

Greek Orthodox priest at odds with leaders over inquiry into cleric leaving post

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Chicago Tribune

MAY 8, 2015, 8:22 PM

A priest who rebelled against his superiors in the Chicago Greek Orthodox Church by supporting his parish's pursuit of a criminal investigation into another clergy member will leave his position at the end of June.

The Rev. Angelo Artemas, who formerly led Sts. Peter and Paul Greek Orthodox Church in Glenview, confirmed that he was recently released from his duties at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Milwaukee "after two years of frustration" and will join a parish based out of Atlanta.

"After two years of fighting for this parish ... I have given up," said Artemas, after informing congregants of his pending departure.

The priest said he and his congregation have been under intense pressure from leaders of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago since members of his Milwaukee church raised concerns in 2013 about their former priest, the Rev. James Dokos.

Dokos, who also served at Sts. Peter and Paul, was eventually charged with felony theft over his alleged mishandling of a \$1.2 million trust fund that was left to the Milwaukee church. He is awaiting trial.

The criminal charge against Dokos, a Chicago resident, came only after metropolis leaders determined in their own initial investigation that no trust fund money was misspent. They also ousted the parish council president of the Glenview church when he requested that Dokos be placed on leave until the criminal probe was completed.

Officials in the metropolis said Artemas was not forced to resign and noted that he had requested reassignment before.

Artemas acknowledged that he had been denied three requests in the past three years to return to the Chicago area.

"When I was told by email by (Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos) that there is not a future for (me) at metropolis in Chicago, I saw the writing on the wall," Artemas said.

Metropolis leaders said in a statement released earlier this year that they "never intimidated, threatened or harassed anyone. ... The assignment of Parish Priests (is) an internal matter of the Church."

Artemas, who lives in Northbrook, said he initially agreed to change places with Dokos, 63, who was a longtime pastor at Annunciation before he was transferred to Sts. Peter and Paul in 2012. Artemas had served more than 10 years at Sts. Peter and Paul. Artemas said he was told that Dokos wanted to move closer to where his wife worked, and that metropolis leaders suggested the change would be "good for both of us."

When he arrived, he said, he realized the church was in much worse financial condition than he had been told. The church has defaulted on its mortgage and cannot afford his salary, he said.

Both churches are among 58 parishes in several Midwestern states overseen by the Metropolis of Chicago, all part of a larger archdiocese based in New York.

After Dokos left Milwaukee, church members there discovered alleged irregularities in how he spent a trust fund created by longtime parishioners that he controlled. Dokos is accused of improperly writing checks for tens of thousands of dollars from the fund to benefit himself, friends and family and to pay his personal credit card bills, according to a criminal complaint filed in Milwaukee.

His trial is scheduled in October.

Controversy stemming from the Dokos case has attracted national interest on Greek Orthodox websites and led to an online petition calling for metropolis leaders to step down. Some Glenview parishioners — including a member of the parish's stewardship committee — blame decreased membership and waning contributions to Sts. Peter and Paul on the ongoing scandal.

"The removal of (Father) Angelo and his replacement with Fr. James Dokos by (Bishop Demetrios) has caused irreparable and immeasurable harm to my parish," George Karcazes wrote in a letter to the editor published recently in *The National Herald*, a Greek Orthodox newspaper.

Karcazes stated that 54 families left the church — 40 of them as a direct result of the Dokos scandal — and that contributions dropped by about \$255,000 during the two years Dokos served there.

As a result of the letter, Karcazes has been asked to step down from his position as a member of the stewardship committee by the current parish priest, the Rev. Panagiotis Boznos, Karcazes said.

In 2013, Annunciation's parish council, whose members include Artemas and congregants, began to raise concerns about Dokos' handling of the trust fund. Milwaukee authorities eventually brought charges against Dokos, alleging that he improperly spent more than \$100,000 from the fund on himself, family members and gifts to other church officials and to pay his personal credit card bills.

The metropolis's investigation "reached the conclusion" that the funds were used in accordance with the trust fund provisions and its benefactor, according to a letter Demetrios wrote to Annunciation leaders. Annunciation officials then contacted the Milwaukee district attorney's office, resulting in an investigation that heightened tensions between metropolis leaders and members of both the Milwaukee and Glenview churches.

Records show Dokos wrote checks from the fund to other church leaders, including Bishop Demetrios, who received \$6,700. The bishop has described the money as gifts given as part of Greek Orthodox tradition.

Last July, Milwaukee officials formally charged Dokos with felony theft in Milwaukee.

The Dokos case has served as a lightning rod for critics of Demetrios and his superior, Metropolitan Iakovos.

An online petition, listing more than 600 signatories including Artemas and several other priests, asks for the New York archbishop to remove the Chicago bishop from his position and seek the retirement of Iakovos.

The Rev. William Christy, who recently retired from part-time ministerial work at Sts. Peter and Paul, is among those who signed the petition.

"I think of the bishop and all the checks he signed and deposited. There is no way he can think that is OK to do that," Christy said. "There has not been one word from Bishop Demetrios on what did he do with all those thousands of dollars of checks he cashed. Did he return them?"

Demetrios was traveling in Greece and could not be reached. Metropolis representatives were not available to respond to the question of whether the bishop, who has not be accused of any wrongdoing, returned the money he received from Dokos.

A week before Greek Orthodox Easter, the metropolis posted a letter on its website in support of Iakovos and Demetrios that was attributed to the priests in the metropolis.

"There were a lot of things that were circulating," said the letter's author, the Rev. John Ketchum of Racine, Wis. "We felt if we didn't say something, if we were silent, then we were agreeing (with the criticism of the leaders). We felt we needed to put forward our love and support for Metropolitan Iakovos and Bishop Demetrios."

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