

RELIGION

“Voices of Faith” heats up visionary controversy

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The controversy surrounding Gianna Talone-Sullivan is back in the news with a recent article published in *The Frederick News-Post* (FNP) on its front page Jan. 8, titled “The Voices of Faith.” She is the wife of a medical doctor who herself holds a doctorate in pharmacology, and claims to see and receive messages from the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Through most of the 1990’s in St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, Emmitsburg, she reported “public” messages allegedly from Mary on Thursday nights. The church was packed with visitors, some from distant seaboard states. The overflow filled the parish’s hall.

In 2003 William Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore, who has jurisdiction here, forbade her to present her messages on property belonging to the archdiocese. In the beginning there was a discussion over whether Talone-Sullivan sees apparitions of Mary. Now the controversy

surrounds how the Catholic Church has been dealing with the issue.

Church’s position on the apparitions

Pastor Vincent J. O’Malley, C.M., pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Emmitsburg, responded to the *FNP* article with a letter to his parishioners. His response attempts to correct two errors in the article and offers his comments about the apparitions. He writes, “Both the archdiocese and the Holy See have decreed that ‘nothing supernatural is occurring here.’ The investigation is over. The Church has spoken. We Catholics are to move forward, as best as possible, in unity of mind, heart, and soul.”

Keeler had assembled a commission of experts in theology, canon law, and behavioral sciences to assess the nature of Talone-Sullivan’s visions and locations. After more than a two-year investigation, the group, in 2002, “unanimously concluded that there is no evidence of supernatural intervention in the Emmitsburg messages.”

Keeler issued a formal decree on June 7, 2003, “that in this case, *constat de non supernaturalitate* (nothing supernatural is occurring)” banning Talone-Sullivan’s messages and visions from Archdiocesan churches and property and said that he had received “appropriate authorization” to make such a decision from the Holy See. This had been given by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In his recent letter O’Malley wrote, “Throughout history, numerous saints have experienced opposition within the Church. These saints acquiesced to the authority of the Church. Their sanctity was verified by their humble acquiescence. No holy person ever persisted in defiance of the Church.”

“To act otherwise,” O’Malley declared, “i.e., to believe in the validity of the alleged apparitions is to act contrary to the teaching of the Church.”

Believers do not think they are disobedient

Raymond Sanders, a St. Joseph’s parishioner and one of those interviewed by the *FNP*, disagrees with O’Malley and says he can be a faithful Catholic and still believe in the apparitions. “The diocese didn’t condemn the apparitions; there just wasn’t enough evidence to prove their validity,” said Sanders, “therefore it’s not a matter of sin or disobedience.”

Sanders also noted that Ratzinger’s Congregation itself did not investigate the apparitions as O’Malley alleges. It examined the report but in the end, “simply gave it (Keeler’s decision) a rubber stamp.

Further, Keeler’s decree did not restrict the release of any new public messages. Since the church found no proof, the decree was a way to distance itself from the apparitions, Sanders said. “Until the church condemns it, it’s okay to believe it.”

Sanders believes the apparitions to be true because, “the messages point or reflect the truth. They reflect the gospel message love of neighbor and use of the sacraments. An authentic apparition always points back to the gospel, points back to Christ.”

Robert Coli, another believer interviewed by the *FNP*, said, “Fr. O’Malley is very wrong and misleads people. He implies that the Emmitsburg apparitions are condemned. Emmitsburg is not condemned.”

Coli said he understands that any Catholic has the right to believe in private revelation except for the ones that are condemned. because there is “irrefutable proof that there is some type of fraud or they are of a demonic origin.”

Coli told *The Dispatch* that he believes in the apparitions because, “God performed a miracle in my family as a result of the family being present at the Thursday night prayer group that was so profound that it could have only been performed by God. To me and my family, it is absolutely impossible for us to doubt this.”

Call for a more thorough investigation

Believers like Sanders and Coli think a more thorough investigation should be conducted.

The Rev. John B. Wang, one of Talone-Sullivan’s spiritual advisors, characterized the work of

the earlier commission as “biased, fallacious, and flawed in many aspects.” Believers in the alleged messages want the matter appealed to the Holy See and want Rome to review the work of the Baltimore commission.

Susan Torborg of Fairfield, Pa., wrote in a Jan. 11 *FNP* letter to the editor, “Dr. Sullivan is completely obedient to the Catholic Church and yet the... Baltimore Diocese has not done a very thorough investigation like the Diocese of Phoenix did years ago.”

Torborg calls for a new investigation and says, “Rome needs to get involved and have a proper investigation done... one that includes Marian theologians and learned scholars who will be able to evaluate these apparitions properly.”

Our Lady of Emmitsburg followers not only believe that the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s investigation was poorly done because it lacked Marian theologians, but also because it lacked the testimony of the visionary’s primary witness, Fr. Alfred Pehrsson, C.M., former pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church. Pehrsson was present for the apparitions from 1993, when they began, until he was reassigned in 1996. During that time he kept Keeler informed about the apparitions, but was not called to testify before the investigative committee.

Pehrsson wrote about the apparitions in 1996, and recently updated his testimony (both found at www.centeroftheimmaculateheart.org) in an effort to complete his work of recording the history of what took place at that time. He declined to speak with *The Dispatch*.

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OBITUARIES

Mr. John Humerick

Mr. John Gerald “Jack” Humerick, 92, of W. Main St., Emmitsburg, died Jan. 6, 2007, at St. Catherine’s Nursing Center, Emmitsburg.

Born Sept. 23, 1914, in Altoona, Pa., he was a son of the late Jackson A. and Annie Taylor Humerick.

Surviving are his wife, D. Eleanor (Mingel) Humerick; two sons, John Michael Humerick of King Salem, Alaska and Thomas William Humerick of Emmitsburg; seven grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and two sisters, Hilda Mahoney of Florida and Dorothy Seiss of Emmitsburg.

A memorial Mass of Christian Burial was held Jan. 13 from St. Joseph’s Roman Catholic Church, Emmitsburg, with his pastor, the Rev. Stephen P. Trzeciecki, C.M., as the celebrant. Inurnment will be at the convenience of the family in Altoona, Pa.

Mr. William Ott Jr.

Mr. William Joseph Ott Jr., 64, of Kelbaugh Road, Thurmont, died Jan. 12, 2007, at home.

Born Oct. 3, 1942, in Emmitsburg, he was a son of the late William J. and Clara Mae Cool Ott.

Surviving are four daughters, Tracy Wiles and Victoria Phelps, Gettysburg, Pa., Kimberly Dicks, Lawton, Okla., and Stefanie Rines, Fairfield, Pa.; eight grandchildren; and one sister, Frances Strausburg, Dayton, Ohio.

Funeral services were held Jan. 16, 2007, with a Mass of Christian Burial from St. Joseph’s Roman Catholic Church, Emmitsburg, with his pastor, the Rev. Stephan P. Trzeciecki, C.M., as celebrant. Interment was in New St. Joseph’s Cemetery, Emmitsburg.

Mr. K. Jeffrey Yingling

Mr. K. Jeffrey Yingling, 51, of 11942 Simpsons Mill Road, Keymar, died Jan. 12, 2007, at Frederick Memorial Hospital.

Born Dec. 6, 1955, in Gettysburg, Pa., he was the son of the late Kenneth F. and Ruth Weddle Yingling.

Surviving are his wife of 15 years, Cathy (Hawse) Yingling; two daughters, Leslie Michelle Yingling and Rachel Nicki Yingling, both of Frederick; two sons, Sean Lewis Sr., Woodsboro and Neal Lewis, Keymar; a sister, Elaine Study, Finksburg; two brothers, Tony Yingling and Freddie Yingling; and six grandchildren.

A memorial service was held Jan. 16, 2007, at Hartzler Funeral Home, Union Bridge, with the Rev. Stanley Diehl, a former pastor, officiating.