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Retiring Veneta pastor tied to Blessed Fr. Solanus Casey

Friday, June 23, 2017 4:13 AM

VENETA — Nearly 40 years after his priestly ordination, Father Michael Morrissey will be retiring from archdiocesan work at the end of June. He served as pastor at St. Catherine of Siena Parish here for the past decade.

Father Morrissey, once a Capuchin himself, has a close connection to the newly Blessed Capuchin Father Solanus Casey. Father Morrissey attended two high school seminaries operated by American Capuchins in Detroit and New York. He still recalls hearing stories about Father Casey from his high school German teacher, who used to live with the famous Detroit priest.

Father Morrissey was ordained a deacon in 1977 and spent the next 15 months working full time at Our Lady Queen of Angels in Spanish Harlem in New York City. There he lived and worked in the same friary where Father Casey had once lived years earlier. During Father Morrissey's time as a deacon in Detroit, he visited Father Casey's grave. Once, an old friar shared how, when he was very young, Father Casey had healed him with just a pat on the cheek and an assurance that everything would be fine — on the day his dentist had diagnosed leukemia.

Father Morrissey was ordained in 1978 at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York by another holy American man whose cause is under investigation — Cardinal Terence Cooke. He went on to receive a master's in divinity from the Maryknoll School of Theology in Maryknoll, New York. He served at Our Lady Queen of Angels from 1977 until his assignment as a missionary to Guam in the summer of 1980, a few months before he became a pastor for the first time in January 1981.

After his Capuchin assignment as a pastor to two parishes in Guam, he transferred from the New York province of the Capuchin Franciscans to the Archdiocese of Portland. Here his assignments included a short time at St. Joseph Parish in Salem and St. John the Baptist Parish in Milwaukie, before starting his 16-year ministry at St. Anne Parish in Gresham. Prior to 1989, the only Spanish-language Mass in Portland was at St. Patrick Parish in the Northwest industrial district. Fluent in Spanish and known for his teaching skills, Father Morrissey led St. Anne as the English-Hispanic community became one of the largest in the archdiocese. In a sort of reversal of his dream to be a missionary to Latin America, the Oregon Hispanic community came to him.

Father Morrissey was incardinated into the archdiocese in 1992.

After a year of sick leave, Father Morrissey and his mother, Willie, arrived in Veneta in 2007. Prior to this, the parish spent 11 years without a resident priest, being served by two different lay pastoral administrators and assisting priests.

During Father Morrissey's time in Veneta, in response to the requests from parishioners, the parish began offering a traditional Latin Mass every Sunday. Personally investing time brushing up on his Latin and the extraordinary form of liturgy, Father Morrissey likened the move to offering Mass in Spanish for Catholics who prefer it. Parishioners also saw this as an outreach to those seeking the traditional rites of the church at the local Society of St. Pius X chapel in Veneta.

Father Morrissey says he always has treasured his devotion to Father Solanus, seeing him as an ordinary man of great holiness.

"Father Mike [Morrissey] has mirrored that holiness at St. Catherine in his pastoral care, Christ-centered liturgies and superb teachings of sacred Scripture," says St. Catherine parishioner Sue Hallett. "Also under his guidance, our parish undertook a major renovation of the church building."



Father Mike Morrissey



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"We are going to truly miss his great homilies, but wish him only the very best for a restful and well-deserved retirement," she adds.

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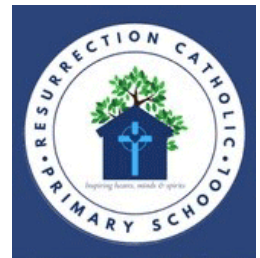
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