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## Archdiocese clears priest of abuse claim, restores his ministry

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The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Louisville has restored to active ministry a priest whom it cleared of a single sexual abuse allegation.

Brian Reynolds, chief administrative officer for the archdiocese, said the Rev. R. Joseph Hemmerle, a Trinity High School teacher who

was placed on leave in January, will be able to say Mass and do other public ministry.

Hemmerle's assignment remains to be determined, Reynolds said. Archbishop Thomas Kelly will decide whether he returns to Trinity or takes on a different job, he said.

The action came after archdiocesan officials learned from Hemmerle's attorney that state police closed their investigation of an alle-

gation that Hemmerle abused a boy at Camp Tall Trees in the mid-1970s.

Tommy Stiles, a state police detective, declined to comment yesterday. Hemmerle's attorney, David Lambertus, declined to confirm whether he had heard from the state police and said he has advised Hemmerle not to comment as well.

The investigation came after a Louisville native, Michael Norris of

Houston, alleged that Hemmerle molested him at the summer camp nearly 30 years ago.

Norris said yesterday: "My conscience is clear. There's nothing more I can do."

Norris said he has no plans to join the more than 100 people suing the archdiocese over allegations about priests and other employees. He said he came forward only to alert church officials.

In April, Kelly issued a statement praising Hemmerle's "long record of distinguished service to this Archdiocese. There is nothing in his record that suggests he could be guilty of this accusation."

The archdiocese has said it has received no other allegations against Hemmerle, who is in resi-

See ARCHDIOCESE  
Page 4, col. 4, this section

# Archdiocese clears priest of abuse claim

Continued from Page One

dence at St. Bartholomew Church.

Numerous supporters of Hemmerle contacted The Courier-Journal about the priest after the newspaper reported on the investigation May 9.

"I believe Father Hemmerle is a great man," said Jeff Frazier, a teacher at Sacred Heart Academy, who has known the priest for 30 years, including as a camper and counselor at Camp Tall Trees. Hemmerle directed the camp in Otter Creek Park in Meade County from 1971 until its closing this year.

"I was on three different bike trips and one walking trip with Father Hemmerle in the 1970s and 1980s," Frazier said. "I was with him 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for up to six weeks at a time. Never did I have an inkling that Father Hemmerle would do anything like what Mr. Norris has accused him of."

Diane Howell, a longtime registrar at Camp Tall Trees, said she "never heard any complaints from any boys."

Hemmerle "was really very devoted to the camp," she added. "It was just his life. He did an awful lot to main-

tain the camp. He never took a salary the whole time he was there."

Hemmerle, a native of the California neighborhood who attended the old St. Benedict Catholic Elementary School, has taught religion at Trinity since his ordination in 1967.

He has coached wrestling, cross country and track teams, and he directed Camp Tall Trees from 1971 through last year.

The archdiocese closed the camp this year because of its deteriorating condition as well as plans by Louisville to remake Otter Creek Park, which the city owns.