

7-2-08 - With prison less than a week away, Father Fay speaks  
Written by Joshua Fisher, Darien Times (CT)

In less than a week, the Rev. Michael Jude Fay, former pastor of Darien's St. John Roman Catholic Church is to report to federal prison. It has been more than six months since Fay pleaded guilty to stealing more than \$1 million from the church he led for 15 years. Since that plea, his lawyers had successfully delayed Fay's prison reporting date — until last week.

This week, during a phone interview, Fay talked about his prostate cancer, blasted the media (including this newspaper) for its coverage of him and spoke about his relationship with Cliff Fantini. Below are excerpts from the article, which is running in Thursday's Darien Times.

Fay is suffering from prostate cancer, which has spread through his body, he said. He has been in clinical trials at Memorial Sloane-Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan. Initial drugs did not work, he said, and one made his condition worse. But the one he is on now “has worked like a miracle drug.”

Fay has had his prison reporting date moved back three times to accommodate his cancer treatment. The federal judge overseeing the case, Janet Bond Arterton, wanted proof that the Bureau of Prisons could not administer the drug to Fay. And because she had not received that proof, Bond Arterton last week denied Fay's request to delay prison by six more months.

“God forbid I would have to go through with this,” Fay later said of serving his prison term, “my 36-month sentence, or whatever it is, becomes a death sentence for me.”

Fay was sentenced in December to 37 months in federal prison for stealing parishioners' money while serving as pastor of St. John's. He pleaded guilty in September to one count of interstate transportation of money obtained by fraud. He was facing up to 10 years in prison and up to \$250,000 in fines.

In May 2006, it was discovered that Fay had been using church money to support a lavish lifestyle, which included trips to Europe, the Caribbean and other parts of the United States. A private investigation — prompted by another church priest and its bookkeeper, who both left the parish in 2006 — also discovered that Fay was in a romantic relationship with another man. Fay resigned shortly after the news broke.

An August 2006 independent audit commissioned by the Diocese of Bridgeport, reported that St. John Parish lost at least \$1.4 million since 2000. Fay became church pastor in 1991.

Reports about a romantic relationship with another man, have been hurtful, Fay said. He singled out a Darien Times reporter during Tuesday's interview.

“I am reeling off of some of the things that had been said in the newspaper,” Fay said. “One of your writers — Susan Shultz — she has written some very awful assumptions. It has affected many people’s lives. I feel badly about that. In some cases it has destroyed some people’s work.”

Fay was speaking of Cliff Fantini, who has been described as his romantic interest in many news stories and by the private investigator who first broke the St. John’s story.

“Some of that is the so-called relationship with the wedding planner in Philadelphia,” Fay said. “He is not a boyfriend. He is not even a wedding planner. It has affected his life in a terrible way. People Google his name and that is what they get.”

Assumptions of Fay’s relationship with Fantini grew this past spring when the former St. John bookkeeper claimed that in 2003 Fay and Fantini celebrated a commitment ceremony together. The claims of the bookkeeper, Bethany D’Erario, were filed in a civil lawsuit in March.

D’Erario said that Fay and Fantini, who was not named in the lawsuit, participated in a commitment ceremony — officiated by a Philadelphia priest — at the Pierre Hotel that same evening.

“That is a total lie,” Fay said Tuesday.