

Priest at St. John the Evangelist moved; parishioners rally in protest

By LAURA NEWBERRY

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Parishioners of an Agawam Catholic church are dispirited after a young priest, who has instituted both celebrated and controversial changes during his tenure, announced he's been reassigned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield.

The Rev. Tomasz Parzynski told the 2,000-plus family congregation last month that he will be moving to another church in February at the request of Springfield Bishop Mitch-

ell T. Rozanski.

Since then, more than 200 letters have been sent to the bishop in support of Parzynski, according to parishioners, who have expressed frustration over the bishop's perceived unwillingness to engage them in conversation about Parzynski's reassignment.

The Rev. Michael Wood, spokesman for the diocese's Office of Vocations, said that while the bishop has received the letters, it is against custom to discuss such matters with parishioners.

"He's taking into consideration the whole diocese," Wood said of the bishop's decision. "It's not the normal practice that any time a priest is moved that the bishop meets with a parish and hear their input."

Wood declined to give a specific reason for the reassignment nor did he specify which church Parzynski will be moved to.

Parzynski was assigned to the parish as an administrator in 2013, but has largely acted as the church's pastor; the church's bulletin and

website name him as such. Wood explained that administrators enjoy much less stability than pastors, who usually must be accused of something serious to be moved.

"I don't think it was fair to the people that he presented himself as pastor when in reality he is an administrator," Wood said.

Parzynski, a 34-year-old native of Poland, started at the church in June 2013 after acting as a parochial vicar at St. Mark's Catholic Church in Pittsfield. The priest who held

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Parzynski's position at St. John before him was moved after only two months at the church, according to parishioners.

The administrator said that while he was initially upset by the news, he has come to accept the bishop's decision and has asked parishioners to stop petitioning his removal.

"I've seen a lot of happy things here, have had a lot of happy experiences," Parzynski said. "What does a priest need more?"

During his time at the church, Parzynski has launched a religious education program for church youths, who parishioners say are more active in the church than they have been in many years.

He also established a choir and added four weekly traditional Latin Masses.

Parzynski said under his leadership, baptisms and weddings have gone up, as well as general attendance. Many young families have joined the church in the past year, he added.

Kristin Hodges, an Agawam resident who's been a

20 years, said Parzynski is supported by the majority of the parish. But some older members were upset over changes made by the priest, she said, such as moving religious education classes to Sunday nights.

"I didn't like it at first, but it got my 16-year-old son and his friends excited about going to church," Hodges said. "This is an absolute loss."

Pauline Sawyer, Agawam resident and member of the church for 44 years, said many small groups have begun to gather after services to discuss Parzynski's announcement, which has distracted members from regular church activities.

"Many believe that the bishop is surrounded by advisers that are not doing things in the best interest of the diocese or our parish," Sawyer said.

The St. John parish council held a meeting earlier this week, during which parishioners were given two minutes each to voice their opinions on Parzynski's removal.

The meeting lasted three hours, and more than 100 parishioners attended.

Sawyer said she and several other parishioners plan to send letters to the Vatican in

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