

Powers Lake Church Remains 'Closed'

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The light remains out in St. James Catholic Church in Powers Lake.

The long criss-crossed boards nailed to the door were removed sometime Saturday night and Sunday morning a typewritten note on rectory stationery was posted on the door saying the Rev. Frederic Nelson had resigned.

Father Nelson could not be reached at the rectory. The Most Rev. Hilary Hacker, bishop of the Bismarck diocese, was not available for comment.

Jean Herseth, a Powers Lake pharmacist and member of the town's Catholic church, said four of the 15 families who attend the church each Sunday showed up for Mass.

"The light was out and Father Nelson didn't appear for the second Sunday in a row," she said. Mrs. Herseth said the 13 worshippers said some prayers and left.

"We called the bishop and he said to make an appointment — but not this week because he would be busy," she explained.

To say that the 70 members of the parish are upset would be gross understatement.

As Mrs. Herseth explains, the bishop wrote to the Powers Lake congregation this past week to express his unhappiness at their "shameful attitude."

Mrs. Herseth said she isn't sure what the bishop meant, but that it probably had something to do with the waiting game played by the parishioners and Father Nelson a week ago Sunday.

A sign appeared on the church door saying "by order of the pastor and bishop this parish is under interdict and closed until further notice."

Powers Lake Catholics went to church, but Father Nelson didn't appear.

They said they called the bishop's office in Bismarck and were told to wait until noon. Father Nelson still didn't show and the parishioners left.

The bishop's office later explained that the bishop had nothing to do with posting signs on the church door and that Father Nelson wasn't in Powers Lake because he was on vacation on the West Coast.

The bishop's office explained that "interdict" usually meant that sacraments will be refused.

The bishop's office said it was not responsible for signs appearing on the church or the criss-crossed boards. Who removed the boards? Who put up the sign that Father Nelson had resigned? Two as yet unanswered questions.

The problem may have something to do with two of Father Nelson's recent edicts.

The local priest decided "R" and "X" films had no place in Powers Lake and acted as trustee in the purchase of the town's only theater. For several months now, film fare has been non-adult.

Next was Father Nelson's refusal of Mass to women with uncovered heads and skirts which rose to the knees when they sat.

The Rt. Rev. Msgr. W. F. Garvin, Bismarck, said Monday he believes the real problem in Powers Lake is the lack of communication between Father Nelson and the bishop.

For Father Nelson to officially resign, he explained, the priest normally would have to come to Bismarck for an interview with the bishop.

But Msgr. Garvin, like the parishioners in Powers Lake, said he hasn't seen or heard from Father Nelson in some time.