

SPIRITUS

by
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Thesis proposal for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

For Submission:

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Treatment

On February 25th, 1999, the Roman Catholic Church separated itself from Father James Callan and the parishioners of Corpus Christi church in Rochester, NY. Covered by media nationwide, the separation was portrayed as an excommunication of the priests and its members by the Vatican and the latest struggle of progressive Catholics against conservative Church authorities.

Growing from 200 to more than 3,000 parishioners in less than a decade, Corpus Christi became home to an impressive range of social justice programs, including a health care center, a halfway house for former prisoners, a home for recovering addicts, a hospice, and a day-care center. What got Callan and the church into trouble were practices that went far beyond the norm in Roman Catholicism: blessing homosexual unions, allowing non-Catholics to receive Communion during Mass, and having his pastoral associate, Mary Rammerman, wear priest like vestments and help officiate in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Using archival footage as well as interviews with the major parties involved, *Spiritus* will be a documentary that explores the events of the separation, the larger issues of liberal American Catholicism versus more conservative authorities, and the resulting congregation 15 years later. Over the last decade, Americans have become increasingly more accepting and the documentary will also attempt to uncover the larger issue of more liberal Catholics separating from the Roman Catholic Church and if the church's views have become more aligned with Callan's, 15 years after the two separated. While the event is important and the natural structure for the film, a secondary goal is to explore the role of Catholicism and religion as it relates to a community and its goal in guiding its parishioners.

Audience

Reaching a wide catholic, cultural, and even political audience with a touchy personal topic to most people, the film is a historical glance at how an evolving society navigates religion and the rules that govern it. There will be some obvious religious messages conveyed throughout the piece such as love, but the filmmaker will be conscious of the ability for it to become too preachy and will guard against that. While there are strong opposing views in this documentary, it is important to make all connections in such a manner that is as unbiased as possible and to let the audience come to their own conclusion. It is important that this does not become an issue of who was right, but to explore the reasons for why each party did what they did and the results of those actions.

Rough Structure Outline

- I. Act 1**
 - a. Teaser/Intro**
 - b. Corpus Christi**
 - i. Father Callan history, coming to the church,
 - ii. Corpus Christi archival footage of mass, gospel choir, etc.
 - iii. Interviews with Parishioners
 - iv. Social Justice programs
 - c. Progressive church views**
 - d. Introducing church's inquiries**
- II. Separation**
 - a. The Media swarms**
 - b. The issues**
 - i. Same-sex marriage
 - ii. Communion to all
 - iii. Larger touch on pop culture and religion
 - iv. Views at the time on such issues
 - c. The fight**
 - i. Neither party backs down
 - d. The decision**
 - i. Effect on parishioners**
 - 1. Some stayed, some followed Callan**
 - ii. Effects on Community programs**
- III. Fifteen Years Later**
 - a. Mary Rammerman forms new church Spiritus Christi.**
 - b. Continues same ideals**
 - c. Countries Ideals**

Perspective and Angle

The filmmaker has a personal connection to this story as he and his family were part of the 3,000 parishioners at the Church during the event. Only the journey of the documentary can really dictate which angle and perspective to take. Starting in a more conservative way of presenting the facts, it is important for the filmmaker to stay open minded during the process.

FILMMAKER CREDITS & RESUME ATTACHED

LIST OF PEOPLE TO CONTACT AND INTERVIEW

1. Fr. James Callan
2. Mary Ramerman
3. Bishop Matthew Clark (Church Authority)
5. Democrat & Chronicle Columnist Doug Mandelaro

6. Dr. Thomas Thibodeau (church historian)
7. 5 – 10 parishioners who followed
8. 5 – 10 parishioners who stayed

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR FEW MAJOR PLAYERS

Father Callan

- Explain why the controversial issues were important to you?
- There was a chance for you to stop making these actions without penalty. Why not stop?
- Much of the bible is about interpretation. Describe the ideals you believed in and how your interpretation supports those ideals.
- Do you regret any of your actions?

Mary Ramerman

- When did you have the opportunity to start partaking in some rituals that are traditionally reserved for men of the cloth?
- Why take that opportunity?
- Did you ever have doubts?
- How was your family life affected by the attention and decisions made?

Bishop Matthew Clark or similar church authority

- Talk to me about the importance of rituals and certain rules within the church
- What is the goal of a church as it relates to the community
- How has society/culture challenged issues of the church
- Tell me about chain of command or the idea of “knowing what you signed up for”
- How much of this was the Vatican, the united states, or Upstate NY’s Diocese decision.