



UP FRONT AND PERSONAL Remembering Father Fitzpatrick

BY THOMAS LEAVENS

Father Jim Fitzpatrick, former director of St. Paul's Center, which sponsors the Christian Awakening and the Cursillo, died July 30. This tribute was written by the director of the Young Adult Christian Awakening Program.

I hate change. I really do - but I try to follow the mantra, "Change is good," whenever I'm forced to confront it. When Father Joe Holcomb told the staff at St. Paul's Center five years ago that he had been appointed as pastor of St. Finbar's in Brooklyn, we were presented with another change: a new director for the Center. I was pretty confident that the new director would be one of the wonderful priests we frequently used to carry out the mission of the Christian Awakening and Cursillo programs. That made sense until we heard that Father Jim Fitzpatrick was assigned as the new director of St. Paul's Center. Who's he? Where is he coming from? Why me??? I hate change!

It's hard to believe that five years have come and gone so quickly. So much has happened over the last five years - in my life, in the world and at St. Paul's. I remember when I first met Father Jim at the Center in Astoria. He was a tall, big man with a strong voice. He told me that he made a Boys' C.A. when he was in high school and remembered that it was a good experience. He didn't have much knowledge of what St. Paul's Center was all about but he was excited about the opportunity to learn everything. He made his intentions as the new director quite clear - he would allow St. Paul's to continue doing what it was doing in the same ways it had always been done. Although he was also assigned as director of vocations for the diocese, he said that St. Paul's Center would be treated with equal importance.

One thing that Father Jim made very clear when he began his assignment was that he did not want to intrude on a program that was so successful. He chose not to be a director of any program because he trusted the directors and teams in place. He felt that they were the true experts. He felt that everyone involved on the weekends brought equal importance to the experience. Directors were no more important than team members, who were no more important than angels, who were no more important than candidates. All were equal, essential and chosen by God to share together on C.A. and Cursillo weekends. His personal goal for each weekend was to be available to all members for spiritual and pastoral guidance. What I loved about Father Jim's involvement in the Young Adult program was that he was extremely approachable. He made himself available for private time to anyone who chose it, with an 'everyman' style. His talks were clear and concise. He is a priest that people can understand, relate to and bring closer to God.

Father Jim came into my life uninvited, unexpected, and changed me forever. He and I came together because God put us together. We couldn't be more different yet there is a strong connection between us. We didn't always agree about things but we always had respect for each other. What I loved about him was his openness to share experiences about his life before his ordination and his life as a priest. I love that he always thanked me for my work and my support of him. I loved his sense of humor and how he called things exactly the way they were. I loved his honesty about what's going on in the world and the Church. I loved how much he believed in the power of prayer. I loved how sensitive he was to the needs of others, specifically those with grief, addiction and lack of faith. I loved how he recommended pop fiction to read for fun and spiritual books for growth. I loved how he reminded me of the truly important things in life and to not focus on the petty. I loved how important his family was to him. I loved how he saw me as I really was and not how I believed I was.

I hope to inspire people to think about their lives and the people in them that contribute to their growth. I hope my reflection article inspires you to reflect on Father Jim and how he has affected your lives in his five years as director of St. Paul's Center. If not Father Jim, I hope you can think about the priests who have come into your life and have inspired you to be better. If not priests, then the people God has put in your life.

I know that Father Jim would not want me to put him into a specific category of importance. In my life, he wasn't - he was just my friend. Father Jim was a blessing to St. Paul's Center over the last five years.

I will pray in thanksgiving for him. I will pray for peace, and I will pray that the people he encountered on his journey gained as much from him as I have.

God bless you, Father Jim - De Colores!

Charges of Sexual Misconduct

Pastor Placed on Leave

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio has placed a Brooklyn pastor on administrative leave from active priestly ministry after allegations of sexual misconduct against him were found to be credible.

In a letter read to parishioners of St. Brendan's Church in Midwood at the conclusion of the weekend Masses Aug. 7-8, the bishop said Father Arthur D. Purcell, the pastor since 1998, would not be returning to the parish.

The letter stated that two individuals had claimed that the inappropriate behavior took place in another parish about 20 years ago. Father Purcell has repeatedly denied the allegations.

Bishop DiMarzio presented the information to the Diocesan Review Board, as mandated in the U.S. Bishops' 2002 "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" and its accompanying "Essential Norms."

Using a former police detective as an investigator, the board examined the allegations and issued a report to the bishop, recommending that Father Purcell be removed from active ministry. After reviewing the report, the bishop determined that the claims were credible and he responded to the board's recommendation.

"In doing so, I am acting in compliance with the direction presented by the 'Essential Norms' of the Bishops," he said.

As a priest on administrative leave, Father Purcell will not be permitted to present himself as a priest, celebrate Mass publicly or administer the sacraments. He may offer Mass privately.

Bishop DiMarzio appointed Msgr. Rocco D. Villani, a retired former pastor of St. Brendan's, to serve as temporary administrator of the parish until he selects a pastor.

"I am deeply grateful to him for his

priestly generosity," the bishop said of Msgr. Villani.

Bishop DiMarzio said "I speak on behalf of the Church, and in particular when I offer profound apologies to the victims. They have suffered, and even the passage of time has not dimmed the memory of a difficult episode in their lives."

The bishop asked anyone who as a minor may have been the victim of improper behavior by a member of the clergy of the diocese "to come forward and advise us." He gave the new telephone reporting number established by the diocese: (888) 634-4499.

Referring to Father Purcell's permission to say Mass privately, the bishop said: "It is my prayer that his celebration of the Eucharist will sustain him in what is clearly a painful period in his life."

Members of the Diocesan Healing Intervention Team were available to speak with parishioners after the Masses. They were also scheduled to meet with parishioners the following Wednesday evening.

Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, O.P., the Victim/Survivor coordinator for the diocese, met with parishioners on the weekend. Assisting were Sister Patricia Leonard, C.S.J., the diocesan Safe Environment coordinator, Deacon James Cobham, Timothy McBride and Jaime Wassler.

In his letter, which Very Rev. Sean G. Ogle, episcopal vicar, read at the Masses, Bishop DiMarzio said: "Surely you know that this continues to be a challenging time for our Church. I ask you to join me in prayer for the well-being of the victims. Please pray, too, for Father Purcell. I add my own prayers for you as you receive this distressing information."

Review Boards Learning More

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Office of Child and Youth Protection.

The goal was to learn from the example of others and find some consistency, said Talbot. "We are at a maturity we didn't have before."

The meeting allowed board members to judge what are the best practices being used and what options are available to improve performance, he said.

One possible result is the developing of resource materials to be sent to review boards, he said.

Talbot, in turn, organized his own meeting of the heads of all the Michigan diocesan review boards and plans to hold two such meetings a year to share information and discuss practices.

"We need to communicate and not work in isolation," he said.

Several review board members interviewed by Catholic News Service said the aim is to develop consistency rather than conformity in the way review boards operate.

In the Diocese of Rockford, Ill., forming a review board meant modifying its intervention team established in 1987 to deal with sex abuse issues.

"We became more structured," said John Rapp, chairman of the Rockford review board and a retired Illinois Appellate Court judge.

Expanded Team

Basically, Rockford expanded its intervention team to comply with charter provisions that a majority of members are not clergy or diocesan employees. In the process, it added people with specialized expertise in dealing with abuse situations and investigating cases. Now the review board is called the intervention committee.

The Archdiocese of Seattle, which had a forerunner of a review board in place since 1990, reconfigured it in 2002 by adding members and dividing it into two sections: one to examine cases and recommend actions, and the other to advise the archdiocese on policies and procedures.

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