



'Unbelievable' dealing\$: Catholic group charges pension-fund abuses

By Marie Szaniszlo
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A group of outraged Catholics plans to file a complaint with the state Attorney General's Office alleging that millions of dollars donated by parishioners over nearly two decades for priests' pensions were used for other purposes.

"Our parish was probably among the most generous. And yet there was a conscious decision (by the archdiocese), again and again, not to contribute to the (pension) fund," said Mary Beth Carmody of St. Jeremiah's parish in Framingham. "Unbelievable is the word."

Late last year, church officials said the archdiocese's pension plans were underfunded by \$80 million - a figure that some say could exceed \$100 million with interest - including \$55 million for clergy members.

At the time, officials attributed much of the plans' problems to fluctuations in the stock market and an increase in both the number and life expectancy of retiring priests.

As of July 1, 2004, the archdiocese had 590 active clergy, with an average age of 58, and 265 retired priests, with an average age of 77, according to an April 2005 draft document titled, "Senior Priest Policy: The Need for Change."

The same document, however, indicated that no contributions were made to the priests' pension fund from 1986 to 2002.

Instead, Christmas and Easter donations made by parishioners for the clergy were used for priests' "medical needs."

Jack Scalcione, a member of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, an East Boston parish with an ongoing sit-in, said: "These guys are just caught out there with their vows of obedience, and they're being shafted."





In a written statement yesterday, Terrence Donilon, a spokesman for the archdiocese, referred to the complaint parishioners intend to file, saying, "I cannot comment on something that has not been submitted nor anyone has seen. I therefore dispute out of hand any broad-based characterizations or accusations based on these factors."

Parishioners called on the archdiocese yesterday to prove that by releasing a detailed accounting of the money donated by parishioners since 1986, and demonstrating why it wasn't used for its intended purpose.








"It's a continuation of what I would consider a crumbling organization, except the organization happens to be the archdiocese instead of Enron," said Jon Rogers, a financial planner and parishioner at St. Francis Cabrini parish in Scituate, referring to the sexual-abuse scandal that led to much of the archdiocese's financial troubles.

"When you see a company collapse, the first people to get hurt are the shareholders before it begins to cannibalize its employees. It's like they created this death spiral, and it looks like they're going to follow it to the end," Rogers said.

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