

3-8-08 - Archbishop formally seeks dismissal of excommunicated priest in St. Louis
AP, International Herald Tribune (FR)

ST. LOUIS: Archbishop Raymond Burke has recommended the removal of an excommunicated priest at the center of a dispute over a Polish-heritage Roman Catholic church, a newspaper reported Saturday.

Burke formally declared that Rev. Marek Bozek, pastor of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, is improperly representing himself as a Catholic priest and should be removed from the priesthood, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported on its Web site.

The Post-Dispatch said Burke made formal his recommendations after Bozek refused to meet with him Wednesday to discuss their long-running dispute. The archdiocese released the text of Burke's decree in Friday's edition of the local Catholic weekly newspaper, the St. Louis Review.

Burke and St. Stanislaus' lay board have long been at odds over control of the assets of the north St. Louis church. The lay board appointed Bozek in December 2005 in defiance of the archbishop, and that month Burke declared the lay board and Bozek to be excommunicated.

In January 2006, Burke also stripped the parish of its standing as a Roman Catholic church. The matter is under appeal at the Vatican.

Bozek is under fire for allegedly breaking with the church and for participating in an ordination ceremony for two Catholic women in November.

Bozek said Wednesday he would not meet with Burke to answer the charges, saying, "I will not subject myself any more to this humiliating process." Burke said a few hours later that he will proceed with a church judicial process that would lead to Bozek's removal from the priesthood, unless he repents.

Bozek, 33, said he would not change his position and would continue his work at St. Stanislaus.

Msgr. John Shamleffer, the archbishop's adviser on church law, said the decree represents a "finding of guilt" on most of the nine charges against Bozek. Shamleffer said a tribunal of church law experts from outside Missouri will be empaneled to hear the question of Bozek's removal from the ministry.

In his decree, Burke declares that Bozek is violating church law. Among the specific findings are simony, or the taking of money, such as Sunday offerings, in exchange for improperly performing sacraments; simulation of the administration of a sacrament; and illegitimate exercise of priestly ministry. Burke said Wednesday that Bozek has been unable to properly serve his parishioners since he joined the rebel parish.

The tribunal would consider the charge of "schism," which could lead to his dismissal. Shamleffer said the archdiocese still must empanel the tribunal and did not know when it would meet.

Information from: St. Louis Post-Dispatch, <http://www.stltoday.com>