

Bishop leaves parish, urges ongoing peace, justice work

DETROIT – Retired Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton said he hoped his parishioners would continue to work for justice and peace, as he celebrated his final Mass as administrator of St. Leo Parish in Detroit Jan. 21.

“We, as a parish community, must carry on the work of Jesus, and that’s what I pray you will do as I leave you,” he said in his homily.

After 23 years of service at the parish, Bishop Gumbleton was leaving St. Leo Parish just days short of his 77th birthday Jan. 26. He was pastor until Jan. 25, 2006, and has been parish administrator since then.

In a letter distributed to all parishioners as they entered the church for the Mass, Cardinal Adam J. Maida of Detroit wrote: “For the last 23 years, Bishop Gumbleton has faithfully served your community and shared your joys and sorrows, challenges, hopes and dreams through Sunday Eucharist, works of Christian service and reflecting on the Gospel of life in today’s society.”

Noting that the bishop would soon be turning 77, Cardinal Maida continued that “it is now appropriate for him to retire from pastoral leadership of a parish.”

As with all bishops, Bishop Gumbleton was required to submit his resignation to the Vatican at age 75, the cardinal explained. Pope Benedict XVI accepted the resignation Feb. 2, 2006.

“Bishops submit their letter of resignation directly to the Holy Father, and he decides when he will choose to accept that resignation,” he wrote. “In keeping with that resignation,” once it has been accepted, “he is to give up any pastoral offices such as pastor of a parish,” the cardinal wrote.

But Cardinal Maida added that, like other retired auxiliary bishops, “Bishop Gumbleton will still function as a priest and bishop, celebrating the sacraments, including confirmation, throughout the parishes of the archdiocese as need arises

and his health and schedule permit.”

Under Bishop Gumbleton’s pastorate, St. Leo started a five-day-a-week soup kitchen that serves the poor in the neighborhood with food, clothing and medical care.

His advocacy of peace and justice issues has gained him an international reputation, besides getting him arrested on a number of occasions.

“He’s just a wonderful man. He goes out of his way to help everybody. He’s so friendly. He’s going to be missed,” longtime parishioner Eddie Sears told The Michigan Catholic, Detroit’s archdiocesan newspaper.

Parishioner Maria Davis said Bishop Gumbleton’s “love for the teachings of Jesus” has always been apparent in his leadership of the parish.

And Sigrid Dale, who with her husband, Ron, has belonged to St. Leo for 14 years, said, “To all of us, he is the clearest example of what Jesus himself was.”

Ordained to the priesthood in 1956, Bishop Gumbleton served the Detroit Archdiocese as vicar general under Cardinal John Dearden. In 1968, he was made an auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese.

Bishop Gumbleton has served as president of both Pax Christi USA and Bread for the World.