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RELIGION

Controversy continues concerning local visionary

STAFF REPORT

The existence of a communiqué from the Vatican and its nature is at the heart of a simmering feud between Dr. Gianna Talone-Sullivan and William Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore.

According to Talone-Sullivan, the Blessed Virgin Mary told her on Feb. 5, 2006 that the Holy See never sent a communiqué regarding her visions and apparitions to the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

However, in a dramatic turn of events, the Archdiocese of Baltimore published a February 2003 communiqué from the then-Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) in the Feb. 23, 2006 edition of *The Catholic Review*. In it Ratzinger stated his approval of the commission's work. Keeler assembled the commission to assess the character of Talone-Sullivan's visions and locutions.

"After a careful examination of the contents of the report and having taken into consideration all aspects of the present case, the Congregation commends the work done by the commission and considers that Your Eminence is in a position to conclude the matter with a decree of 'constat de non supernaturalitate' in reference to the phenomena in question," wrote Ratzinger, noting that Keeler had the authority to decide the matter.

Ratzinger's letter had never been revealed publicly until Feb. 23. However, Keeler, in his June 7, 2003 decree banning Talone-Sullivan's messages and visions from Archdiocesan churches and property, stated authoritatively that he had received "appropriate authorization" to make such a decision from the Holy See.

In the face of mounting accusations that the alleged visionary

and her followers were being disobedient to church authority, Talone-Sullivan received a Feb. 5 message reputed to be from the Virgin Mary, which contradicted the Cardinal's assertion. "... I assure you, my children, you are not disobedient, not to the Church at all. For I assure you, children, that there never was any written communiqué from the Holy See. There has never been yet, up to this point ..."

The archdiocese's publication of the communiqué has directly refuted the words of Talone-Sullivan's Marian message, causing area Catholics to ponder the authenticity of the apparitions, and some to claim that a fraud has been exposed.

But Talone-Sullivan and her spiritual advisors have responded to the crisis by downplaying the nature of the communiqué and berating the work of the commission, which the future pope had commended.

"I have been advised by my spiritual director and advisors to point out to the faithful that Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger simply commends the work done by the commission and 'considers' Cardinal Keeler in a 'position to conclude' the matter with a decree of 'constat de non supernaturalitate.' Cardinal Ratzinger does not himself conclude this matter and, as is the customary procedure, allows authority to rest at a local level, that being with Cardinal Keeler and not the Holy See," wrote Talone-Sullivan in a statement released Feb. 18, 2006. She has declined an interview with *The Dispatch*.

The Rev. John B. Wang, one of Talone-Sullivan's spiritual advisors, recently characterized the work of the commission as being "biased, fallacious, and flawed in many aspects." Believers in the alleged messages want the matter to be appealed to the Holy See and the

work of the Baltimore commission to be reviewed again by Rome.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore, apparently satisfied that their recent publication of the Vatican communiqué and its commendation of the commission's work has adequately refuted Talone-Sullivan and her advisors, has refused further comment on the matter.

Meanwhile, Our Lady of Emmitsburg followers continue to gather for Talone-Sullivan's apparitions, despite the fervent opposition of Father Vincent O'Malley, pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Emmitsburg. O'Malley, a staunch opponent of the apparitions, advises his parishioners not to attend these meetings because he believes attending them is not in the spirit of fidelity to legitimate church authority.

Regular monthly prayer meeting is experiencing growth with its recent move to the Lynfield Complex, located between Thurmont and Frederick, just off Rt. 15, where they have met regularly for the past four months.

With attendance growing to 350, Peter Blanchard, one of the organizers, said, "Things are going so well at Lynfield that we've decided to continue holding the prayer meeting there." Representatives signed a six-month contract, beginning with the first Sunday in April. The prayer group meets at 3 p.m. on the first Sunday of the month. And Blanchard said, "All are welcome."

Cardinal William H. Keeler will be 75 on March 4. According to canon law he is required to submit his resignation to Rome. It is not expected that he will be relieved of his duties at this time. Local ecclesiastical observers expect that Keeler may eventually act to forbid Catholics from attending future prayer meetings.

Emmitsburg Community Lenten Services

The Emmitsburg Council of Churches has announced the 2006 Community Lenten Services schedule.

Services will be held at 7 p.m. on Sunday evenings, beginning March 5 and running through Palm Sunday, April 9. The Easter sunrise service will be held at the Grotto Chapel, with the time still to be determined.

The ecumenical Lenten services this year will be based on the film, "The Passion of the Christ." Each week will include viewing a scene from the film, followed by reflections from a guest speaker.

Services will move from one community church to another, with local pastors speaking from pulpits other than their own. Refreshments and fellowship will follow the services.

March 5	Elias Lutheran Rev. Wade Martin
March 12	Trinity United Methodist Fr. Vincent O'Malley, CM
March 19	Tom's Creek U. Methodist Rev. Reginald Rice
March 26	Incarnation U.C.C. Rev. Jon Greenstone
April 2	St. Joseph's Catholic Church Rev. Ben Jones
April 9	Emmitsburg Presbyterian Rev. Bill Warehime
Easter	Grotto at MSM Rev. Reginald Rice