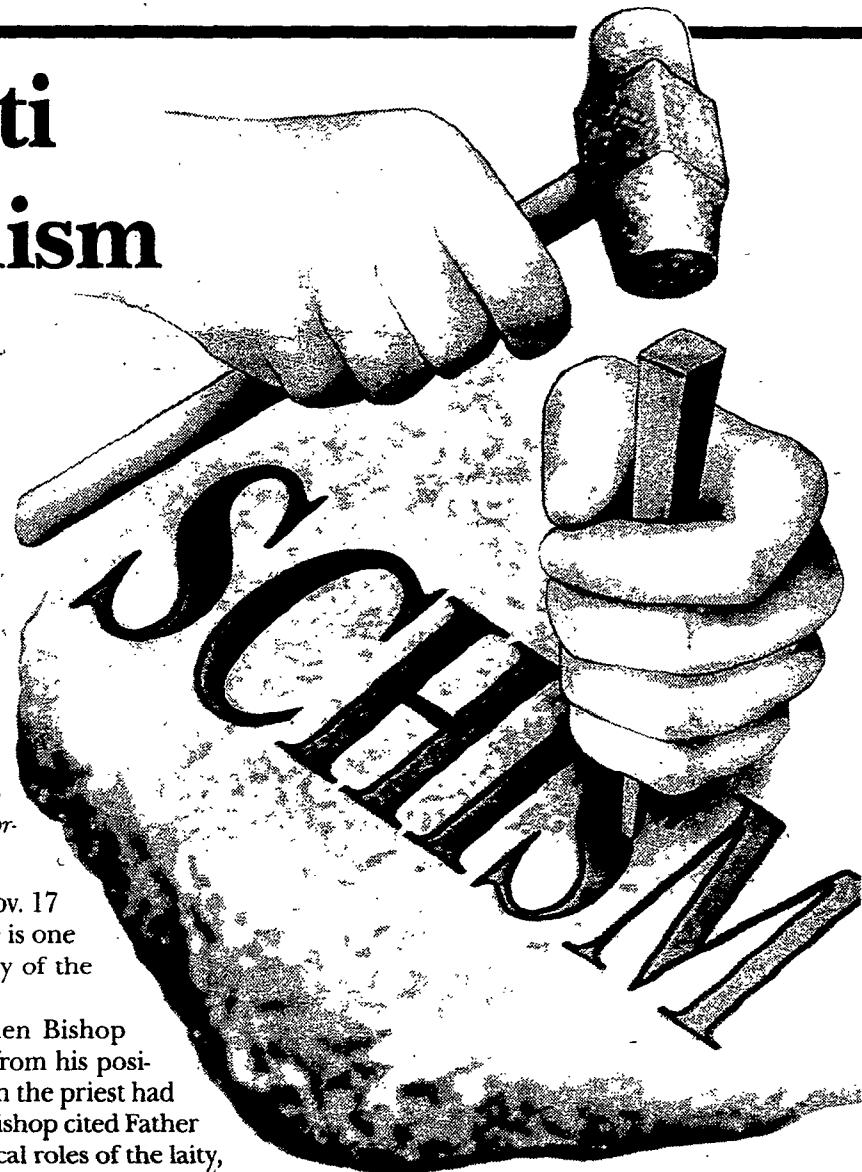
The saga leading up to Mary Ramerman's Nov. 17 ordination in Rochester's Eastman Theatre is one of the most theatrical stories in the history of the Diocese of Rochester.

On a public level, it began in August 1998, when Bishop Matthew H. Clark removed Father James B. Callan from his position as administrator of Corpus Christi Church, which the priest had overseen since 1976. In removing Father Callan, the bishop cited Father Callan's open defiance of church teachings on liturgical roles of the laity, homosexual marriage and Eucharistic sharing with non-baptized people — despite the bishop's repeated requests that he change course.

Father Callan was a popular and charismatic priest. Under his leadership the parish had founded a number of outreach ministries to the poor, the sick, the imprisoned and others. Yet critics charged that Father Callan routinely flouted church law in the name of reforming the Catholic Church.

Among the practices that drew attention to the parish was Ramerman's regular attire in an alb and modified stole at the altar, giving the appearance that she was an ordained person. Father Callan also conducted a small number of blessings of same-sex unions in private settings, and routinely invited everyone who attended Masses to receive the Eucharist, regardless of whether they were baptized.

Father Callan's 1998 book, *Can't Hold Back The Spring — The Blossoming of Corpus Christi Church*, was not only a history of the parish but also documented the practices that eventually led to his removal. The book also listed Ramerman as his "associate pastor," a canonical title that cannot be held by a lay person.



Questions & Answers

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Father Joseph A. Hart, vicar general of the Diocese of Rochester, and Father Daniel Condon, diocesan chancellor, addressed a variety of questions regarding the Catholic Church's view of the Spiritus Christi congregation and what this schism means for Catholics, especially those who left the church to join Spiritus. Their answers are summarized here.

Is Spiritus Christi — in any way — still a Catholic church?

No, they said, because Spiritus is not in communion with the Catholic Church.
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