



News from the
Catholic Diocese of Palm Beach

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NEWS RELEASE

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Statement of the Diocese of Palm Beach Regarding the Criminal Case of Rev. Francis B. Guinan

The Diocese of Palm Beach has been informed that the jury has found the Reverend Francis P. Guinan criminally guilty of charges of grand theft. While respecting the rights of the accused, and not wishing to interfere with the criminal process, the diocese is relieved that the jurors were not swayed by the inaccurate presentation of the defense. This defense portrayed a false notion that diocesan policy permits priests to spend up to \$50,000 of parish funds for personal use. This is blatantly false. The policy referred to is one that gives **pastors** the ability to spend up to this amount, exclusively for church purposes such as parish building renovations and the like. Above this amount, diocesan permission is required.

When diocesan officials received credible evidence against Father Guinan regarding financial impropriety at St. Vincent Ferrer Parish, which pointed to using parish monies not in keeping with his priestly ministry, Bishop Barbarito immediately withdrew his ability to administer financially the parish of St. Vincent Ferrer and approved a Diocesan investigation, which included an independent audit. The Delray police, who had simultaneously received an anonymous complaint about Father Guinan, and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement launched a separate lengthy investigation with which the Diocese of Palm Beach fully cooperated at all times. In the course of the investigation, evidence was also uncovered against Fr. Skehan, Fr. Guinan's retired predecessor at St. Vincent Ferrer. Because of the evidence uncovered at St. Vincent Ferrer, Bishop Barbarito also authorized an investigation at St. Patrick Parish, where Fr. Guinan had previously served as pastor.

Bishop Barbarito wishes to assure all, that independent of this matter, a policy of regular thorough biennial reviews of every diocesan entity by independent audit firms, and a system of handling parish funds were established and promulgated in March 2005. Parishes are required to follow these policies. The current policies and procedures are intended to assist parishes and finance committees in complying with diocesan norms. They are also intended to assist pastors in the financial administration of their parishes.

In light of Father Guinan's conviction and Fr. Skehan's recent guilty plea, Bishop Barbarito will continue to restrict Fr. Guinan and Fr. Skehan from public ministry. They will be expected to lead lives in reparation for their actions.

The trial and conviction of Fr. Guinan today may be a painful reminder of the feelings of betrayal and anger, especially for the parishioners of St. Vincent and St. Patrick Parishes. Bishop Barbarito wishes to commend the people of these parishes and the diocese for their patience and continued faith in the long period since this matter began. On behalf of all priests, the Bishop apologizes for the scandalous behavior which has occurred.

The Diocese of Palm Beach has successfully sought and intends to continue to seek restitution of stolen funds. We will continue to do our best to right a wrong that should never have occurred and is a grave aberration from the upright conduct of the majority of the good priests of our diocese. The Bishop asks for your continued prayers for all involved, including Fathers Guinan and Skehan. Relying on God, the ultimate judge and source of healing, let us move forward with the same faith that is the hallmark of our diocese.