

Our Lady of Grace parishioners rally for return of popular priest



(Cardinal Thomas Collins, right, blesses a student garden at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School in October, accompanied by Father Joe Gorman. Auroran photo by David Falconer)

By Brock Weir

Parishioners at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church are rallying to demand the return of Father Joe Gorman to their Parish.

The popular pastor was asked to "take some time away from the parish" by the Archdiocese of Toronto, citing "financial irregularities" and, according to a church spokesman, "involvement in marriages not sanctioned by the Catholic Church."

Since word of his departure spread throughout the Our Lady of Grace community, hundreds have come forward to sign a petition asking Cardinal Thomas Collins of the Archdiocese of Toronto, to re-instate the popular pastor.

"We, the parishioners of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, ask for your intervention to help heal our community, which has been wounded by the abrupt removal of our pastor, Fr. Joe Gorman," reads the petition which had, at publication, 345 supporters. "He has been an inspiration and a reconciliatory instrument, a role model, especially for our youth, and has been moral support for families in need, particularly the mentally ill, elderly, and the poor and grieving.

"Through his joyful Christian spirit, he has brought back to the church many of the members who had left, even non-Catholics."

Signatories ask the Cardinal to appoint a mediator to assist in Father Joe's return to Our Lady of Grace, along with "transparency, due process and clear communication to help us through these difficult times."

After signing the petition, members of the congregation were clear in their support for Father Joe.

"Father Joe is a pastor who is following the lead of Pope Francis, where we ought not to be looking so strongly at the strict rules of the church, but more at the people of the church," wrote Aurora resident Teresa van Schaik. "All the community works that Father Joe has done with our youth makes me proud to be a parishioner at Our Lady of Grace."

In a statement, the Archdiocese cited "pastoral irregularities relating to the financial administration of the parish and serious civil and ecclesiastical irregularities concerning the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony."

"Those parties have been notified," continues the statement. "To offer support and help him reflect on his role as pastor, Cardinal

Collins has asked Father Gorman to take some time away from the parish. He remains the pastor of Our Lady of Grace and our prayer is that this period of reflection will assist him in his life of priestly ministry.

"We recognize this is a very difficult situation for all involved. We invite parishioners of Our Lady of Grace to pray for Father Gorman in the days ahead and to support those who will administer the parish in his absence."

The Auroran reached out to Neil MacCarthy, Director of Public Relations and Communications for the Archdiocese, to elaborate on these "irregularities" concerning matrimony. He replied the statement refers to "involvement in marriages not sanctioned by the Catholic Church" and is "not talking about same sex unions at all."

"Participating or presiding at marriages within a Catholic context, but that did not have approval to move forward," he elaborated.

Parishioners, however, weren't content to just pray privately but took their prayers online as well.

"The flock want their shepherd back," wrote John Iafrate of Aurora. "Pope Francis would be so proud of what Fr. Joe has accomplished at OLG (Our Lady of Grace) in such a short time span. He has compassion for the marginalized. He's taught us the importance of evangelization and giving back to the community. He has love and respect for our youth. He is an excellent homilist. He has charismatic leadership style and he is darn funny when he wants to be and serious when he needs to be. I can go on and on about OUR Fr. Joe. I pray for his immediate return to Our Lady of Grace Parish."

Added Ty Wehrenberg of Newmarket: "My wife and children are parishioners of Our Lady of Grace Church. While I am not Catholic, if there was ever someone who would make me consider becoming Catholic, it would be Father Joe. He has a way of connecting with people that I have never seen in the church before. His teachings are based in the reality of today. It would be a shame to have him removed from Our Lady of Grace."

To view the petition, visit

www.change.org/p/cardinal-thomas-collins-we-just-want-father-joe-gorman-back-at-our-lady-of-grace-catholic-church-in-aurora-on.
For more on the Archdiocese of Toronto, visit www.archtoronto.org.