

# Pastor of Our Lady of the Fields resigns

Father Eugene Nickol resigned as pastor of Our Lady of the Fields in Millersville Oct. 25 following a recent archdiocesan audit of the parish's financial and child and youth protection records. The audit showed a lack of "appropriate controls to ensure compliance with archdiocesan child protection and financial policies," according to an Oct. 30 archdiocesan statement.

In his Oct. 25 resignation letter to Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, Father Nickol said he had eight "wonderful years" at the parish and will "greatly miss the wonderful people," but added that he has "not given them the leadership that they need."

"The recent archdiocesan audit and my meeting with Vicar Bishop Mitch Rozanski opened my eyes to some dangerous situations that I have been blind to," he said, "and not giving the proper pastoral care to, including financial and hiring lapses from archdiocesan guidelines, not fulfilling all STAND (child protection training) requirements and not giving the staff my full time and attention to be the leader they needed."

The audit occurred after an anonymous letter was sent to the archbishop's office, according to Bishop Rozanski. Prior to that, the archdiocese had scheduled a routine audit of the parish, as required by archdiocesan policy.

The audit uncovered concerns related to the oversight and management of offertory funds; payments to vendors and employees and compliance with human resources and child protection policies pertaining to safe environment training; and the maintenance of required documentation for all employees and volunteers.

In an Oct. 31 interview with The Catholic Review, Bishop Rozanski said there are no missing funds from the parish. The resignation was related to "lack of controls and lack of oversight that a pastor is responsible for when he's in a parish," Bishop Rozanski said.

There is no evidence of abuse or criminal activity and Father Nickol remains a priest

in good standing.

The former pastor is living in another rectory and continues his priestly ministry where he is needed, Bishop Rozanski said. He will likely receive his new assignment in January.

Because Archbishop O'Brien is currently the apostolic administrator of the archdiocese, he does not have authority to appoint a pastor at Our Lady of the Fields. A priest administrator will be appointed and the clergy personnel board will meet with parishioners in the spring. A new pastor is anticipated to be named in the summer, pending the appointment of a new archbishop.

Bishop Rozanski, who met with parishioners Oct. 30 to tell them of the resignation, said it was "very difficult news to hear."

"There was a big showing of support for him and his ministry amongst them," Bishop Rozanski said, "and for the pastoral ministry he did there and the lives he touched."

Bishop Rozanski noted that child and youth protection policies and procedures are in place "for a good reason and ultimately that is for the protection of children who are entrusted to us in our care."

Ann Lamdin, president of Our Lady of the Fields' pastoral council, acknowledged during the Oct. 30 meeting that the resignation came as "great shock." Pastors are trained to follow rules and procedures "without exception," she said.

"The resources of the archdiocese are available to assist a pastor in complying with these rules and procedures," she said. "Yet, the audit revealed that these important rules and procedures were not followed in our parish."

Based on the information that was shared with her, Lamdin said she "reluctantly concluded that Father Gene's resignation was both necessary and in the best interests of the parish."

Lamdin said Father Nickol has been an integral part of the lives of parishioners and a "dear friend" to many. The parish has survived previous leadership transitions and will do so now, she said.

“I look forward to working with each of you and with the staff of the archdiocese as we navigate the way forward,” she said.