

Bishop removes Powers Lake priest's authority

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Staff Writer

A Powers Lake, N.D., priest who has had difficulties with three of his Catholic bishops since 1953 has been stripped of his priestly responsibilities.

The news that the Rev. Frederic Nelson of the Shrine of Our Lady of the Prairies has had his duties revoked appeared in the March issue of Dakota Catholic Action, the official publication of the Bismarck diocese.

In a footnote to the announcement, Bishop John F. Kinney added, "A priest needs the official approval of the local bishop for the authorization to preach

and celebrate the sacraments of the Catholic Church for the lawfulness and in some cases the validity of such sacraments."

Nelson was unavailable for comment.

In Wilton, N.D., the Rev. John Owens, diocesan director of information for Bishop Kinney, said he had not spoken to Nelson since publication of the "conferral of the faculties," as it is known, and Nelson has refused so far to give a press statement or talk to diocesan officials.

Owens said, "I want to make clear that the bishop does not call this a final action. He hopes that Father Nelson will reconsider his position with the church

and he will continue to be available for discussions about it."

Nelson, a native of Portland, Ore., was ordained in 1950 at Bismarck and served in New England, N.D., before being assigned to St. Leo's parish in Minot, N.D., in 1951.

In 1953, Owens said, then-Bishop Lambert Hoch of Bismarck assigned Nelson to serve St. James Catholic Church in Powers Lake.

Hoch's successor, Bishop Hilary B. Hacker, asked Nelson to put more emphasis on his own parish, end organization of the Shrine of our Lady, stop national appeals for funds and stop plans for a retirement home (now St.

Olaf's Retirement Home) and a Catholic grade and high school in Powers Lake.

"Before Bishop Hacker was succeeded by Bishop Kinney he relieved Father Nelson of the St. James assignment," Owens said.

"The St. James Church is without a priest and the priest serving the Powers Lake mission parish is the Rev. Chris Walter, Our Lady of Rosary Church in Stanley, N.D."

Owens said Bishops Hoch and Hacker had difficulties with Nelson, arising from the time of the Vatican Council II.

"As the Council ended in 1963,

there was a revision of the way in which the Mass was to be offered," he said.

Owens said some priests objected to the change and clung to the old procedure despite Vatican direction. "But we're all subject to authority," he said. "One man can't be bigger than the church."

While the Mass may still be celebrated in Latin, Owens said, it must be according to the Canon Law. The old Tridentine Mass does not meet requirements of the Canon Law.

The diocesan newspaper announcement, which Owens said was deliberately low-key, states

"The Shrine of Our Lady of the Prairies is not affiliated or associated with the Diocese of Bismarck.

"No authorization or approval is granted to the shrine or its associated institutions by the diocese. Catholic marriages are celebrated in Powers Lake only at the parish Church of St. James (Stanley.)"

Walter said the action by Bishop Kinney can mean some increases in Walter's service load.

"It certainly will mean some increases in baptisms, in anointing of the sick, confessions and possibly a few extra marriages," Walter said.