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Delaware crime: Wilmington pastor charged with embezzlement

AG's Office: \$358,000 missing from parishes

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Prosecutors did not indicate why they believe Breslin took the money.

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"Stealing from church funds is an abuse of trust and a criminal offense which we take very seriously," Delaware Attorney General Beau Biden said in a statement.

Biden, the vice president's son, said through a spokesman that despite his father's association with the church, he does not feel he has a conflict of interest in the case.

After Breslin was released on \$40,000 unsecured bail, Haley said his client "denies any criminality in any way." He said that Breslin had been cooperating with authorities. He is "very disappointed" by the indictment and believes the situation is all the result of a misunderstanding.

As of Wednesday morning, Breslin was still listed on the diocesan website as a pastor, but by afternoon Bishop W. Francis Malooly issued a statement indicating the Rev. Leonard Klein had been named the temporary administrator of St. Mary's and St. Patrick's parishes.

St. Mary's, meanwhile, is one of the 28 parishes in the diocese facing a priest sex-abuse lawsuit. The plaintiff in the case is an anonymous "Jane Coe" who charges she was molested as a 13-year-old by the Rev. Edward Carley, who has since died.

In a statement about the Breslin case, Bishop Malooly said Wednesday he will be at both St. Mary's and St. Patrick's this weekend "to lend my support and assist in any way I can."

The bishop said he also would be meeting with diocesan staff and lay leadership in the two parishes to discuss "immediate needs."

In a Dec. 2009 hearing related to the Diocese of Wilmington's bankruptcy filing, diocese Chief Financial Officer Joe Corsini said a priest had taken \$35,000, but declined to identify the parish that had been victimized or the priest and said the incident had not

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been reported to police because it was still being investigated. On Wednesday, diocesan spokesman Bob Krebs declined comment when asked if the priest referenced by Corsini was Breslin.

In that same hearing, Corsini said there had also been two thefts by lay employees, one of \$20,000 that had been reported to police and one of approximately \$250,000 that had not been reported because it also was being investigated.

Krebs said Wednesday that he did not believe the alleged thefts by Breslin would have any effect on the diocese's bankruptcy proceedings -- because they involved parishes, not the diocese -- or the ongoing efforts by diocesan officials to reach a "global settlement" to resolve all outstanding priest-abuse lawsuits against both the diocese and its parishes.

Located behind St. Patrick's church is the St. Patrick's Center Inc., a nonprofit that helps feed the poor. The organization shares a name and leases space from St. Patrick's but is otherwise unaffiliated with the parish or the diocese, according to a spokesman, and its funds and funding are separate from the parish.

Contact Sean O'Sullivan at 324-2777 or sosullivan@delawareonline.com.

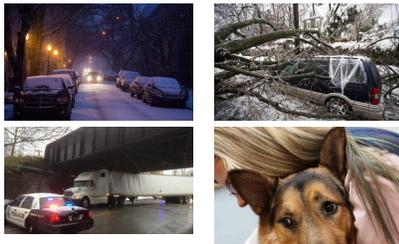
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