

'New direction' at St. Bridget's

Pastor explains why 3 were fired

By RICHARD WHITMIRE
Times-Union

The staff firings that led to a protest Sunday that disrupted mass at St. Bridget's Catholic Church happened because the church needed to go in a new direction, said the new pastor, the Rev. Dozia Wilson.

On Feb. 25 Wilson fired three workers at the church, Sister Grace Miller, Eli Danzy and Marvin Rogers. The resulting protests Sunday were severe enough to prompt Wilson to alert the police.

Sister Grace has been at St. Bridget's, 175 St. Bridget's Drive, for two and a half years and is well-known for her social issues activism. Danzy was an assistant to Wilson, and Rogers played the piano for church services. None of the three could be reached for comment this morning.

St. Bridget's is a black parish, and Wilson is a black priest who recently arrived at the parish. He's on loan from the Albany Diocese at the request of Bishop Matthew H. Clark. Dozia's last assignment was in the Roxbury section of Boston.

In recent years St. Bridget's has been struggling to stay alive. It has a congregation of about 100 and is almost totally supported by the diocese.

Wilson said before he arrived, the emphasis of St. Bridget's was almost totally on community outreach.

"I felt when this was going on three years ago and the parish was new, this was fine. We needed it to get people into the church. Fine. But now we need programs for the people here, religious education, seminars, organizations, well-planned liturgies," Wilson said.

"I saw the parish having to move kind of contrary to the direction they were willing to move in."

Wilson said he wants the outreach to continue — work such as landlord-tenant prob-



Dozia-Wilson Sister Grace Miller

lems and jail ministry — but he wants the work done more by parish volunteers.

"I think many people have not seen this as a traditional parish. They've wanted some place to come and worship, but in the past it's been so issue oriented. This doesn't mean we won't be involved in issues, but our primary role is as a worshipping community."

The priest said he also anticipates doing some fundraising for the church, and he wants the parishioners to help with the effort.

Wilson said he thinks most of the congregation will stick with him, but said he might lose about 10 of the 100 parishioners.

Asked if he anticipated this kind of backlash, Wilson said, "Yes. But it was worth it. Anything they don't like they're going to have some kind of reaction to. I think you have to understand that and decide whether you feel the decision you're making is crucial and important enough that you're willing to go through all the pain."

The three who were fired will be replaced, Wilson said.

Wilson said Clark was aware of the difficulties he was having at the church. Since Sunday's protest, Clark has met with a group of protestors and another group of parishioners.