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In West Orange, a church divided

[The Star-Ledger](#) ^ | Tuesday, December 28, 2004 | JEFF DIAMANT

Posted on 12/28/2004, 5:00:22 PM by [CatherineSiena](#)

In West Orange, a church divided

Founder's death leaves traditional congregation in dispute over successor

At the church founded by the late Rev. Paul Wickens, Mass is always said in Latin. Women still cover their heads, and people receive the host in their mouths from a priest, never touching it with their own hands.

To say that St. Anthony of Padua, the church Wickens started nine years ago, is a haven for traditionalists is an understatement. And with his death this year, the search for just the right successor to the old founder has split the parishioners of this unusual West Orange church.

At a time when they would rather rally around a new priest, hundreds have boycotted the chapel for makeshift Masses at a Ramada Inn in East Hanover and a VFW Post and the Wellesley Inn in Fairfield.

The schism opened soon after the July death of Wickens, whose opposition to the historic 1960s reforms of the Second Vatican Council attracted hundreds of other "traditionalist" Catholics who like him felt the changes sullied ancient Catholic traditions and practices.

Modern Catholics would find some practices at St. Anthony's obscure. But when Wickens died, parishioners wanted a replacement who shared their views. They also wanted the chapel kept separate from the Newark Archdiocese, which accepted the 1960s reforms and suspended Wickens after a 1980s dispute stemming from his opposition to Catholic sex education.

Wickens remained a vocal critic of the archdiocese, calling Archbishop John J. Myers too liberal even though Myers is generally known nationwide as a staunch conservative.

The current boycotters say they have nothing personal against Wickens' replacement, the Rev. John Perricone, a conservative Catholic in his own right who in many ways seems a perfect fit for St. Anthony's.

Perricone, who started at St. Anthony's Dec. 1, is founder of the group "Christifidelis," which is dedicated to the Latin Mass.

Still, many longtime St. Anthony's parishioners reject him because he is an archdiocese priest, officially placed on loan to the chapel by the archdiocese.

At his last archdiocese post, Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Orange, Perricone celebrated Mass in the modern way that traditionalists deplore, in English, facing the pews, and letting lay people touch the host.

"This Perricone, he's on both waters, he offers both Masses -- the Latin Mass and the modern Mass. And we do not accept that," said Elvira Valdez, who joined St. Anthony's in 1998 and has attended motel Masses.

"We only accept the ancient Mass, the old Mass, the Latin Mass. That's why Father Wickens stayed clear cut away from the archdiocese, because they would make him accept the modern Mass as equal to the old Mass."

Valdez and others say they fear that Perricone's hiring will lead to a full-scale takeover by the archdiocese, and that Mass in English may eventually be allowed there.

While reforms stemming from the Second Vatican Council are widely regarded as more inclusive of lay people, the members of St. Anthony's think they watered down the faith, and that translations from Latin are inadequate.

Since Perricone started, some longtime St. Anthony's churchgoers have traveled long distances to attend other traditionalist churches, such as St. Jude's in Eddystone, Pa.

Locally, the latest alternative Masses were at the VFW Post in Fairfield Saturday, for Christmas, and Sunday, drawing about 200.

DUELING SERMONS

A similar crowd attended a motel Mass in Fairfield earlier this month, where people knelt on the green patterned carpet of a kneeler-less conference room and received Communion from the Rev. John Fullerton, flown in for the occasion from Missouri.

Fullerton is with the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, which was founded by French Bishop Marcel Lefebvre, who was excommunicated after refusing to accept the 1960s reforms.

Attendance at St. Anthony's, meanwhile, has been lighter than before Wickens died, and Perricone's supporters hope he can draw back those who left.

"If the diocese leaves us alone, there'll be no problems here," said Bill Brooks of Pompton Plains. "And the people will hopefully come back. Father Perricone is a good priest."

In his first sermon at St. Anthony's, the Rev. Perricone left no doubt about his beliefs, praising Wickens, whose archdiocese suspension lasted until he died.

"I am privileged," Perricone said, "to be able to bring forward the sacred traditions that Father Wickens has ... preserved."

Yet many who stopped attending St. Anthony's feel the church's three board members, who approached the archdiocese about Perricone, disregarded Wickens' wishes by bringing in an archdiocese priest.

A week ago, a group of them filed suit in Essex County Chancery Court, saying the statute under which the church was incorporated lets all members, not just trustees, pick the priest.

On both sides of the St. Anthony's dispute, parishioners say the church should honor Wickens' wishes. But they relate different versions of what he wanted.

Some, allowing that Wickens praised Perricone, said he also thought Perricone's archdiocese ties tainted him. Others say Wickens wanted the church turned over to the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X.

DISPUTED TAPE

At a church meeting on Nov. 14, St. Anthony's board members -- Andrew Flock, Larry Small and Bob Ciuffreda, elected the day Wickens died in a previously scheduled election -- played a tape of Wickens praising Perricone shortly before his death.

But some who heard the tape at the meeting have complained it had only excerpts of the conversation. In what was played, Wickens did not address Perricone's archdiocese ties, a subject that surely was of interest to him, board critics said.

Asked about that, Al Wickens, the priest's brother, said that Paul Wickens never spoke about the archdiocese or the Society of Saint Pius X on June 24, the day he was taped.

"From that conversation, which was seven or eight minutes ... was a clear indication that if Father Perricone could possibly come, it would be a perfect fit for the chapel," said Al Wickens, who said he was present when the taping occurred.

While the arrangement with the archdiocese strikes many longtime St. Anthony's members as improper, to others it straddles the right side of a thin line. Archdiocese spokesman James Goodness said that while Perricone is considered "on loan" from the archdiocese, St. Anthony's is responsible for his salary, and the archdiocese does not receive a percentage of weekly collections.

Despite last-minute efforts to reconcile, the archdiocese never lifted its suspension of Wickens. It wanted him to sign a letter of obedience to Newark Archbishop Myers, which all pastors do when starting a new assignment, Goodness said. Wickens refused to do so, Goodness said.

Whether they attend a Latin Mass at St. Anthony's or elsewhere, the people drawn to it say they go for reasons other than merely hearing the words in Latin, though that is important.

"It's not just the Mass said in Latin. It's about the traditional faith. It requires the reverence that's there, the respect for the way the sacraments are done," said William Denk, who stopped attending St. Anthony's and now travels elsewhere for Mass.

"Many people have seen family members lose their faith. They've seen the breakdown in our culture and society. Now, when you've had Catholic bishops who have to debate whether a candidate who is pro-choice can remain Catholic, it shows exactly where (society) has gone to now."

Jeff Diamant covers religion. Reach him at jdiamant@starledger.com or (973) 392-1547.

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1 posted on **12/28/2004, 5:00:22 PM** by **CatherineSiena**

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To: **CatherineSiena**

Interesting read..As an Episcopalian, and lord knows we have enough on OUR plates..it would seem to me that with all now going on in the Catholic church, this is akin to arguing if the prime rib was rare, or pink..

2 posted on **12/28/2004, 5:10:46 PM** by **ken5050** (Ann Coulter needs to have children ASAP to propagate her gene pool. Any volunteers?)

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To: **CatherineSiena**

Still, many longtime St. Anthony's parishioners reject him because he is an archdiocese priest, officially placed on loan to the chapel by the archdiocese. >>>>

The full priesthood is contained in the bishop, they should be honored that a priest assigned to a bishop is there and the archbishop himself extended an olive branch to bring the parishioners back into the fold.

You can't be Catholic and have your own private little church. What's wrong, are they afraid they will have to contribute to the bishops annual campaign?

From what I understand the board is still in control of the church building and parish finances.

3 posted on 12/28/2004, 5:46:52 PM by Coleus (Let us pray for the 60,000 + victims of the tsunami and their families.)
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 1](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: Coleus

What's wrong, are they afraid they will have to contribute to the bishops annual campaign?

The Parishioners of St. Anthony's are worried that the ratty types who've infested our Church will eventually get their paws on it and ruin the chapel that THEY themselves built.

I don't blame them for feeling this way. The New Order manipulators have ruined everything else they've touched when they've been given enough time. If they don't make a complete mess of Saint Anthony's (or close it down) it would be an anomaly.

You also have to understand that traditional Catholics live their lives differently. To name just a few aspects of this; they fast stricter and more frequently, dress nicer for church, teach a stronger catechism, bury their dead differently and the women cover their heads (as per scripture) at mass.

The New Church in the New Springtime doesn't believe in or require any of this anymore. It's not just about the Mass itself.

4 posted on 12/28/2004, 6:18:41 PM by AAABEST (Lord have mercy on us)
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 3](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: ken5050

this is akin to arguing if the prime rib was rare, or pink..

The prime rib appears rare and may taste delicious, but if eaten, the unseen arsenic in it will kill you.

5 posted on 12/28/2004, 9:04:03 PM by Grey Ghost II
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 2](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: AAABEST

Be careful. Just because someone professes to be a traditional Catholic doesn't necessarily mean that person is holy.

Some traditional Catholics are indeed holy; but some aren't.

6 posted on 12/28/2004, 11:27:49 PM by mattcabbott
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 4](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: CatherineSiena

Well we've finally done it. St. Anthony's has finally made the papers!

What is this talk of a VFW mass in Fairfield? Is that being said by the SSPX? Is that a regular mass?

7 posted on 12/29/2004, 12:35:31 AM by csbyrnes84

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To: **thor76; sinkspur; Canticle_of_Deborah; dsc; MarineMomJ; hobbess1; marshmallow; Wessex; ELS; ...**

Star-Ledger Article about the situation at St. Anthony's Chapel in West Orange, NJ. It was on the FRONT page of the New Jersey section on Tuesday.

8 posted on 12/29/2004, 12:41:37 AM by csbyrnes84

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 7](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **CatherineSiena**

Are people actually driving all the way to St. Jude's in Eddystone, PA to go to mass? I have seen Jersey license plates in the parking lot there, but I had just assumed that they were all from South Jersey. Come on though, that's a really long drive, around 2 hours from North Jersey. If you want to go to a Society mass there is one in NYC which is pretty close to the North Jersey area or even the Society's church in Ridgefield, CT is closer than the Eddystone Chapel.

I go to St. Jude's from time to time when I'm back at College, which is outside of Philly.

9 posted on 12/29/2004, 12:44:39 AM by csbyrnes84

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To: **mattcabbott**

You make a good point. I'm certainly not estatic about every single trad I've come across, some manage to fit every negative stereotype ascribed to traditionalists.

Generally speaking however, they have a better foundation "out of the box", and don't make me physically ill as some of those I've encountered at NO-Masses.

This said, I'm attracted to traditional Catholicism much more so because it's spiritual benefits than because of any fellowship with it's followers. I'm not a big people person anyway.

10 posted on 12/29/2004, 12:59:01 AM by AAABEST (Lord have mercy on us)

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 6](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **CatherineSiena**

We only accept the ancient Mass,

So they perform the Mass in Greek or Aramaic?

11 posted on 12/29/2004, 8:33:24 AM by Conservative til I die

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To: **Coleus**

You can't be Catholic and have your own private little church. What's wrong, are they afraid they will have to contribute to the bishops annual campaign?

It's just trads being trads. Petty, spiteful, proud (the bad kind), and somewhat egomaniacal.

12 posted on 12/29/2004, 8:34:24 AM by **Conservative til I die**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 3](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: AAABEST

You also have to understand that traditional Catholics live their lives differently. To name just a few aspects of this; they fast stricter and more frequently, dress nicer for church, teach a stronger catechism, bury their dead differently and the women cover their heads (as per scripture) at mass.

Poppycock. They've got a new priest who they admit is a conservative *and* is devoted to the Latin Mass. But, he commits the sin of saying the Novus Ordo elsewhere, and for most cultic groups, 100% purity is demanded.

No one is stopping anyone at this church from living their lives differently. They can still fast, cover their heads, pray in Latin, etc.

13 posted on 12/29/2004, 8:37:59 AM by **Conservative til I die**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 4](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: AAABEST

You make a good point. I'm certainly not estatic about every single trad I've come across, some manage to fit every negative stereotype ascribed to traditionalists.

Interestingly, I haven't met a Trad who hasn't fit every negative stereotype yet.

Talk about providing the worst witness possible.

14 posted on 12/29/2004, 8:39:24 AM by **Conservative til I die**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 10](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Conservative til I die**

You can not have it both ways , you are either true to Christ and His Church, the way is was, before Vatican 11 turned everthing upside down, with modernism.....or you fall into the same pit as the liberal, faithless ,moderen, way of the New Ordo where everything goes!

Fr. Wickens went back to the Mass of his Ordination for the reason that the New Mass way NOT RIGHT..what the heck do ya think these folks are clinging to what Fr. taught ? Clinging onto the Faith of the Martyrs and countless saints, who NEVER attened or said the New Ordo? You Can Not go both ways!

Unfortunately the Catholic Church has been in this mess since Vatican 11 and this is only ONE incident in the 40 yrs. of its people constanly being divided and tossed about, because they wish to cling to the old Latin Mass and all the old, holy ways. The clergy are to blame !!!!

15 posted on 12/29/2004, 9:04:05 AM by **Rosary** (Pray the Rosary daily)
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 13](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Coleus**

Still, many longtime St. Anthony's parishioners reject him because he is an archdiocese priest, officially placed on loan to the chapel by the archdiocese.

One would think, that as Rational people, they would take thier measure of the man personally.

As one that has, I find the arguments against him, to be more than wanting.

Conservative, Erudite, and bringing others down the Traditional path...

16 posted on 12/29/2004, 9:14:08 AM by **hobbes1** (Hobbes1TheOmniscient® "I know everything so you don't have to" ;))
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To: **Conservative til I die**

Interestingly, I haven't met a Trad who hasn't fit every negative stereotype yet.

Ironically enough, that sounds just about the way lefties talk about Conservatives.

17 posted on 12/29/2004, 9:15:19 AM by **hobbes1** (Hobbes1TheOmniscient® "I know everything so you don't have to" ;))
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 14](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **CatherineSiena**

In what was played, Wickens did not address Perricone's archdiocese ties

Of course, he did! Fr. Wickens said that Fr. Perricone was the most desirable choice and that the hardcore traditionalists would not be happy with the compromises necessary to bring Fr. Perricone to St. Anthony's. Fr. Wickens had asked Fr. Perricone a number of times even before he knew of his cancer to come to St. Anthony's. He knew and respected Fr. Perricone's position that he wouldn't leave the archdiocese to go to an independent chapel. Fr. Wickens understood that the compromises necessary to bring Fr. Perricone to St. Anthony's involved the archdiocese. And he accurately predicted the response of the hardcore traditionalists.

18 posted on 12/29/2004, 9:23:08 AM by **ELS**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 1](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **mattcabbott**

Some ~~traditional~~ Catholics are indeed holy; but some aren't.

That looks better....

19 posted on 12/29/2004, 9:24:48 AM by **hobbes1** (Hobbes1TheOmniscient® "I know everything so you don't have to" ;))
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 6](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **csbyrnes84**

I go to St. Jude's from time to time when I'm back at College, which is outside of Philly.

There are 2 Indult Masses in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Why are you going to the SSPX?

20 posted on 12/29/2004, 9:25:28 AM by **latae sententiae** (Last Things first!)
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