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## **California pastor bans protesters from parish ministries**

by Monica Clark

Parishioners opposed to administrative actions of their pastor in Berkeley, Calif., have escalated their protests after being banned by the pastor from all ministries as well as membership on parish committees.

In a bulletin announcement Oct. 30, Fr. John Direen, pastor of St. Joseph the Worker Parish, said the protesters will not be allowed to serve as ushers, lectors or Eucharistic ministers nor serve on any parish committees "until further notice."

The announcement shocked Salvemos/Save St. Joseph the Worker, a group that has held weekly vigils outside the church for the past six months to show their dismay for a range of decisions they say are destroying the parish.

Among the decisions are the eviction of a retired pastor from the rectory and parish ministry, dismissal of the pastoral council and establishment of a replacement council without parish input, suspension of the Consejo Latino, unwillingness to let the parish's long-standing social justice committee meet on parish grounds and failure to respond to parishioners' request for a financial audit.

Additionally, they say Direen has not involved parishioners in defining a vision for the parish that takes into account its rich and diverse history.

The Sunday after the announcement, a dozen members of the group attended Mass at Oakland's Cathedral of Christ the Light, wearing their signature white T-shirts imprinted with an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. These T-shirts, which some have worn while performing liturgical ministries, are "especially distracting and disrespectful to our worship," Direen had said in his Oct. 30 announcement.

The group has also written to Oakland Bishop Salvatore Cordileone expressing their dismay about Direen's announcement and saying the priest "has been unwilling to engage seriously in a reconciliation

process of the sort you counseled us to undertake with him" during a meeting in July.

When the group met with Direen on Sept. 18, he did not raise any objection to their participation in ministries, said Raul Ramirez, the group's spokesman and a 50-year parishioner. Their requests for a follow-up meeting have not been answered. (Direen would not allow *NCR* to be present at the Sept. 18 meeting.)

After the ministry ban was announced, the coordinator of lectors resigned in protest, as did a sister who has served as lector and in other parish roles for many years.

Phyllis Jagusiak, who joined the parish through the RCIA program a decade ago and has been active as both a lector and Eucharistic minister, resigned the following week after reciting a prayer she composed for the Prayers of the Faithful.

"Lord, we are all hurting. You are in our midst, not only in the Mass, but at the protest table. ... Help us to put the parish back together," Jagusiak read. After Mass, she joined the protesters for the first time and donned one of their white T-shirts.

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One of the demonstrators continued his ushering duties during Mass on Nov. 6, saying later that he would continue to do so until the pastor directly forbade him from serving.

The demonstrators, many with more than two decades of parish membership, say their actions are rooted in their deep commitment to their parish and their unwillingness to be silenced.

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