

Bishop's blessing fizzles protest of priest transfer

By JAMES McQUEENY

An angry delegation of parishioners from St. Jude's Church, Hopatcong, protesting the pending transfer of their pastor by picketing the Paterson residence of Bishop Lawrence B. Casey, were prepared for any developments yesterday.

Or so they thought.

The group of about 50 had streamed from their chartered bus, parked across the street from the bishop's Derrom Avenue home, to protest the removal of Rev. Joseph W. Molloy as their pastor, and had been walking with placards for about 10 minutes when a black limousine pulled alongside them.

Out stepped Bishop Casey whose appearance surprised and quieted the throng. Many had believed the bishop would not be home until the evening. They had been planning to meet with a representative.

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The bishop walked up to the marchers who were noticeably subdued in contrast to their protest fervor minutes before, and ushered them to his residence walkway where he spoke briefly on their intent, then bid them to close ranks for his blessing and handshake.

Down went signs, off went hats, down went heads — and there went the demonstration to the dismay of protest leaders.

Bishop Casey remained with the protestors about 10 minutes shaking hands and discussing the diocesan transfer edict of Father Molloy, 45, who is reportedly accused of failing to pay diocesan parish assessments, improper

spending of parish building funds and the introduction of unauthorized liturgical procedures.

He said an appeal requested by Father Molloy was being conducted this week and the priest would be invited to appear at the hearing. The final decision of the appeal will be rendered later this week, the bishop promised.

The diocesan removal order was effective Monday but has been stayed until Father Molloy's appeal is decided.

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Before the bishop left the demonstrators — who in turn boarded their bus and went home — a few people shouted their support of Father Molloy and their ire at Bishop Casey.

After the blessing — which one woman refused by stepping away from the crowd — a woman told the bishop: "There's time to pray and a time to fight; and St. Jude's has come to fight."

Many of the parishioners told the bishop that they would not support the parish if Father Molloy is transferred. The bishop was given a list of 1,000 names on a petition threatening to withdraw financial support for the parish if the priest is relocated.

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Mrs. Francis B. Connor, president of St. Jude's Ladies Guild, called the sidewalk protest — while it lasted — "a last resort."

"No one knows how much this parish has suffered over this during the past several years," said Mrs. Connor, who said Father Molloy has been under "constant harass-



Photo by Richard Tashjian

Bishop Lawrence B. Casey of Paterson addresses picketers from St. Jude's parish, Hopatcong, who oppose the proposed transfer of their pastor, Rev. Joseph W. Molloy

ment" by diocesan officials during his six-year tenure as pastor at the church.

In November of last year, according to parish protest leaders, Father Molloy was summoned to the bishop's Paterson office and given an invitation to resign which he declined.

Mrs. Connor contends the

present appeal is fruitless because the transfer order will be upheld. She said a priest at Holy Family Church, Florham Park, said Sunday that he stood to be the next pastor at St. Jude's.

"After that, how can they say he (Father Molloy) will be given a fair trial, I'd like to know," she said.

John Keogh of Hopatcong, a picket organizer, said the appeal decision announcement, promised by the end of the week, will be awaited by members of the 850-family parish.

"If it doesn't come out by Saturday, we'll have protestors 500-strong here — and we can get them," he said.