

Official: Dock Found In Ore. Is Debris From Japan

BY JEFF BARNARD
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — A nearly 70-foot-long dock that floated ashore on an Oregon beach was torn loose from a fishing port in northern Japan by last year's tsunami and drifted across thousands of miles of Pacific Ocean, a Japanese Consulate official said Wednesday.

A commemorative plaque on the dock showed it was one of four owned by Aomori Prefecture that broke loose from the port of Misawa on the northern tip of the main island, Deputy Consul Hirofumi Murabayashi said from Portland, Ore.

"We were able to confirm from Aomori Prefecture that they don't wish to have it returned," he said. "About the other three, of course, we have no idea where they are floating, or if they are sunk somewhere."

The dock was first spotted floating offshore Monday, and mistaken by several people for a barge, said Chris Havel, spokesman for the Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation. It washed ashore early Tuesday on Agate Beach, a mile north of Newport on the central Oregon Coast. It's made of concrete with a metal pontoon and measures 66 feet long, 19 feet wide and 7 feet high.

The distance between Japan and Oregon is roughly 5,000 miles.

A starfish native to Japan was among the marine life still clinging to the structure after the long voyage, Havel said.

Tom Cleveland, a housekeeping supervisor at some nearby beachfront condominiums, said the dock washed ashore in a storm, and people curious to see it have been jamming up traffic at a beach parking lot.

A radiation check of the dock came up negative, which was to be expected if the dock broke loose before the nuclear power plant accident triggered by the waves, Havel said. The parks department was overseeing efforts to identify and remove the dock.

State police were posted to keep people from climbing on the dock, said Mitch Vance, shellfish program manager for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Vance took samples of the mussels, barnacles and other shellfish clinging to the dock Wednesday morning. There also was green algae and brown kelp, he said.

There was no answer at the Tokyo-listed phone number for Zeniya Ocean Service Engineering Ltd., the company named on the placard, after business hours in Japan. The placard was dated June 2008.

The Japanese coastal town of Misawa, where the dock originated, sustained some tsunami damage but is north of the most heavily hit areas in Iwate and Miyagi prefectures.

Church

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heard," he said. "It's definitely got some spirit to it, and I'm looking forward to meeting all the people there."

Moris, who has served as parochial vicar for St. Michael Parish in Sioux Falls since being ordained in 2010, has been assigned as the pastor for St. Wenceslaus Parish of Tabor, the pastor for St. John the Baptist Parish of Lesterville, and the administrator for St. Agnes Parish of Sigel effective July 10.

Moris said the title of administrator for Sigel instead of pastor is an important distinction.

"Basically as the administrator, I oversee everything and assign people to play roles out there, rather than a pastor that would be on the campus all the time," he said. "As the priest, I will be doing the sacramental duties out there, making sure they have mass once a week and meeting the pastoral needs of the people in that church, (such as) any of their sacramental needs or them coming in to talk to me."

Moris, who will reside in Tabor, said he is particularly excited about the opportunity to get to know parishioners on a more personal level than he is accustomed to.

"Being (in Sioux Falls) at the largest parish, it's hard to get to know people," he said. "We have 2,000 families and 5,000 members, and we get a lot of visitors here. So I'm really looking forward to getting out to the Tabor area and the smaller groups and families

and getting to know them."

Hunhoff, who said Sigel's parishioners are excited for Moris' arrival as well, believes the partnership among the three churches will prove to be a successful one.

"Sigel and Lesterville were linked together for decades and were kind of like twin parishes, and Tabor and Lesterville are almost sister cities," he said. "So this is really good linkage, and I think it's going to work really well."

While Moris' assignment is good news for the small parishes, both Moris and Hunhoff acknowledged the fact that the futures of the parishes are still uncertain.

For the past few years, the Chancery Office of Sioux Falls has undertaken a major planning and review process for its parishes due to priest shortages.

According to Jerry Klein, Delegate for Communication and Social Ministries at the Diocese of Sioux Falls, Moris' recent assignment is not related to that review process in any way.

"Those decisions are still coming, and there is no firm timetable for when that will happen," Klein said.

While it is unclear whether Sigel will retain weekly masses once the process is completed, Hunhoff said he is grateful Bishop Paul Swain has decided to assign a

priest to the parish for the time being.

"We know he has a difficult job in this era where we're short of priests," Hunhoff said. "I think every family is very appreciative that he saw the value in the rural parish and found a solution for now."

Moris echoed those sentiments, saying he too will keep an eye on the future, but will enjoy his current opportunity at the moment.

"We do what we can," he said. "With our priest shortage, we're kind of being pulled at different ends, but God bless us that we're able to do it right now."

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