



## St. Bridget's rift healing

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Prayers, hugs, handshakes, coffee and doughnuts continued the healing process for some parishioners Sunday at St. Bridget's Catholic Church, a congregation torn by a controversy over its priest and a friend who had been living in the rectory.

The small parish southeast of Rochester has been split for the last few months because of sexual-oriented tapes and magazines found in the church rectory about six months after the Rev. Mark Santo and a friend, Carl Myrick, came to the parish.



The materials, allegedly owned by Myrick, 43, were seized by the Olmsted County Sheriff's Department and reviewed. Myrick was charged last week in Olmsted District Court with possession of child pornography. He has been out of the area for the last two weeks, reportedly in Florida.

Some parishioners, however, don't believe the controversy is over. They want a fuller investigation by the Winona Diocese of which St. Bridget's is a part. They also want an apology from the priest as an acknowledgement that the materials should not have been in a church rectory.

Parishioners have known about Myrick and the materials for a few months and the Winona Catholic Diocese said it investigated the matter, finding Santo had not viewed the materials and that he is innocent.

At Mass Sunday, Santo and parishioners prayed for everyone involved, including Myrick, and asked God's help in healing any wounds.

As it turned out, the gospel for Sunday's Mass was the story of Lazarus, which Santo used in a short, emotional sermon. He pointed out the story deals with raising a dead man to life and said he hopes that the parish will rise and heal itself.

During the service, Santo added a special prayer for Myrick.

After Mass, some parishioners greeted Santo with a hug. One supported him because she said: "We are a church, we need to forgive and move on. That is what we are taught."

She said she loves the small parish because it feels like a community. "That's why it would sadden me if it would fall apart," she said.



reports were over blown or yellow journalism."

They also question the validity of the criminal charge against Myrick, too, because all the tapes seized were returned and only one magazine was mentioned in the complaint.

They said they found Myrick helpful and noted that he planted many of the shrubs around the church and some flowers that are just beginning to bloom.

Some of the parishioners are still angry and hurt, Santo said, but it seems to be a small group. Attendance at Masses this weekend was normal, or a bit larger than usual for the parish with about 150 families, he said. A few dozen people stopped in the parish hall after Sunday's 9 a.m. mass for a continental breakfast of juice, fruit, doughnuts and coffee.

Some parishioners, however, said the continental breakfast showed how divided the parish is. A regular breakfast had been scheduled, but so many people aren't coming or stopped helping that it was changed to a lighter meal, they said.

The people don't fault Santo with helping a friend, they say, but are upset and hurt at the material and what they believe is a cover-up by the diocese.

"The fact that Father Santo was caring for his ill friend, Mr. Myrick, is immaterial and not the issue," said Jo Russell, who has been a member for 25 years. "Father Santo believes Mr. Myrick's personal life should have been respected because it did not involve other people."

Russell added Santo "should not have condoned immoral, illegal, homosexual, pornographic material in the rectory."

Russell said parishioners were told Dec. 8 that the materials were removed from the rectory. But when the sheriff's department searched the rectory 10 days later, the materials were still there. "Was there really an investigation?" she said.

Bill Kuisle, another longtime parish member, believes the diocese did a poor job of investigating. "I am very disappointed in the way that church has handled this," he said. He wants the bishop to look further into the matter.

His mother, Mary Kuisle, said the matter has indeed hurt attendance. "It seems like every week, a family or two drops out," she said. She knows of about 20 people who have stopped coming to St. Bridget's. "It's causing hard feelings all over." @et