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Bishop withdraws reassignment for Oregon pastor, blames confidentiality violation

by Dan Morris-Young

Bend, Ore. — The reassignment of pastor Fr. James Radloff to a small parish on the Oregon-California border has been temporarily withdrawn by Bishop Liam Cary of the Baker, Ore., diocese.

In a letter dated Nov. 5 and received by Radloff in Chicago, where he is staying with his mother, Cary said the priest and his canonical adviser violated confidentiality.

"In view of some of your recent Facebook postings (especially those of 23, 24 and 25 October) and other developments, I have decided against sending you to Merrill," Cary said in the letter. "While your placement is under consideration, you may wish to prolong your stay in Illinois into December. I will be gone for the next week and a half. When I return, Fr. [Richard] Fischer will be in touch with you about these matters."

Fischer is diocesan vicar general and is listed on the diocese's website as administrator of St. Augustine Parish in Merrill, Ore., a town of about 900. Radloff was to serve in Merrill beginning at the end of this month.

Radloff was relieved of his duties as pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Bend in early October and has filed an appeal with the Vatican. His removal has caused much anger and confusion among parishioners, and several officers of the parish resigned. Adding to the anxiety: The reasons for Radloff's dismissal remain under wraps, and he is not allowed to disclose them.

Fr. W. Thomas Faucher, Radloff's canonical adviser and procurator, made a section of Cary's latest letter to Radloff available to *NCR* on Sunday. In it, Cary mentions news coverage of the appeal in *NCR* and *The Bulletin* in Bend. *NCR* coverage included material from an Oct. 30 statement by Radloff provided to

the news organization through Faucher.

The appeal of his removal was filed with the Vatican Congregation for Clergy on Oct. 18 by Faucher, a canon lawyer and priest of the Boise, Idaho, diocese, where he is pastor of St. Mary's Parish.

"Father Radloff will comply with the request of Bishop Cary and not return to his diocese until requested to do so," Faucher told *NCR*.

"On Sept. 10, 2013, you promised to 'uphold' what you acknowledged to be 'the confidential nature of the documents and communications that make up the Acts' of your case," Cary writes in the Nov. 5 letter, adding: "You further promised to use this information 'solely ... in the canonical forum as foreseen by canon law.' Your rights in that forum have been and will be fully respected; therein you can make whatever arguments you wish to. Canon law does not foresee that you or your canonical advisor will extend that argumentation to the pages of the *National Catholic Reporter*, *The Bend Bulletin*, or Facebook."

Faucher said he planned to express "umbrage" to the bishop over the accusation of a confidentiality breach.

In an email, Faucher wrote, "Nothing in Fr. Radloff's written statement to *National Catholic Reporter* or my comments to either *NCR* or the *The Bulletin* newspaper in Bend violated the confidentiality agreement" that both priests signed as a condition to be allowed to read the reasons outlined by the bishop in his formal decree of removal.

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"Nothing learned in the official acts of the case has ever been disclosed," Faucher said.

Radloff acknowledges confidentiality in his Oct. 30 statement: "Bishop Cary ... has forbidden me or my canonical advisor from revealing what the reasons are" for terminating his pastoral role. Radloff also emphasized that as part of his appeal, he is asking the Congregation for Clergy for permission to publicly divulge the reasons Cary used to justify the removal.

Cary has refused to discuss reasons for the dismissal, writing in an Oct. 1 letter to St. Francis parishioners that he was "not at liberty" to do so. That letter also lauded Radloff for his hard work and accomplishments at the parish, declared that he remains a priest in good standing, and said the priest did nothing illegal.

St. Francis is Bend's largest parish and has struggled with financial challenges, including support of a parish elementary school and a \$6.4 million church building project, in recent years. Parishioners, including members of the stewardship group, parish council and finance committee, credited Radloff with reinvigorating the parish. Mass attendance, contributions and school support noticeably improved since he became pastor in December 2011, they said.

According to Radloff's Oct. 30 statement:

- On Aug. 1, Cary asked him to resign as pastor;
- The priest "responded by asking for mediation and reconciliation, which requests were rejected";
- Radloff and Faucher were consequently "informed of the five reasons for my removal" by Cary;
- In response, Faucher "submitted a long legal brief rejecting all of the reasons," arguing that they did

- not meet the criteria for removal found in canon law; and
- Those "detailed objections were simply dismissed by Bishop Cary in one-sentence rejection of them."

Many parishioners also were troubled by the presence of two visibly armed security personnel at the vigil and Sunday Masses over which Cary presided at St. Francis on Oct. 5 and 6

Cary allowed time after each of the liturgies for parishioners to visit with him. Robert Parkinson said he waited in line nearly a half hour after the Sunday 10 a.m. Mass ?to ask him why he thought it was necessary to have armed guards outside and then inside during Mass.

"His response was, 'We heard there was going to be trouble,' ? Parkinson said.

Parkinson, the owner of a printing and graphics company, said, ?It is unfathomable that you need armed guards in a church in Bend. I told the bishop that he had underestimated the caliber of parishioners in this parish. No response. Just a stone face. I told him he had ripped the heart and soul out of this parish and (I) just walked away.?

Mike Cleavenger, a law enforcement retiree and 27-year parishioner, noticed an armed security guard as he drove into the parish parking lot for the Saturday vigil Mass. ?You couldn't miss him,? he said, ?since there is only one entry. He was wearing a shirt and tie and he had a semi-automatic weapon on his hip. And he had a private security badge.?

Cleavenger said he overheard the guard ?instructing a second person on what they would do if there was a disorderly person in the Mass. He said they would just quietly inform him that he had to leave, and if necessary take him by the arm and say, 'You need to leave with me'.?

Cleavenger introduced himself to the guard and asked if trouble was anticipated. ?He said there had been threats against the bishop. I told him I was a retired police officer and that if there really was a disorderly person, we could take care of that ourselves. He said it (their presence) was just precautionary.?

?I told him to remember what I looked like,? Cleavenger said, ?because if there was any trouble I would be helping.?

Cleavenger said he had left a phone message with the bishop earlier that week suggesting that it would be healthy for the parish to have Radloff present at the Masses as well to ?to help us move ahead, to allow a goodbye and provide an opportunity to celebrate the good times he had here and his great leadership for almost two years.?

Radloff was installed as St. Francis' pastor in December 2011, fewer than three months before Cary was ordained Baker's bishop.

Cleavenger said he had visited numerous parishioners during six months of parish stewardship work and knows a wide cross-section of the congregation.

?I have not heard from one person who feels this should have happened or needed to happen,? he said. ?I am sure there are, but the ones who have talked to me are very devastated.?

?The cloak of secrecy and the lack of transparency are very upsetting,? he added.

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