

Parishioners left "cold" by handling of Gorman matter



Gorman, left, with Cardinal Thomas Collins, dedicating a student garden at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School last fall. Auroran photo by David Falconer

By Brock Weir

For the past three months, speculation on the future of Father Joe Gorman within the parish mounted among the Our Lady of Grace (OLG) community. But, when the answer finally came on Saturday, many parishioners had sharp words over how the situation was handled.

Speaking before a large congregation late Saturday afternoon, Fr. Thomas Lim, who has been leading the parish in Gorman's absence, acknowledged this curiosity, stating he had been asked "often" for news "in regards to Father Joe and his situation." Up until then, the answer had always been "no", but there was a game changer by the end of the week.

"This week, the Cardinal has asked that I deliver a letter that is directed to the parishioners of Our Lady of Grace," he said. "Moreover, Fr. Joe asked if he could have an opportunity to address the parishioners of Our Lady of Grace, to which the Cardinal also gave his permission."

Both letters, he said, were on a table near the church's exit to Yonge Street, and before the priest finished his words, members got up to see what both men had to say.

The fact they had to find out their pastor had decided to leave the priesthood via a letter, when a statement outlining Cardinal Thomas Collins' request to Fr. Gorman to take time away from the parish was read aloud from the pulpit at the end of January by Bishop Wayne Kirkpatrick, left some parishioners surprised.

"I just asked the deacon why this was not read from the pulpit and he said, 'You should read it yourself and think about what the Gospel said,'" said Rosalyn Gonsalves, a member of the OLG community for over 30 years. "To me, they don't have the courage to stand up there and talk about it. The diocese have certain ways of doing things and irrespective of what the parishioners might think, they will always do it their way.

"However, the transgressions of Fr. Joe Gorman, in my opinion, pale by comparison to those of Barry Glendinning. Many years ago, it was fine for the Diocese to allow a known pedophile to be in our midst for many years, and for the parishioners to be told that [Glendinning] merely had a 'drinking problem,' that he was treated at Southdown and we should give him a chance. Really? The minor transgressions of Fr. Joe pale by comparison and are decidedly not in the same league.

"Yet, the bureaucracy of the Diocese has prevailed and they have chosen to give credence to those parishioners who have hatefully

turned against Fr. Joe, contrary to the precepts of the Christian religion. Sadly, none of those chose to recognize all the wonderful contributions he has made to the parishioners and the community at large.?

Another parishioner, who asked not to be named, said she believed the statement read from the altar was 'very cold.' Calling Fr. Gorman a 'genius' in his field, she said his absence has sapped the parish of the 'energy' he brought.

'There was something about him that just drew people into that church,' she said. 'There were people who came who hadn't been to church in years. For him to leave the priesthood, what a loss for the Catholic Church. It is just such a total loss for him not coming back.'

Rumours were rife, she said, and she was not alone in questioning the characterization of Fr. Gorman's actions as 'transgressions.'

'There's your goodness for you,' she said of the marriages. 'He didn't want anyone to not be happy with life. Is that such a great sin? For me it's not. I would have performed the marriage tomorrow.'

Ms. Gonsalves expressed a similar view, adding she, in her personal opinion, did not view this as a transgression. Without Fr. Gorman, she said certain masses have seen a dip in attendance, but the big impact has been in collections and contributions to the church's ShareLife program.

'We divert our collection elsewhere; money talks,' she said. 'My biggest [issue] is the way the Archbishop has chosen not to come and speak with the people directly and has left it up to whoever. To be handed a letter at the end of the [mass] and to be told to go and read it, really? I think that is very poor on the part of the diocese.'