

7-30-08 - Diocese says Roselle priest gambled \$112,000 in church funds

By Russell Working, Chicago Tribune reporter

Pastor of St. Walter Parish placed on administrative leave.

Church officials have placed a Roselle Roman Catholic priest on administrative leave after he allegedly misappropriated \$112,000 church cash to fund a gambling habit, a spokesman said Wednesday.

Diocese of Joliet Bishop Peter Sartain told worshippers at St. Walter Parish's weekend masses that an audit of bank records turned up evidence that Rev. John Regan had taken the money, spokesman Doug Delaney said.

The allegations came to light when the church's bank reported irregularities to the diocese, Delaney said. Sartain expressed "his deep personal sorrow" in the case.

"Financial records indicate that a clear majority of the misappropriation is related to gambling, indicating an apparent gambling addiction," Delaney reported in a statement. "Father Regan has already begun therapy in relation to that addiction."

Father Regan was ordained in 1989 and held various assignments before becoming pastor of St. Walter in June 2006, the diocese stated. There had been no prior indications of the misuse of funds or that Regan might have an addiction to gambling.

The church, at 130 W. Pine Ave., has 3,000 parishioners, and Sartain announced the administrative leave at masses Saturday and Sunday.

"We've heard from a number of parishioners," Delaney said Wednesday. "I would say it's mixed. Some people are supporting father in the parish, and some people are angry, which is justifiable. We take all calls."

The diocese has already paid the missing sum to the church, and it has insurance to cover the alleged theft, counting on a reimbursement from the insurance company and restitution from Regan, Delaney reported. Parish records are audited every three years, and St. Walter was last scrutinized in 2006.

The diocese announced that authorities are aware of the situation, but it declined to comment on what action might be taken.

A woman answering the phones at St. Walter said the associate pastor, Rev. Mario Quejadas, was out and could not be reached for comment. She referred a reporter to the diocese.

Regan did not immediately respond to e-mails from the Tribune seeking comment.

A biography posted on the church Web site said Regan was raised in Peotone and attended public schools and then the University of Notre Dame, majoring in mathematics. He entered Mundelein Seminary after graduating from Notre Dame in 1985 and was ordained in 1989.

In 2000, Regan opened the Fiat House of Discernment, a residence for men who are exploring a call to priesthood, helping boost the number of diocesan seminarians from 12 in 1993 to 28 in 2005, the Web site stated.