

STATEMENT FROM THE DIOCESE OF OAKLAND
Revised June 28, 2011

A scheduled visitation by Bishop Cordileone to St. Joseph the Worker parish in Berkeley took place the weekend of June 18-19. Parish visitations provide the bishop and parish opportunities to worship and visit together. The bishop also meets with parish and school leadership and reviews important parochial matters. Some parishioners and others used this occasion to conduct demonstrations about concerns they have with the pastor, Fr. John Direen.

On Saturday June 18, the bishop and pastor met with the parish pastoral and finance councils, the catechists, and members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Legion of Mary. Fr. Direen also scheduled a special evening meeting with the bishop for representatives of those who have concerns about the parish.

Throughout the weekend concerns stated were with: (1) Fr. Direen's decision to ask pastor emeritus Fr. George Crespin to move from the parish; (2) decisions made over time related to parish administration; (3) the direction and future of the parish; (4) controversy around meeting with protestors on Sunday.

Subsequent media coverage of the weekend and other commentary require the Diocese to state certain facts clearly, related to the above matters:

1. Fr. Direen became pastor in July 2009 and Fr. Crespin, pastor emeritus, continued living in the rectory. From the beginning, Fr. Direen experienced lack of cooperation from Fr. Crespin which caused many pastoral difficulties. Some of these difficulties include: failure to observe the necessary steps to insure the valid and licit celebration of the sacraments (especially marriage); refusal to discontinue certain irregularities in the celebration of the sacraments so as to conform to the liturgical standards set by the Church, such as not allowing penitents the option of confessing anonymously in the sacrament of Reconciliation and communicating the Eucharist to extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in the manner of concelebrating priests; and refusal to follow parish procedures in the scheduling of sacraments and other special ceremonies (baptisms, weddings, quiceañera celebrations, etc.) and in the preparation of people for these sacraments.

After increasingly poor pastoral coordination, Fr. Direen spoke with Fr. Crespin in early June and told him that the living arrangement was not working out, and it would be best if he left the rectory by the end of summer, keeping the sacramental and ceremonial commitments he had made up to that point. At the Masses he celebrated shortly thereafter, Fr. Crespin criticized the pastoral leadership of Fr. Direen, telling the parishioners they deserved a better pastor than the one they currently have and suggesting that they may want to start looking for another parish. As a result, Fr. Direen sent Fr. Crespin a letter asking him to leave the rectory by June 30.

2. There was no parish pastoral council at St. Joseph the Worker parish until the pastor who immediately succeeded Fr. Crespin appointed one himself. The next pastor kept this council in place, and this is the council Fr. Direen inherited when he became pastor. Over time, some members left the council and were replaced by invitation of the council. This year other members were terming out and, by mutual agreement, the council termed out together in March.

Fr. Direen then appointed an interim parish council with a charge to decide the method and timing of determining new members of council for the future. The interim group met for the first time on May 9, and Bishop Cordileone met with them during his visitation.

There was no finance council when Fr. Direen arrived. He decided to wait for the scheduled parish financial audit before establishing this council. He recently appointed three members who met for the first time on May 16, and there are plans to expand the membership of this council. Bishop Cordileone met with this group during his visitation as well.

3. There are many challenges for the parish at this time, including a large debt incurred prior to Fr. Direen's arrival, largely due to retrofitting expenses. However, Fr. Direen is strongly committed to improving the financial position of the parish. There have been recent staff reductions caused by the need to cut expenses. The parish now relies on dedicated volunteers for most administrative and ministry functions. Also, the income of the parish from the Sunday collections has not changed significantly over the past several years.

There has been no discussion or suggestion at any time, at any level, about closing the parish. Parish finances are detailed on the parish web site. It is also not true, as has been asserted, that Fr. Direen is responsible for the closing of two parishes in previous assignments. Prior to his assignment to St. Andrew-St. Joseph parish, the Diocese had already begun a process to consider merging that parish with the Cathedral parish; Fr. Direen was sent to St. Andrew-St. Joseph with the understanding that this was a likely possibility.

Also contrary to recent commentary, no ministries or committees at St. Joseph the Worker have been disbanded, dismissed or displaced. A conference room in the public area of the rectory was converted into a gift shop, in the hope of raising revenue for the parish. To accommodate, Fr. Direen moved out of the pastor's suite into a smaller resident's room, and the suite was converted into a conference room for larger groups to meet. Because this is in the private area of the rectory, such groups are always accompanied by a resident of the rectory. There remains a smaller meeting room in the public area of the rectory. Fr. Direen is committed to building and strengthening all parish ministries.

4. The chronology of events surrounding the protest which took place on Sunday June 19 is as follows:
 - ***Certain community activists in Berkeley called for a protest in front of the church on Sunday, June 19. An estimated 150 people turned out to protest, including parishioners and non-parishioners, Catholics and non-Catholics. The protestors were peaceful and unobtrusive at first. [See note below.]*
 - Bishop Cordileone presided at the Spanish language Mass at 11:00am. Afterwards, while greeting attendees after Mass and before preparing for the Ge'ez Rite liturgy with the Eritrean community, the bishop was confronted inside the church by a group of protestors.
 - This group insisted he stop what he was doing and come outside to speak to the crowd. Sensing a growing frenzy among the protestors, the bishop told them this was not the time or the place to do so. He told them he had met the night before with their representatives, and would be willing to do so again with others under the proper conditions.

- Protestors continued to crowd into the church, effectively obstructing the entrance and speaking very loudly. The bishop asked them to leave the church so the Eritrean liturgy could begin, but they refused to do so.
- When the bishop went up to the sanctuary to await the start of the liturgy, a significant number of the protestors, including some non-Catholics, entered the church carrying their placards with the stated intention of attending the liturgy themselves.
- Fearing a disruption but not wanting to presume bad faith, the bishop suggested that the police be called and be informed that there may be a disruption of a worship service in the church. The pastor then called the police, who decided to send two officers to the site. Upon arrival the officers asked the pastor if he wanted them to arrest anyone; he told them no, and instead asked them to simply inform the people that he had the right to ask them to leave the church if he so chose because they were disrupting the start of the liturgy.
- At the same time, the Eritrean community, seeing what was going on, did not want to enter the church. Instead, they assembled in the chapel off of the vestibule and their celebrant, Fr. Ghebriel, decided to celebrate the liturgy there.
- In order to join the Eritreans, and to avoid possible obstruction by the protestors, the bishop had to leave the church from the sacristy and proceed to the back of the church from outside.
- Given the tension of the situation and the uncertainty of maintaining peaceful order during or after the liturgy, the pastor consulted with the two police officers present, and it was decided that the safest action was to clear the church completely. The people inside then exited the church except for one, who insisted on attending the liturgy (as no arrests were made, the individual did remain and joined the congregation without disruption). After the people left the church, the Eritreans outside joined the others in the chapel for the liturgy already in progress.
- The liturgy with the Eritrean community then continued peacefully, although the space in the chapel was not large enough to accommodate everyone in attendance.

***An earlier posted statement attributed the organization of the June 19 protest to BOCA leaders. The source for this attribution was The Berkeley Daily Planet at this [link](#).*

On June 28, in a letter to Bishop Cordileone, BOCA executive director Rev. Michael McBride said that a call to protest at the Parish on June 19 was wrongly attributed to him in the Daily Planet and that this was because of a mis-communication from his office. He further clarified that BOCA declined multiple requests to join the community protest. In this light, the Diocese has corrected its statement.

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