

Okotoks priest faces fraud charge

Warrant issued in Ontario for Fr. Mark Buckley

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CALGARY HERALD

There is an outstanding warrant issued in Ontario for the arrest of an Okotoks Catholic priest to answer a charge of fraud over \$5,000.

Father Mark Patrick Buckley was charged in 1998 after it was found that \$69,635.01 was involved in "unusual transactions" at his previous posting at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Grafton, part of the Diocese of Peterborough.

Before the charge was laid, Buckley left Ontario to work for Calgary's Bishop Frederick Henry, who taught him at St. Peter's Seminary in London, Ont.

"We are aware of the accusation against Father Buckley," said Calgary Diocese spokesman Father John

Schuster. "As far as we are concerned, he is innocent until proven guilty."

North Humberland Ontario Provincial Police detachment Const. Susan Storry confirmed the fraud charge remains outstanding. However, John L. Hill, Buckley's Toronto lawyer, said "the police have been ordered not to act on the warrant until it is reviewed by the Crown attorney's office."

Peterborough's Bishop James Doyle said the charge against Buckley arose entirely out of the "perceived irregularities" in the parish accounts at Grafton. His diocese does not want the criminal charge pursued, he said, and Buckley has agreed to repay the missing funds.

Buckley's story first came to the Herald from a former parishioner, Barbara MacKerrow, who claims she lost \$202,000 from her deceased husband's estate to Buckley. According to legal documents provided by MacKerrow, Buckley declared bankruptcy in 1997 owing \$382,541.11.

According to MacKerrow, Buckley first approached her to invest in the pet stores, in church, in February 1995



Father Mark Buckley

after the death of her husband.

When MacKerrow filed a civil court action to recover her money, Buckley

filed for bankruptcy. Some time later, disgruntled parishioners commissioned an independent audit of the parish accounts.

"I was aware of the financial difficulties Buckley was in before he came to us," said Ron Wallace, superintendent of Christ the Redeemer School District in Okotoks, Buckley's employer.

"It was my judgment then, and it is now, that (the charges) would not impede him in his duties. He has performed excellent service for us and has my full confidence as a Catholic educator."

The problem with parish funds was not discovered until Cobourg chartered accountant James Berg audited the parish accounts in June 1997.

The audit alleged a number of "unusual transactions involving parish funds" totalling \$69,635.01. The audit alleged there was \$6,356.39 paid toward a cottage, \$27,535.24 paid out to "cash" for a personal bank account or credit cards, and a \$3,500 loan to a nearby hair salon.

Buckley refused to comment to the Herald on this matter.

'INFO' LINE

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