

May 24, 2007 - Darien's St. John Church: Former pastor asks for money

By Susan Shultz, The Darien Times (CT)

Where once there were limousines, now there are legal bills.

Last May, news broke that the former pastor of St. John Parish, the Rev. Michael Jude Fay had been using parish money to fund a lavish lifestyle that was called inappropriate by diocesan leaders. In August, an independent audit of the period between January 2000 and April 2006 revealed an estimated loss of \$1.4 million to the parish, with as much as \$350,000 unaccounted for by the former pastor.

Now the former pastor is seeking help with his legal expenses.

A large amount of St. John's loss was attributed to \$829,000 in Father Fay's credit card charges, including \$130,000 in limousine costs, \$140,000 for meals in restaurants all over the world, and \$37,432 in home furnishings. There were additional payments on other cards issues by Chase, Citibank, Bergdorf Goodman, Saks and Bloomingdale's. The parish money was also used to help pay \$1,500 a month in rent on a New York City apartment and a down payment of \$5,000 for a party for 64 guests at New York's Pierre Hotel.

An additional approximately \$400,000 was moved to a personal secret account opened by Father Fay.

The audit covered the last six years of the parish accounting under Father Fay's leadership. Father Fay had been pastor of St. John's since 1991. A criminal investigation is pending.

Father Fay, in an April 30 letter addressed to "family and friends," has asked for help in paying legal expenses totaling \$115,000.

A copy of the letter, which shows a Fort Lauderdale, Fla. address for Father Fay, was received anonymously by The Darien Times via U.S. mail, with a Stamford postmark.

"As you can only imagine, this past year has been complicated and extremely painful," he wrote.

Father Fay also indicates that the process is close to being finished.

"As proceedings come to a conclusion, I am left with a very difficult legal bill @ [sic] \$115,000," he wrote.

For anyone who chooses to make contributions toward his legal expenses, Father Fay wrote that he would be "very eternally grateful."

As far as how to contribute, Father Fay wrote that any money should be either mailed directly to his law firm, Robinson & Cole, in Hartford, or wired to the law firm's bank account in Hartford as per provided instructions. In either check or wire transfer form, the former pastor indicates a further account in his name to properly route the contribution.

The instructions came with a cautionary statement.

"Please understand, however, that your payment does not create or evidence an attorney-client relationship between you and Robinson & Cole LLP, and they are not providing legal representation to you," he wrote.

There is no indication as to the recipient list for the letter or how many people were on the list.

The Rev. Frank McGrath, pastor of St. John Parish, said that he had "seen copies of the letters around," the parish, but preferred not to comment further.

Dr. Joseph McAleer, spokesman for the Diocese of Bridgeport, said he had no knowledge that such a letter existed.

In the conclusion of the letter, Father Fay wrote “What’s left of me is the same as you always knew me, compassionate and faith filled.”

He also wrote “God bless you and yours and I pray for you always.”
The letter was signed “Father Jude.”

Tom Carson, spokesman for the U.S. Attorney’s office, which is handling the criminal investigation into Father Fay’s financial misconduct, had no comment.