NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Vatican upholds excommunications; priest, parish board to appeal

Chaz Muth Catholic News Service | Jun. 3, 2008

By Chaz Muth, Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON -- The Vatican's doctrinal congregation has backed St. Louis Archbishop Raymond L. Burke's excommunication of members of a parish board of directors and the priest they hired, but the excommunicated Catholics vowed June 2 to appeal that decision.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said the six-member St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish lay board of directors is schismatic and that its pastor, Fr. Marek B. Bozek, has performed invalid sacramental acts while in the parish.

The congregation said it would ask Pope Benedict XVI to laicize Bozek unless he is reconciled with the bishop of his home diocese, Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Mo., within 30 days.

The congregation made the statements in letters sent to Burke May 15. The letters deny the parish board's appeal of the excommunications. U.S. Cardinal William J. Levada, the congregation's prefect, and Archbishop Angelo Amato, its secretary, signed both letters.

St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish was suppressed by the archdiocese over the governing board's refusal to bring parish structures into conformity with canon law. The corporation that runs it is considered to be functioning outside the communion of the church.

In December 2005, Burke declared that the six members of the lay board and Bozek were excommunicated.

In 2002, Archbishop Burke's predecessor, now Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, began negotiating with the parish to reorganize it to comply with church law, which specifies that the primary authority over a parish belongs to the pastor.

When Burke became head of the St. Louis archdiocese in December 2003, he took up the issue, but the parish board and most parishioners resisted, expressing fears that the transfer of authority was a ploy for the archdiocese to close the parish and take control of its assets.

Burke has said the archdiocese's goal is not to gain control over the parish's assets.

St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish was formed in 1880 to serve Polish Catholic immigrants. In 1891 Archbishop Peter Kenrick deeded the parish to a parish corporation run by six lay directors. Establishing a lay governing board was a concession made to some ethnic parishes in the 19th century but is contrary to current church law.

Burke reassigned the parish's priest-administrator in August 2004 and moved the pastoral care of the city's Polish-heritage community to another church. The parish's lay board hired Bozek, who left the Springfield-Cape Girardeau diocese without the permission of his bishop, now-retired Bishop John J. Leibrecht, and began

ministering at St. Stanislaus without Burke's permission.

The Vatican congregation's letters indicate that the parish's appeal of the excommunications was outside the time limits set by canon law for an appeal and didn't comply with other canon law requirements.

The congregation gave the parish's board 30 days to appeal the decision, though it said any appeal would go to "the ordinary session of the cardinal and bishop members of this congregation."

"I think we all feel as though this has been very unjust to declare us excommunicated over a property dispute," Stan Rozanski, a current member of the parish board, told Catholic News Service May 30.

The Vatican's rejection of the parish board's appeal appears to be based mostly on the timeliness of its filing, Rozanski said, and he believes the governing body can prove it did submit its petition within the required time frame.

"Rather than dealing with the issues, [the Vatican] rejected our appeal on superficial matters," he said. "When the archbishop has basically condemned us over a property dispute, it seems ridiculous not to continue the fight."

Burke used his May 23 column in the archdiocesan weekly newspaper, *The St. Louis Review*, to discuss the letters and his decisions in the ongoing dispute. He wrote that he was "obliged" to excommunicate the parish's board members "because of their persistence in schism."

He wrote that Bozek is "a priest not in good standing in the church, for the purpose of attempting to celebrate the sacraments and sacramentals at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, all outside of the communion of the Catholic church."

The congregation's letters to Burke asked him to "offer them [St. Stanislaus board] special pastoral care and kindness, encouraging them to recede from the contumacy of schism."

Polish-born Bozek, 33, acknowledged he did disobey his bishop in abandoning his old post and diocese, but argued that as a priest he didn't feel like he had a choice and had to provide sacraments to a flock "who were abandoned by their shepherd."

The parish current has approximately 550 households, he said.

"If you rape children you will be reassigned, but if you provide sacraments to starved Catholics, you will be excommunicated and laicized," Bozek told CNS, referring in general to the Catholic church's past history of handling some sexual abuse cases.

"I'm very sad," he added. "The recent decision proves we care much more about man-made canon laws, than Jesus' mission to feed the sheep and care for the people."

Though Bozek said he dreamed of becoming a priest from the time he was a child in Poland and regarded his boyhood clergy as heroes, he said he will not abandon members of his parish to save his priestly status, even if it means he would become a member of an "underground church" separated from Rome or become "a monk and live a life of penance."

In his column, Burke wrote: "The situations which have necessitated these decisions are profoundly sad for me as, I am sure, they are for you." He asked Catholics of the St. Louis archdiocese to "pray for the graces of reconciliation and repentance of the board of directors of St. Stanislaus Kostka Corporation and Rev. Marek Bozek."

Source URL (retrieved on *09/23/2014 - 22:44*): http://ncronline.org/news/vatican-upholds-excommunications-priest-parish-board-appeal