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Vatican denies Oregon pastor's appeal of removal

by Dan Morris-Young

Bend controversy

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The Vatican has declined to intervene on behalf of a priest whose bishop removed him as pastor of a parish in Bend, Ore., in the fall and later barred him from public ministry.

In a decision dated Jan. 31 and reported to *NCR* on Friday, the Vatican Congregation for Clergy confirmed that Baker, Ore., Bishop Liam Cary was justified in removing Fr. James Radloff as pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Bend on Oct. 1.

According to Radloff's canonical adviser, Fr. Thomas Faucher, the congregation "has also declined to order Bishop Cary to make public the reasons for the removal" and "declined to order Bishop Cary to rescind his ban on Fr. Radloff from celebration of Mass and from all public ministry."

Radloff learned of the decision through Faucher early Friday and was not immediately available for comment.

Reached by phone Friday morning at his office in Bend, Baker vicar general Fr. Richard Fischer, who has been handling communications between the diocese and Radloff, said he had no comment. "I cannot speak for the bishop," he said, adding that Cary is "out of the area."

Fischer declined to take this reporter's phone number when asked if he could facilitate contact with Cary for comment. "We will see where we go," he said, and ended the phone call.

Radloff filed an appeal of his canonical removal as pastor of Bend's largest parish Oct. 18. He and Faucher have been bound by confidentiality understandings in the case from giving the reasons Cary put

forth for the removal.

In a statement issued through Faucher at the end of October, Radloff said he had asked the congregation to allow the reasons for Cary's decision to be made public. He also said Cary had rebuffed efforts at reconciliation, mediation and dialogue.

Cary has refused to discuss the reasons for Radloff's removal, writing that he was "not at liberty" to do so.

At the time of Radloff's termination, Cary wrote that the priest, who had served at St. Francis of Assisi for 21 months, remained a priest in good standing and had done nothing illegal.

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Cary's action led to some resignations from the parish council, stewardship group and finance council.

Fr. Julian Cassar, who had been rector of St. Francis de Sales Cathedral Parish in Baker City, Ore., was named to take over the St. Francis leadership role effective Oct. 17. While the cathedral is located in Baker, diocesan administrative offices are in Bend.

Cary raised eyebrows and offended a number of parishioners when he presided at all Masses the weekend following his discharging of Radloff while accompanied by two visibly armed security personnel.

Cary had assigned Radloff without specific title to Merrill, Ore., a town of about 900 on the Oregon-California border, where the priest was to serve pending the Vatican appeal. However, Cary withdrew that assignment in early November admonishing Radloff and Faucher for providing statements to *NCR* and Bend's major newspaper, *The Bulletin*, indicating that the two priests had violated confidentiality agreements surrounding the Vatican appeal.

Faucher disputed the bishop's accusations, saying at the time, "Nothing in Fr. Radloff's written statement to *National Catholic Reporter* or my comments to either *NCR* or *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.

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

Nor, apparently, will it be if conditions in the Congregation's ruling are followed, Faucher indicated today.

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