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## Orinda pastor doubles as high-profile diocesan administrator

By Nick Marnell



Rev. George Mockel Photo provided

The problem with performing well at a job that you could just as soon do without is that the boss makes it very hard for you to leave.

Despite requesting that his term as vicar general of the Catholic Diocese of Oakland not be renewed so that he could devote more time to his parish, Rev. George Mockel, pastor of the Church of Santa Maria in Orinda, has been reappointed to the post. As vicar general, Mockel aids Bishop Michael Barber in the overall governance and administration of the diocese. A loose comparison in the business world would be a chief operating officer - the vicar general - working with a chief executive officer - the bishop.

"I have always enjoyed working with people, in a parish," Mockel said. He has served as the vicar general of the Oakland diocese since 2005 under three bishops, and with each change at the top, Mockel expected he would be released to do solely his parish work. But his background in canon law, his administrative abilities and his experience were too much for each bishop to pass up.

Mockel was born in Oakland. He said he felt something of a calling to the priesthood as a teenager, but he wrestled with the feelings, not unlike Jacob in the book of Genesis. His aha moment, though, was hardly biblical. "It hit me one day when I was sitting in the family room, watching television," he said.

Even his time in the Mountain View seminary was a struggle, and he often thought about leaving. "The '60s impacted everyone. It wasn't cool to be a priest," Mockel said. But he persevered, and was ordained in Oakland in 1975.

Though Mockel kids about the various pulls away from the parish work that he loves, he has no regrets. "I never got an assignment that I wanted, and I never wanted an assignment that I got," Mockel said. "But I wouldn't change any of them for a million dollars."

The Oakland diocese plans to release a report in February that names all clergy "credibly accused of sexual abuse." Mockel did not comment on whether any priests who served in Lamorinda parishes were on that list. "I can't because I don't know," he said, as Mockel has had no involvement with the investigation which the chancellor of the diocese, Stephen Wilcox, is coordinating. Wilcox did not respond to a request for comment.

"Having this investigation led by a lay person is probably best," Mockel said. "It's good that we are putting the list out. I hope that it doesn't turn out that a person on that list is innocent, and that they are doing this very carefully."

Mockel called the sexual abuse of minors a "terrible tragedy" and stressed that the Church needs to "get this right."

The bishop said he was grateful to Mockel for his loyalty and for the excellent job he has done in the diocese. "I thank Father Mockel for his continued service and dedication to Christ's flock that has been entrusted to our care and most especially at Santa Maria Parish," Barber said in a statement.

Mockel did admit to an unexpected benefit of working the two jobs. "If someone is looking for me, and I'm not at the parish, they think I'm at the diocese. And if I'm not at the diocese, they think I'm at the parish," he said.

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