

Peel BioG January 29, 1992 Mississauga News.

Peel BioG. Bk.

O'Neill, Desmond
Jan. 29-92 MN

Resigns to 'avoid further upset or embarrassment'

Father O'Neill bids farewell

By KAREN BRIDSON
Special to *The Mississauga News*

Friends and supporters of Father Desmond O'Neill gathered at Martha and Mary Parish Hall Sunday to show support for their pastor, who was recently cleared of charges of sexual assault involving a teen.

There were also there to bid him farewell, as O'Neill announced his resignation as pastor at St. Ignatius Loyola Church.

Ken Harris, O'Neill's lawyer, said O'Neill resigned "to avoid any further upset or embarrassment. He prefers to just call it a day."

The same sentiment was behind having the open house at Sts. Martha and Mary parish hall in-

stead of at the parishioners' home church, Harris said.

"The message we're trying to give him today is that we're with you, we think of you and we'll miss you," said Harris. "And it's a chance for us to say farewell."

The hall, with a capacity of 300, remained full all afternoon, and was decorated with banners saying "We Believe In You Father." The majority of those attending were Loyola parishioners, all of whom wore yellow ribbons to illustrate their support for O'Neill.

The event featured speeches from the chairman of Loyola's Parish Council Al Holden; Grand Knight of the John F. Kennedy Council for Knights of Columbus

Henry Lach; Ken Harris and Loyola parishioner Ron Harlow.

After he was given a box containing 1,700 messages of support and a plaque of the proclamation of support that recently appeared in *The Mississauga News*, O'Neill delivered his first sermon in more than a year.

He thanked his parishioners for the "tremendous support" that they have given him over the past year.

"There has been, not only for me but for you, a tremendous amount of pain and anguish. And I've had some people ask me has my faith been shaken, has it been lessened. I said no, no way, it's only been enhanced," O'Neill said.

O'Neill added that he had received word that Loyola will have a new pastor in two weeks. "Give him a chance," O'Neill said. "Open your hearts, as you did to me."

As Father O'Neill has not asked to be reinstated as pastor of Loyola, he will no longer have to stand before a church panel which was to review the case before possibly offering him his old job back.

According to Harris, O'Neill's next step is to wait for an assignment from his superior, Archbishop of Toronto Aloysius Ambrozic.

O'Neill was charged with sexually assaulting a 16-year-old male on Oct. 21, 1990. In December a jury found him not guilty following a three-day trial.

MN

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O'NEILL, DESMOND
(FATHER)