

Pilarczyk holds fast despite the ugly rumors

By Peter Bronson
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If gossip is sinful, Cincinnati Catholics may set a record for Hail Marys this month. Rumors about Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk are being passed around like a collection plate.

One said a group at the recent Catholic men's conference would demand Pilarczyk's resignation. It didn't happen.

Then a rumor said Pilarczyk had already resigned but the pope was too ill to find a replacement or doesn't want Pilarczyk to quit.

"I have absolutely no reason to believe that is true," said Cincinnati Archdiocese spokesman Dan Andriacco. "He has never said anything to me that would give a particle of truth to that."

Critics of Pilarczyk point out that other bishops have resigned without warning after top-secret negotiations with the Vatican.

Maybe. But it's probably just wishful thinking. Demands for Pilarczyk's removal are rising. Collections were down 14 percent last year. If the church were a parliament, Pilarczyk might get a vote of no confidence.

"There are two, ever-broadening camps," said Suzanne Schneller. She owns a Catholic bookstore, Innervisions, on Beechmont Avenue, where she hears so much talk, "sometimes I feel like an elevator operator."

Pilarczyk has been accused in news reports and court cases of lying about his knowledge of priests who molested children. As the scandal eats at the church from within, Pilarczyk is blamed.

"I think he has become iconic as a place to go with that," Schneller said. "The attitude is that somebody should have been able to prevent all this."

She believes Pilarczyk is doing his best, and forcing him out would not be consistent with Biblical principles of reconciliation and forgiveness. "I can understand how people can get to that point of view. It's gone on so long, there's an energy for it just to be over. Wave the magic wand and make it go away. But I'm not sure that will put this behind us."

Andriacco said the stories and accusations of lying have been unfair, but because of court-ordered restrictions, he can't defend Pilarczyk with specifics.

"Of course he's aware of it," Andriacco said. "But in what way would this (resignation) get anything behind us? The lawsuits will not go away."

He cites \$700,000 spent on child-protection training and background checks of clergy and volunteers.

But even if Pilarczyk did not deliberately cover up abuse by priests, critics say, he could have done more to keep accused priests away from children.

"Behind the scenes, many priests can't wait until he retires," said David Rose, author of "Goodbye! Good Men," which blamed many of the current church problems on a gay subculture that infiltrated seminaries. "What I find astounding is that the whole aspect of denial still continues."

Pilarczyk often seems to be cold and unsympathetic. He once told Enquirer reporter Dan Horn, "I'm not the kind of person who exudes warmth and goodwill. That's just not the way I am."

"I don't know what he can do about the perception that he's not compassionate," Andriacco said. "I see him every day. I know he is compassionate. I know this weighs on him very heavily."

It's easy to say in hindsight that Pilarczyk could have done more to report abuse and protect children. Even Schneller, who supports him, says "the split has grown wider."

Pilarczyk, 70, has five years until mandatory retirement. I'm not his judge, and the pope's not returning calls. But if gossip is sinful, so is a shepherd who scatters his flock.