

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Father Joe

By Stephen Somerville

By now, most people in our community have heard about the situation regarding Father Joe Gorman of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church.

Two months or so ago, the Archdiocese of Toronto asked Father Joe to step away from his ministry citing ?financial irregularities relating to the financial administration of the parish and serious civil and ecclesiastical irregularities concerning the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony.?

According to a local media report at the time, the Archdiocese said that Father Gorman presided at a wedding of a couple where a divorced party had not received an annulment, which is against requirements of the Catholic Church.

A subsequent wedding was performed by Father Gorman between two members of the Our Lady of Grace parish in an Anglican chapel ?after being advised on more than one occasion this was not permitted?, and later indicated on marriage records that a minister from another denomination presided over the service.

?This activity was contrary to the laws of the Catholic Church and violated the Civil Marriage Act, putting his own license to celebrate weddings in jeopardy,? according to the Archdiocese.

Following this initial statement ? and according to the same local report ? Neil MacCarthy, Director of Public Relations and Communications for the Archdiocese, amended the comment to underline Fr. Gorman did not gain personally from these ?irregularities,? rather ?proper procedures? were not followed on ?certain special collections.

Fast forward to April 25.

On this date, both Thomas Collins, the Archbishop of Toronto, and Father Joe, released separate letters to the parishioners of Our Lady of Grace.

The Archbishop wrote that he had asked Father Joe to take some time away from the parish.

?I asked him to do so that he might have an opportunity to reflect on his responsibilities as a pastor and to follow a path of personal reflection that would enable him to grow in his priestly life before returning to pastoral ministry?Unfortunately, Father Gorman has declined my requests to participate in the proposed path of reflection??

Father Joe thanked the parishioners for their good wishes and support. He also wrote: ?I love this parish. It is such a community of faith. I loved being part of it. As your Pastor, I was always in awe of how you ministered each other. You literally lived our Lord's message of faith, love and peace. It was so inspiring to me.?

He then goes on to write that ?after a lot of prayer, thought and family support, I have decided to leave the priesthood. My heart and my mind are made up and I am happy with my decision. It is my decision and mine alone.?

It should not have come to this.

The Archdiocese must act if a complaint arises, and it did so in this case, which is good. As we all know, too often in the past the Catholic Church has quietly moved a priest to another area, without letting anyone know what had occurred.

However, the initial statement and follow on statement by the Archdiocese were not clear and still left many questions unanswered. The roughly 6,000 families of the parish should have been provided with more details on the allegations and maybe some type of Town Hall forum should have been held.

While I do believe that every dime that we give to the church should be accounted for, the priest should be given wide latitude to assist those that he feels need our help.

That is why I put money in the envelope every Sunday morning. I am leaving it up to the local priest to exhibit good judgement in dispensing of church funds.

While I do not have any evidence, the rumor out there is that the Archdiocese wanted Father Joe to attend some type of retreat for a month somewhere in the U.S. where he would be joined by other priests who have been accused of very serious/heinous allegations. If this is the case, then the Archdiocese is wrong.

Yes, there are rules that must be followed. Maybe a reprimand or some other penalty should have been in order for Father Joe.

What has happened is that our community has lost someone with great passion and compassion. His sunny disposition and sense of optimism brought so many people back to the church or enticed new folks into the fold.

His homilies were always well received; a thoughtful message conveyed in an upbeat and crisp manner.

Although I did not know Father Joe well, he was there to listen when I was going through some tough personal times and he was there to comfort my wife as she dealt with an ailing mother and he visited my mother-in-law in the hospital just before she passed

away a couple of weeks ago.

He has been there in a similar fashion for so very, very many others in our community.

I am very much saddened by his departure from both Our Lady of Grace and from the priesthood.

I wish Joe the best in his future endeavors.

Stephen can be contacted at stephengsomerville@yahoo.com