

1-20-08 - Audit results not in a year after scandal broke at Greenwich church

By Hoa Nguyen, Staff Writer, Stamford Advocate (CT)

GREENWICH - In the year since financial discrepancies forced the Rev. Michael Moynihan to resign as pastor of St. Michael Church, Frank Boyle still faithfully performs his duties as an usher, while June Crabtree remains a loyal parishioner.

Boyle and Crabtree, two Greenwich residents who are among the many Moynihan supporters, said that while some people have left the parish since his ouster, others, have chosen to stay at the North Street church.

"It's still my church," Crabtree said. "I just love the church itself."

However, there is a sense that before the parish can move forward, it needs to find out what happened to the \$1 million the Diocese of Bridgeport said Moynihan could not account for. The audit church officials announced a year ago still has not been completed.

"We're hopeful that we can get this behind us very soon," said Joseph Quinn, a Stamford resident who heads up the parish finance council formed shortly after Moynihan's departure. "There are people who are out there who care very deeply, who care very deeply about Father Mike, but also about continuing forward with the parish."

A year ago today, Bishop William Lori asked for Moynihan's resignation because a preliminary financial audit uncovered more than \$500,000 that could not be accounted for.

The diocese has not accused Moynihan of stealing the money, but said he deceived them about keeping two accounts off the books. The former pastor has had problems providing all the necessary documentation to prove the spending went to pay for parish and Greenwich Catholic School needs, the diocese said.

Since a preliminary audit was released a year ago, church officials have said the figure appears closer to \$1 million. Little has been said about the progress of the final audit, though parishioners recently were told the results could be ready in the next several weeks. The diocese blamed the delay on a lack of documentation of spending by the parish and Moynihan.

"We have reassured parishioners that it is winding down and we hope it will be shortly," diocese spokesman Joseph McAleer said of the final audit results.

Diocesan officials said Moynihan's lawyer has been in contact with them about the audit, though they declined to identify him. Messages seeking comment from Moynihan, who now serves as college chaplain at the State University of New York Maritime College, were not returned.

Crabtree said she recently attended a Christmas Mass Moynihan celebrated at the maritime college, where she was reminded of the priest's oratory abilities.

"I listened to every word he said," she said. "He was the most charismatic priest I have ever met."

Crabtree said she did not fault Moynihan for keeping two accounts hidden from the diocese, saying he probably used it to save up money parishioners specifically gave to be used at his discretion and not that of the diocese. She also said later criticism focusing on the luxury \$200,000 powerboat and expensive cars Moynihan owned was unfair because Moynihan's family members bought those items for him.

"People are so quick to judge," she said.

Although Crabtree said she believes fewer parishioners are attending Mass at the church, others, such as Boyle, said the parish does not appear to be much different since Monsignor J. Peter Cullen took over as pastor.

"It takes time, I think for them to put their stamp on how they are going to do things and what they are going to do," Boyle said of Cullen and other parish priests. "I don't know if anything has really been lost in the transition, outside of personal feelings."

Cullen could not be reached for comment.

Greenwich resident Michael Dunne, a parishioner who serves on the finance council, said people are eagerly awaiting the results of the final audit.

"We're waiting on the diocese," he said. "Until they give us more information than they have, things are the same."