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Parish petition drive draws support for women religious

by Thomas C. Fox



Father Brian T. Joyce

Half the adults in an Oakland parish signed a petition after Masses Oct. 25 in support of U.S. women religious who are facing two Vatican investigations.

"They were very supportive. The response was very positive," said Fr. Brian T. Joyce, pastor of Christ the King Parish in Pleasant Hill, Calif. "We announced the petition drive, had tables outside after the masses, and invited people to sign."

Joyce said the petition, which will be sent to Vatican officials, drew some 1,500 signatures, or roughly half the 3,000 adults in the parish.

After learning about the investigations, which Joyce described in a parish bulletin, Christ the King parishioners reacted in two ways, he said. They were supportive, and they were puzzled as to why the Vatican would want to investigate the U.S. women religious.

Joyce attempted to answer the latter question with essays he wrote in the parish bulletins dated Oct. 18 and 25.

After presenting an account of the history of the two investigations, Joyce told his parishioners he would like to see "more transparency and less secrecy" by the Vatican. "After all, I can't put a shred of evaluation in an employee's file without the employee having full access to it," he wrote.

He went on to write that he hoped the investigations would "become the cause for the Vatican and ourselves to celebrate and give public thanks for the holy and heroic ministry of our sisters."

The petition reads:

"We, parishioners of Christ the King Parish in Pleasant Hill, California, are signing this petition in support and appreciation of U.S. Catholic women religious, not only those in our diocese, but all of our sisters throughout the United States. We sign in recognition of the decades of service that these women have devoted to the education of countless generations of children in Catholic schools and in special educational ministries, to caring for the poor, the marginalized, the sick, the dying, the grieving, the voiceless and the most vulnerable of our citizens. We sign in gratitude for their decades of untiring work to bring about peace and justice, both locally and globally. We sign in recognition of their selfless dedication of time, talent and treasure to a lifetime of true discipleship living the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the inestimable ways that U.S. Catholic women religious have contributed to the sustenance, strength and vitality of the U.S. Catholic church. It is our hope that the two investigations of our sisters by the Vatican will ultimately conclude with a celebration of these remarkable, heroic women, and official recognition of the abundance of gifts and graces they contribute to our lives as well as to the vitality of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world."

Said Joyce: "I am very pleased with the way our parishioners reacted, but I am also concerned about the future of the sisters. I hope it turns out to be a positive result, and that it's the innocent evaluation that it's claimed to be."

Tom Fox is NCR editor and can be reached at tfox@ncronline.org

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