

DIocese OF FALL RIVER

# The Anchor

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2009

## An eye-opening experience in Guaimaca, Honduras

By DAVE JOLIVET, EDITOR

GUAIMACA, Honduras — He had never been to the diocesan Mission, but he had heard much about it. It was time for his first visit, and Father Karl C. Bissinger, secretary to Bishop George W. Coleman, and diocesan director of Vocations, candidly admitted to *The Anchor*, “I was a bit apprehensive about going.”

Not as apprehensive as were Father Bissinger’s parents. “My parents were nervous about my going and a few days before hand they said good-bye to me,” he said.

“Then the next night my mom called to say good-bye, and then the next night,” he laughed.

Father Bissinger accompanied Bishop Coleman on his recent visit to the Mission. Since *The Anchor* featured the bishop’s insights from past years, we figured it would be interesting to see the Mission through the fresh eyes of his secretary.

“I had my ideas about what I would find there,” he said. “I thought that once we got off the plane and out of the airport, we’d

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**FAR-AWAY RENDEZVOUS** — Bishop George W. Coleman, left, chats with a delegation from St. John the Baptist Parish in Westport, at the Fall River diocesan Mission in Guaimaca, Honduras. The Westport folks visited the bishop and Father Craig A. Pregana while they were in Honduras helping out their “adopted” parish in Olancho.

Westport faithful visit ‘adopted’ mission in Honduras — page 11

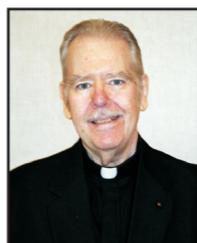
## Diocese’s judicial vicar addresses Vatican on clergy sexual abuse

By DEACON JAMES N. DUNBAR

ROME — As a pontifical council on Church law draws up new procedural provisions for cases of sexual abuse by clergy, Father Paul F. Robinson, O. Carm., judicial vicar for the tribunal of the Fall River Diocese, was among six American canonists invited to share their insights at a March 5-6 symposium here.

“I felt quite honored to be asked

by the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts to prepare a paper and offer input,” said Father Robinson, who was ordained a Carmelite priest in 1967, and who holds a doctorate in canon law from the University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome.



FATHER PAUL ROBINSON, O. CARM

Because there has been a sharp increase in the number of penal cases brought before ecclesiasti-  
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**DEDICATION BLESSING** — Bishop George W. Coleman anoints the altar at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Wellfleet with sacred chrism during the Rite of Dedication Sunday. The altar was originally in the former Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Wellfleet Center and was restored and moved to the new location. (Photo by Kenneth J. Souza)

## Bishop Coleman dedicates new Our Lady of Lourdes Church

By KENNETH J. SOUZA  
ANCHOR STAFF

WELLFLEET — Despite the expanded capacity of the new 500-seat Our Lady of Lourdes Church, it was standing room only last Sunday as Bishop George W. Coleman presided at the solemn Rite of Dedication for the Fall River Diocese’s newest church.

The church and attached parish center, located on a 10-acre site at 335 Main Street (Route 6), is the culmination of a major fund-raising campaign on the part of parishioners, who raised more than \$2 million to construct the

new church on property previously purchased by the diocese in 1987.

“Today is a time for rejoicing, as we dedicate this new church to the glory of God under the patronage of Our Lady of Lourdes,” Bishop Coleman said during his homily. “Some years ago Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Wellfleet Center was closed and work began to construct the beautiful church we’re dedicating today. I am most grateful to Father John F. Andrews for his pastoral ministry to the members of the parish. On this occasion I thank him

for carrying out those additional responsibilities ... that led to the realization of this project.”

Father Andrews, who has overseen the fund-raising campaign and all aspects of construction since he became pastor 12 years ago, was elated to at last see this project come to fruition — especially given some of the obstacles he had to overcome along the way.

“This new church is the second church in our diocese planned and constructed under the leadership of Father Andrews — the first be-

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## Pauline Year director glances back, looks ahead to final leg

By DEACON JAMES N. DUNBAR

HYANNIS — When Father Andrew Johnson, OCSO, says “It’s been a pretty good year” as March nears its end might seem a little too anticipatory for most.

But as the director of the Pauline Year observance in the Fall River Diocese that began June 28 in 2008 and ends this June 29, he has been at the helm of many outstanding events that aim at inspiring Catholics to learn about St. Paul and hopefully imitate him in making their own personal conversion.

“And there’s more exciting events to come,” reports Father Johnson, who spoke to *The Anchor* from the Cape where he is parochial vicar at St. Xavier

Parish in Hyannis.

After Pope Benedict XVI launched the Year of St. Paul, Father Johnson has been busy writing a column about St. Paul, tracing his lineage to Tarsus about the year 8 A.D., his persecution as an assertive Pharisee who persecuted the early Christians and the theology of his conversion on the way to Damascus.

He also made it clear that it was the risen Christ who appeared to Paul and that the resurrection is the confirming proof of the redemption Christ won for us on the cross.

“I write every other week, taking from the Holy Father’s ongoing catechesis on Paul and boiling it

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## Diocese's judicial vicar addresses Vatican on clergy sexual abuse

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cal tribunals in the United States in the past decade, has given its canonists an unparalleled experience in applying certain provisions of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, he said.

Father Robinson recalled that in October 2008, Archbishop Francesco Cocolalmerio, who has led the PCLT since 2007, visited the U.S. and expressed his desire to hear the experience of American canonists in applying the procedural and penal law of the Code to cases involving the sexual misconduct of priests/deacons under the 2002 Dallas Charter and Norms.

"The invitation that came last December for six of us to appear at the symposium followed on that," said Father Robinson, an Easthampton native who came to the Fall River Diocese in December 1992 and served in the Tribunal, where he has been judicial vicar since July 1, 2002.

"What is hoped for is that the PCLT will, in the next few years, produce an instruction for the penal law of the Code similar to the 2005 Instruction — "*Dignitas Connubii*" — which the Council produced for the canons concerning marriage processes," he reported.

"It was a candid, no-holds-barred exchange among the presenters and the member of the various Roman dicasteries — about 50 in number — who attended," the Carmelite described the meeting.

"Each of us spoke for about an hour. It was followed by another hour of questions and answers, during the two-day period with morning and afternoon sessions."

After the symposium the speakers appeared before the

Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, the dicastery responsible for the clerical sexual misconduct trials, for an off-the-record meeting during the late afternoon and evening hours.

Although that meeting gave everyone a greater sense of each other's concerns and problems, "and this is not meant as a criticism, but it offered few, if any, practical solutions to concrete issues," he stated.

"But I believe that Rome listened, heard what we had to say, took notes, and will incorporate our remarks, where appropriate, into forthcoming legislation."

What was most surprising, he said, "was to see the depth and breadth of the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the problem and of its consequences in the American Church," said Father Robinson.

"Rome seems ready to hear how the universal legislation plays out in local churches and to allow for local variations on a given theme. At the same time, I detected a great concern for what Rome perceives as a widening rift between American priests and deacons and their bishops due to the perception that the bishops have abandoned their priests and have sacrificed them to the media gods and to popular hysteria. Happily, this generally has not been the experience in religious institutes."

The other distinguished canonists who spoke included Patricia M. Dugan of Philadelphia, Passionist Father John J. Foley of New York, Mercy Sister Victoria Vondenberger of Cincinnati, Father David L. Deibel of Napa, Calif., and Father Patrick R. Lagges of Chicago.

Their topics addressed confidentiality and the media, preliminary investigations, balancing

rights, pastoral principles, and resolution of cases.

"My paper presented the experience of the collection and evaluation of proofs," he said.

The principal problem in penal trials is we are dealing with two divergent legal systems: an inquisitorial European one and an adversarial Anglo-American one, he explained.

In the Anglo-American system, law enforcement personnel gather evidence. In the European system, the judge(s) gather evidence. In the Anglo-American system there are separate processes in court trials — criminal and civil. The European system combines them.

"While civil law focuses on the apprehension and punishment of perpetrators of crimes, canon law focuses on the reform of the offender and the restoration of order in the community," Father Robinson pointed out.

The thorniest issue, he said, is conflicting rights in sexual abuse cases, because once the canonical action begins, the accuser becomes a witness for the diocese or province against the accused.

"The process for determining guilt and punishment must be beyond reproach," the vicar asserted. "From the point of view of the accused cleric, he is on trial for his life and finding him guilty of a crime for which he stands accused is equivalent to a death sentence in a criminal trial. Resurrecting a cleric's good name/ministry is largely an elusive, philosophical goal, whose practical achievement largely still escapes us in the concrete."

With the current Dallas Norms in place, "Each of us is only the point of a finger away from personal and ministerial disaster," he commented.

Receiving considerable discus-

sion at the symposium were the Norms' "one-size fits all" crime and punishment and the "one-strike-and-you're-out" response to sexual misconduct allegations.

"Rome and the American canonists voiced the conviction that all crimes are not equally nefarious and that there needs to be some gradation in the seriousness of the crimes and the fittingness of the penalties," he reported.

All are concerned about the impact on the traditional Catholic teaching of repentance and conversion made by the Dallas Norms. "Not surprisingly, no one had a solution," Father Robinson said candidly.

"But all did recognize the potential for conflict: the possibility of true *conversio morum* [total change of behavior]; the probability of recidivism or falling back into sin; the need to protect the patrimony and ministry of the diocese or province; and the need to assist victims with their own personal healing."

While all are clearly seeking to resolve those issues, no one yet found a complete satisfactory way to do so, he added.

Another area of concern for Rome and American canonists was the lack of distinction in the Dallas Norms between historical and current accusations. The lack of clarity comes when there is a removal of a cleric accused of a crime many years ago and not since, as opposed to a cleric who is currently, actively abusing minors.

"They do not pose the same risk to society and the Church and should not be treated in the same way," said Father Robinson.

For the currently abusing cleric, there is an urgency to remove him from ministry, which does not exist in the case of one who had not been accused of any sexual misconduct for many years, he opined.

In his paper, Father Robinson addressed circumstantial evidence such as the polygraph, voice stress analysis and recovered memories.

"None of these is universally accepted and trusted by law enforcement communities. My

own belief is that it would be a disservice to the jurisprudence of the Church to accept any of them lock, stock and barrel at this time."

"Perhaps," he said, "it is time to conclude they don't work, may never work, and seek more reliable ways of separating truth from prevarication such as the low tech, non-scientific solution of improving our own interviewing and assessment skills."

As a backdrop for the whole discussion are additional realities, Father Robinson pointed out.

"One is that there seems to be powerful, deep pocketed attackers who are determined to see the destruction of the Church. Another is that there is a whole class of individuals who have become professional finger pointers and who live off the results of their accusations," he noted.

"We need to find an effective way to defend ourselves against these realities while protecting the Church, wrongly accused clerics, and true victims of sexual abuse," he asserted.

While there are few, if any current practical results of the symposium, "I believe everyone left Rome feeling we had made a successful presentation of the issues and difficulties we have encountered in dealing with the clerical sexual misconduct penal trials," Father Robinson said.

"I believe everyone on both sides of the table was pleased and satisfied with the symposium."

Msgr. Thomas J. Harrington, who although retired, is a defender of the bond in the diocesan Tribunal, said Father Robinson's selection to address the PCLT "is a clear indication of recognition for his extraordinary competence and knowledge of canon law, as well as his practical experience as a canonist in inter-diocesan matters."

He added, "The work that emanates from his office under his direction is exemplary and could easily be used as a textbook for canon law students. His peers in the presbyterate are encouraged at the recognition which also reflects well for the entire Fall River Diocese."

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