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Birthdays

Pastor returns to Saginaw to build unity

by Denise Ford-Mitchell | The Saginaw News
 Saturday May 16, 2009, 1:40 AM

When the Rev. Daniel Anholzer packed his bags in 2002 to serve a three-year term as the new provincial minister of the Detroit-based Province of St. Joseph, the Order of Franciscan Minor Capuchin priest knew it was unlikely he'd return to his beloved "Rainbow Parish" in Saginaw.

His re-election to a second three-year term in 2005 plus a yearlong sabbatical in Asia pretty much sealed his fate, Anholzer believed.

"When the new provincial was elected, I let him know I was open to whatever he wanted me to do and go wherever he wanted me to go," said Anholzer, 57. "I was stunned when he asked me if I would be willing to come back here, because that just doesn't happen. But I quickly said yes. I couldn't tell you how very happy that made me. Saginaw really is home."

Saginaw's St. Joseph parishioners -- families of Irish, Polish, Cambodian, black and Hispanic heritage -- learned in January Anholzer was returning to the church at 910 N. Sixth.

He succeeds the Rev. William M. Frigo, who filled in for the Rev. Ramiro Trejo. Trejo vacated his post in January to address health challenges.

With his May return, Anholzer becomes the third Capuchin friar leading a Catholic Diocese of Saginaw parish. The Rev. Francis Voris is the pastor of St. Anthony of Padua, 3680 S. Washington in Spaulding Township; and James Hast is leading St. Agnes, 2500 W. River in Sanford.

Prior to his Detroit stint leading the nearly 200-member order, Anholzer served for 18 years as Saginaw's St. Joseph's pastor. After touring the completed \$2.6 million, 550-seat house of worship -- he left as construction was just beginning -- he's wasting no time getting back into the swing.

The priest will join St. Joseph parishioners and First Ward residents in a volunteer Community Clean Up Day today from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on North Sixth from Sears to Norman in Saginaw.

A bigger challenge looming is reunifying the congregation, Anholzer said. Barely two years after his departure, members bitterly clashed over the placement of the "Virgin mother of Jesus, Our Lady of Guadeloupe" statue.

"Unfortunately, some parishioners are still hurt about the cultural insensitivity of it all," Anholzer said.

Hispanic members claim Christ's mother appeared to an Indian peasant near Mexico City in 1531. The icon is credited for bringing native Mexican Indians into the Holy See. In the 1940s, Hispanic church members had the statue cast in Mexico and shipped to Saginaw.

It stood at the front of the former sanctuary until the new church opened in April 2003, when church leaders placed the statue out of view in a small chapel area and replaced it with a painting.

For Hispanic parishioners, removing the statue -- from which believers request intercession with God -- ended six decades of cultural sensitivity and tradition at the church, comprising about 85 percent Hispanic, 10 percent African-American and 5 percent white.

Members of the church, which prides its open-door ministry, also butt heads on neighborhood outreach efforts, said Anholzer, who was ordained as a priest in 1981. He lived in Nicaragua for five years, ministering to people in communities throughout the country. He came to Saginaw in

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1984 to serve parishioners of the East Side Saginaw congregation, known as the Rainbow Parish.

"I haven't come back to St. Joseph to serve as a 'messiah' who can fix everything that is broken. There's only one Messiah, Jesus our Lord. My goal is to build unity again, to be the 'miracle on North Sixth Street' that (the late) Bishop Kenneth E. Untener dubbed it so many years ago.

"But unity is something you have to work on continuously. 'We' have to replace the 'them and us' distrustful spirit. To do that we have to take steps to heal and admit we were all right and all wrong. Learn from it and move on.

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