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More unrest in Belleville, Ill., diocese

by Robert McClory

NCR Today

The perplexing situation at a small parish in southern Illinois recently caught the attention of the mighty *Washington Post*. In a long opinion piece, Melinda Henneberger regrets that the parish's beloved pastor was ousted in 2012, and it appears there's nothing anybody, including Pope Francis, can do to end the ensuing turmoil. As reported at the time, Fr. Bill Rowe was forced to resign by Belleville Bishop Edward Braxton. His offense was his longtime habit of adding at times his own words and interpretations in place of those in the Roman Missal while saying Mass.

Since then, Braxton appointed a permanent deacon as parish administrator who allegedly had four marriages before entering the diaconate, the *Post* reported. Mass is presumably said by visiting priests. No one is happy -- the parishioners who want a real pastor, the deacon who says most parishioners "want to do nothing but piss and moan," and Rowe, who has not been assigned to another parish. Since the *Post* article appeared, the deacon has resigned due to illness.

Henneberger writes that Pope Francis is unlikely to intervene in this mess "either by firing the bishop or the deacon. Power in the Catholic Church is far more diffuse than generally understood; despite all the focus on Rome, most local decisions are made by local bishops, who are only rarely removed, whether for heresy, financial misconduct or on moral grounds. Even if Braxton, who oversees 116 parishes in Southern Illinois, is so unpopular that a majority of his priests signed a petition urging him to resign in 2008, the church is not a democracy."

Read the whole story here.

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