

St. Bridget's a Boston replay?

By RICHARD WHITMIRE
Times-Union

The priest who ignited controversy at St. Bridget's Church by firing three staff members brought about similar controversy at his last assignment in Boston, say the people he worked with in Boston.

Before coming to Rochester about two months ago, the Rev. Dozia Wilson was parish priest at St. Joseph's Church in the Roxbury section of Boston. He was there for three years, beginning in May 1976, and he left there in May 1979.

St. Joseph's is similar to St. Bridget's. It's a small black parish in a black



Wilson

neighborhood with a congregation of about 100, and the parish is supported almost entirely by the Boston Archdiocese.

After leaving Boston, Wilson had no parish assignment for about seven months, until he was assigned to St. Bridget's Church, 175 St. Bridget's Drive. Wilson says he was on sabbatical during the interim.

ON FEB. 25, Wilson fired three of the St. Bridget's staff, including Sister Grace Miller, who had worked at the church for two and a half years and is well-known for her social activism in the black community around the church. Since then, Wilson has changed the locks on the church and now the three can't enter the church without his knowledge.

Both the firings and the changed locks are similar to incidents that happened at the Boston parish.

Wilson said he fired the St. Bridget's staff

because the church needed a new religious emphasis. He said the staff was unwilling to go in the new direction which emphasizes religious programs.

The firings have triggered a protest by many St. Bridget's parishioners, who worry the church may eventually close.

Clergy and lay people who knew and worked with Wilson in Boston say Wilson brought severe controversy to the church there. They say he was asked to leave by the Boston Diocese. However, Wilson says he chose to leave after staying there for three years. Bishop Thomas V. Daley of Boston was unavailable for comment.

IN AN INTERVIEW yesterday, Wilson refused to discuss most questions about Boston.

"I'm not going to get involved with the Boston scene. I don't think it relates to here," he said. "At this point the issue is being over-

worked, and the press involvement in this is what is continuing the hassle."

But there are some similarities in Wilson's actions last month at St. Bridget's and his Boston experience. Here are some of the things that happened in Boston, according to the people Wilson worked with:

□ Soon after arriving in Boston, Wilson started firing staff members at St. Joseph's, according to one priest who worked with Wilson in Boston.

"What he does is get rid of the people there who are any threat to him," he said. "And then he builds up a staff of loyal people."

□ Parents from the St. Joseph's Community School, which is partly supported by the diocese, say Wilson tried to undermine their school by withholding money.

Please turn to back of section

St. Bridget's a Boston replay?

From page 1B

In October 1978 about 70 students, teachers and board members staged a demonstration in front of the offices of the Archdiocese of Boston, in an attempt to talk with Bishop Daley about the problems they were having with Wilson. Jonathan Todd, then chairman of the school's finance committee, said he tried to convince officials of the diocese that Wilson was mismanaging diocesan funds intended for the school. But he said the diocese was ignoring their letters and phone calls.

"It was like pulling teeth," said Todd, who is finance director for the Greater Roxbury Development Corp. "We protested and sat outside, with the kids until they saw us." After the demonstration, Wilson put locks and chains on the school doors to keep children out of the school, said Todd.

At the time, Wilson told the parents it was because they had complained about rodents in the school. But Monica Peters, chairperson of the St. Joseph's Parent Board of Directors, said the locks and chains were put on because they complained to the diocese.

Todd said the demonstration led to a series of meetings with Daley, and two meetings with Humberto Cardinal Medeiros, archbishop of Boston.

THE PRESSURE over the school issue and other issues in the parish resulted in Wilson leaving Boston, Todd said. But Wilson denies that's why he left Boston.

According to sources in Boston, the reason for the conflict is that Wilson wanted control of the school, which is not a parochial school and is only partially funded by the church through a special arrangement with the diocese.

Todd said because Wilson withheld money from the school the school had to raise tuition to cover the debt, and school enrollment dropped from 200 to about 100.

□ When Wilson arrived, St. Joseph's parish was not in debt, but when he left three years later the church had a debt of \$50,000, said one priest there.

"On one hand he may not have been living differently than any suburban pastors, but to come and do that in an urban setting where people are struggling for existence and funding is short, I just found that hard to understand," said the priest, who asked to remain anonymous.

Asked about the debt, Wilson said, "The church was always in debt."

□ The school petitioned the National Office of Black Catholics to investigate the situation, said Stephen Ellis of Boston, secretary of the organization, who, at one point during the controversy, lived in the St. Joseph rectory with Wilson.

ELLIS SAID he didn't know the outcome of the investigation, and the Rev. Cyprian Rowe, executive director of the organization in Washington, D.C., declined comment.

But several sources in Boston said the effect of the investigation was blunted when Wilson threatened to sue the people involved.

However, Ellis said, "To this day the parish has never recovered in terms of the division that was caused (by Wilson)."

Mrs. Peters from the Parent Board of Directors said, "The thing is they (the Boston diocese) protected him. To this day they still do not admit Dozia Wilson was wrong. But we came together and told them if they didn't do something we would go to the media. We didn't do that because he finally left."

Todd said, "We had to threaten that if they didn't remove him that I and other parents would remove him, and at that point they started scurrying around and doing things."

Wilson is from the Albany Diocese. Before coming to Boston he was associate pastor of an

Albany parish, working mostly with Irish parishioners.

THE REV. JOHN J. ROONEY, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Albany, worked with Wilson at the parish and he said there were no problems with Wilson there.

"His work was fine and he had fine rapport here...I'm almost dead sure there were no incidents in this parish when he was here."

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of the Albany Diocese could not be reached for comment, but the Rev. Michael Farano, chancellor of the diocese, said he does not think Hubbard recalled Wilson from Boston.

"Wilson said he was leaving (Boston) and asked for help from Hubbard to find another place," Farano said.

Asked if the Boston diocese requested Wilson to leave, Farano said: "I'm saying that Bishop Hubbard responded to Wilson's request. You wanted a statement, that's it."

Bishop Matthew Clark could not be reached for comment yesterday or today, but the Rev. Charles Latus, secretary to Clark, declined comment on questions, except to say: "All I know is that Father Wilson, out of a desire to work in a predominantly black parish setting, came to us."

"The bishop is pleased to have Father Wilson," he said. "He invited him here to minister to the black community."