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Oakland bishop, parishioners to meet on leadership issues

Monica Clark | Jul. 11, 2011

BERKELEY, Calif. -- After a month of Sunday demonstrations in front of their church, members of Save St. Joseph the Worker Church have been invited to meet with Oakland Bishop Salvatore Cordileone on July 25 to discuss their concerns about leadership at the parish.

Since early June, in addition to the demonstrations, more than 250 parishioners have sent letters about a growing crisis in the parish and at least two dozen parishioners joined in a one-hour phone blitz to the bishop's office on July 7. In an email the following day, leaders of the group were told that Cordileone would meet with them, a request they have been making for more than a year.

At issue are grievances about the leadership of Fr. John Direen, who took over as pastor two years ago. These include disbanding the pastoral council, limiting participation of El Consejo Latino (the Spanish-speaking advisory council), turning a conference room adjacent to parish offices into a religious book store without parish consultation, and dismissing from the rectory of a long-serving priest who was undergoing cancer treatment.

When Direen told a retired former pastor, Fr. George Crespin, that he, too, must leave the parish, parishioners mobilized, organizing a letter-writing campaign and a major demonstration during Cordileone's visit to the parish June 19 to administer Confirmation and celebrate weekend Masses.

The situation escalated further in late June when the Oakland diocese posted a statement on its Web site claiming that Crespin, had caused "many pastoral difficulties."

For more details, see these earlier stories:

Argument over Berkeley parish escalates [1]

Parishioners protest bishop over pastor's changes [2]

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