

12-13-07 - Audit ordered of church's books

By Emily Udell, Staff writer, The Southtown Star (IL)

The pastor of a Flossmoor Catholic church has been asked to step down amid an investigation by Cook County prosecutors into missing money and an audit of the church's finances by the Archdiocese of Chicago.

The Rev. William E. Killeen, 58, temporarily has been removed from his position at Infant Jesus of Prague, archdiocesan officials said Wednesday.

Cardinal Francis George announced his decision to ask Killeen to "step back from his responsibilities as pastor" in a letter that was read to parishioners during weekend Masses.

"In recent months, your parish has had to deal with a number of financial problems," the cardinal said in the letter. "It has not been easy to sort everything out, and I am sorry you are going through this difficult moment."

The cardinal appointed the Rev. Francis Cimarrusti, who had been in retirement since January, to serve as temporary administrator of the parish.

Susan Burritt, a spokeswoman for the archdiocese, said the audit was undertaken at the request of parishioners. Burritt said the audit results would be turned over to the state's attorney's office, which also was investigating.

"We take all financial inquiries extraordinarily seriously as we do any misconduct at any level," she said, adding people can report misconduct on the archdiocese's Web site - www.archdiocese-chgo.org.

Flossmoor Police Chief William Miller said his department asked the state's attorney's office to investigate after church money was reported missing by Killeen in late October.

"Due to the fact that it's a church involved, it's our standard procedure to get the state's attorney involved," he said, declining to say how much money was reported missing.

A spokeswoman for the state's attorney's office declined to comment.

A woman who identified herself as a church secretary said she had no information about the removal of Killeen and also declined to comment.

Before coming to Infant Jesus of Prague, Killeen was pastor of St. Christopher Church in Midlothian, where his tenure was marked by financial scandal.

A former business manager hired by Killeen was convicted of stealing about \$150,000 from the church and sentenced to three years in prison. And St. Christopher developed an approximately \$1 million debt that was overcome by fundraising, an anonymous donor contributing \$200,000 and the archdiocese forgiving part of a loan to the parish.

Killeen was St. Christopher's pastor for 13 years before moving to Infant Jesus of Prague in August 2005. In June 2006, he published a letter in Infant Jesus of Prague's bulletin apologizing for the theft that occurred under his leadership at St. Christopher.