

2-15-08 - More Heartbreak at St. Michael, Diocese: Moynihan Live-in Relationship Revealed
By PATRICIA McCORMACK, The Greenwich Citizen (CT)

Three Diocese of Bridgeport bishops - one deceased and another promoted to cardinal of the Archdiocese of New York - figure in heartbreak of gargantuan size gripping Greenwich's St. Michael the Archangel Church and 86 other parishes across Fairfield County.

The dead bishop's name is the Most Rev. Walter W. Curtis. The name of the bishop promoted to cardinal is the Most Rev. Edward M. Egan. The name of the third is the current bishop, the Most Rev. William E. Lori.

No solution is in sight. The scandal involving sex and millions of dollars continues to bubble up. The latest? The New York Post, in its Feb. 4 edition, blew an unseemly situation out of the water involving St. Michael's former pastor, Rev. Michael Moynihan.

In a "slash and burn" dispatch, the Post's reporters knocked the socks off St. Michael parishioners and shook folks with their hands on the levers at Diocesan headquarters in Bridgeport.

The tabloid - using graphic street language - revealed in an exclusive investigation that Moynihan, long the St. Michael pastor until forced to resign over a year ago, was entwined in a relationship with the parish's former Children's Choir director, Michael Fawcett, a New York musician of high professional repute.

The Post documented that, for nearly a decade, the two shared a \$4,000-a-month one-bedroom Manhattan apartment leased by the priest. - known to have an insatiable appetite for expensive "toys." He drove a Lexus and owned a luxury powerboat. Records showed his lavish lifestyle could not be supported by a priest's salary of about \$30,000 a year. Even when he prepared couples for marriage, he often celebrated the end of that "duty" by treating the prospective bride and groom to an expensive dinner with only the finest wine as he launched them on their trip down the aisle.

The trio of bishops was privy to many of these unsavory goings-on but until recently, under Lori, the policy was to sweep the dirt under the rug.

Victims of documented priestly conduct of a criminal nature - molestation of children and theft of parish funds - in more than a few of the Bridgeport Diocese's 87 parishes include:

* Uncounted betrayed faithful.

* Hundreds robbed of innocence by priest rapists during the second half of the 20th century and continuing in the 21st century in Fairfield County. One priest perpetrator moved around by then-Bishop Egan finally landed in a parish in Byram. Within months, records and reports from the faithful show he molested 17 underage boys and girls. The Diocese has paid more than \$35 million to victims plus fortunes in legal fees to keep court documents sealed to prevent the public from knowing the sordid facts involving conduct of its wayward clerics.

Due to wraps gradually coming off the scandal-protection system of the bishops, two pastors - Darien and Greenwich parishes - have been defrocked and no longer can celebrate Mass. Rev. Michael Jude Fay of St. John Parish in Darien has been sentenced to prison.

An elderly pastor at St. Mary in Norwalk, allegedly named in a child-molestation case, killed himself in jail. But that's not all. The assistant priest at St. John's has thrown away his roman collar and returned to civilian life. The secretary who helped him prove the double life of Fay is suing the Diocese for pooh-poohing discoveries about Fay revealed by a private investigator hired by herself and the priest assistant.

Records show the "scandal-protection" system operated by the Diocese under Bishops Curtis and Egan was based on the classic three-monkey modus operandi: See no evil. Hear no evil. Speak no evil.

Though Bishop Lori to his credit has tried to respond appropriately, there are indications he is powerless to fend off interest by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Among other things, the FBI is looking into some financial transactions involving St. Michael funds.

The Greenwich Citizen has learned that of particular interest to the federal sleuths are off-shore accounts. If the FBI pins down what sent them on the trail, criminal charges could be in the wings for principals in the financial side of the scandal at St. Michael Parish.

Diocesan officials report its investigation will be coming out in a report to be issued within weeks. It remains to be seen if anything of a criminal nature will be revealed. Some parish insiders told The Citizen there are hopes wealthy insiders who slipped Moynihan piles of money to use as he saw fit will come forward soon to exonerate Moynihan.

They gave it to Moynihan so it wouldn't go to the bishop in Bridgeport's Diocesan headquarters, informants told The Citizen.

Parishioners and Greenwich citizens recall that there appeared to be "two" Michael Moynihan's at work in Greenwich. To wit:

* One Father Moynihan apparently lived a private life with Fawcett in New York. The other, somewhat iconic in the community, presided over the annual Memorial Day Mass for the deceased at St. Michael Cemetery and even swore in Selectman Penny Monahan twice during installation ceremonies for the newly elected Board of Selectmen. That Father Moynihan also was the dashing leader of Greenwich Catholic School, the charismatic darling of parents there, and also active in inter-faith clerical circles and many do-good activities throughout Greenwich.

*The other Father Moynihan was stripped of his priestly privileges by a seemingly shocked Bishop Lori after the Post informed him of the Moynihan/ Fawcett arrangement. On the surface at the time, Lori appeared to be knocked off his feet by an alleged surprise factor inherent in the New York Post's revelations. However, subsequent information from Diocesan insiders indicates that Lori could hardly have been surprised by what the investigative reporters had discovered.

Here is why:

*In the past, according to the diocesan officials in the know, the bishop had been informed of the Moynihan/Fawcett on-going trysts and had, in fact, advised the priest to break off the "inappropriate" arrangement. But Moynihan, taking the advice in, let it roll off his back like water rolls off a duck's feathers. The warning had no effect. He ignored it.

*The warning about the love affair - actually, a private matter with no criminal overtones - had come months-to-years ahead of the January-a-year-ago forced resignation of Moynihan from the pastorship of St. Michael for what were questions about his management of church funds.

At the time, he was also ejected from his post as president of St. Michael Catholic School, a \$20,000 per-year private institution that, among other offerings, includes an equestrian program that had gained permits from the Greenwich Planning and Zoning Commission.

A Greenwich Citizen reporter recalled that during the P&Z public hearing for the permit, Father Moynihan, his striking white hair in an expensive fancy blow-dry style, looked like central casting's idea of a priest. Moynihan told the P&Z about merits of horseback-riding training for school children.

And in response to the reporter's question, Moynihan said he enjoys riding horseback as frequently as the opportunity presents itself.

Threads he wore to the hearing appeared to the reporter to be custom-made or from high-end clothiers. Thickly starched white cuffs were cinched by gold links that glistened when the light caught them when he gestured theatrically.

Responding to the New York Post's revelations, the Diocese of Bridgeport, under the title - Breaking News Around the Diocese on its Web site www.bridgeportdiocese.com - posted a "Statement on Father Michael Moynihan."

Highlights:

"In January 2007, Father Moynihan's resignation as Pastor of St. Michael the Archangel Parish was obtained as the result of the Diocese's discovering off-the-books accounts that he previously hid and repeatedly denied existed."

"Previous to that, allegations of an improper relationship with an individual were vigorously denied by Father Moynihan and could not be substantiated. Nonetheless, Father Moynihan was asked to end all affiliation with that individual to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, so as not to undermine the Church's mission."

"Father Moynihan agreed to end that affiliation but failed to disclose that he was leasing an apartment in Manhattan occupied by the individual.

"When, in the last few days, the Diocese learned, and then confirmed, that the individual occupies an apartment leased by Father Moynihan, Father Moynihan's authorization to function as a priest was withdrawn, including his longstanding service as chaplain at SUNY Maritime College.

"The systematic investigation of all aspects of Father Moynihan's financial administration of St. Michael's continues. The Diocese and the Parish Audit Committee expect to report on the results of this investigation to the Parish in the very near future."

In a related development at presstime, Bridgeport resident John Marshall Lee, chair of Voice of the Faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport, issued a statement titled "Another Church Lesson for Today." The highlights:

"One more chapter in the story of a priest in the Diocese of Bridgeport was revealed on Feb. 4. The New York Post featured new details on Father Michael Moynihan, resigned pastor of St. Michael the Archangel in Greenwich. Financial mismanagement including multiple accounts of \$500,000 or more, disobedience to Diocesan directives, caused his removal in January 2007.

"The Post reported a long-term co-habitation of a one-bedroom midtown, N.Y.C. apartment by the clergyman and a roommate, Michael Fawcett, an actor and singer. Previous denials by Father Moynihan of stories about this relationship proved false in light of recent revelations.

"The Diocese has promptly suspended Father Moynihan from public ministry and sacramental functions. Yet there is no financial report about his case after a year of research and review of parish records by the Diocese on whether there was any financial abuse by Moynihan and, if so, the real extent or nature of it. There has been no statement as to whether legal authorities are involved currently or have been.

"The Diocese continues to make no comments about clergymen who seem to have failed significantly in their vocational promise, as if that was of no matter to the people in the pews. The stories of Michael Jude Fay until 2006 pastor of St. John in Darien and of Moynihan, are troubling in that they combine questions of financial and vocational integrity. What management judgment led a bishop to approve these two priests for responsible Diocesan leadership posts like the Diocesan Tribunal Sexual Abuse and Presbyteral Councils?

*Why does Bishop Lori continue to approve major ongoing legal expenses amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars relative to keeping secret the documents including former Bishop Edward Egan's testimony in the settled Rosado sexual abuse case? Where are these legal appeal monies originating, if not ultimately from the people who occupy the pews today or did so yesterday?