

Church's candor on pedophiles unusual

Other incidents did not force 2 priests out

By Greg Seigle
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Archdiocese of Washington yesterday revealed that two of the four local priests removed from their duties for sexually abusing an altar boy more than 20 years ago in Lanham also had been accused of molesting other boys as recently as 1986.

The two priests — the Rev. Thomas Schaeffer, 69, and the Rev. Edward B. Pritchard, 50 — were treated for pedophilia after child-molestation complaints were lodged with church officials, according to Monsignor William Lori, chancellor of the Catholic archdiocese.

Those two were returned to jobs within the archdiocese under the recommendation of therapists at the time, although Cardinal James B. Hickey would not allow them to return to the pulpit, Monsignor Lori said.

The practice of transferring priests to other ministries to hide their sexual abuse of children was a common practice within the Catholic church until the mid-1980s, Monsignor Lori acknowledged.

"There was a practice of transferring individuals engaged in this behavior," Monsignor Lori said during a telephone interview yesterday, adding that therapists had advised bishops to quietly transfer the priests. "In hindsight, it looks terrible. That was the wrong thing to do, and we'd never do it again."

"As a church, we have zero tolerance of this kind of behavior," Monsignor Lori said. "We do not want to absolve [the priests] of any wrongdoing."

In October 1986, when the archdiocese recognized "that sexual abuse of minors was not only a severe moral failing, but also a terrible disease," church officials devised a plan of swift action to deal with pedophiles, Monsignor Lori said. That plan includes offering help to the victim and counseling and education to the priest, he said.



Cardinal James B. Hickey

Since the church shifted its policy from transferring wayward priests to forcing them to undergo therapy, both Father Schaeffer and Father Pritchard were sent away for treatment, Monsignor Lori said.

Both were then posted where they could be closely monitored and kept away from children, Monsignor Lori said. Father Schaeffer was posted at the Carroll Manor Nursing home in Hyattsville and Father Pritchard was assigned to administrative duties.

Last Sunday, the church revealed that the priests and two others — the Rev. Edward Hartel, 58, pastor at the Shrine of St. Jude in Rockville, and the Rev. Alphonsus Smith, 70, pastor at St. Bernardine of Siena Roman Catholic Church in Suitland — had admitted to molesting an altar boy who worked for Father Schaeffer at St. Matthias Roman Catholic Church in Lanham in the 1970s.

The victim, now 34 and living near Baltimore, had recently contacted the archdiocese with his allegations. When confronted individually by Monsignor Lori, the priests admitted molesting him in the mid-1970s when he was 11 and 12.

Father Smith also admitted to Monsignor Lori that he had a five-year sexual relationship ending in 1993 with a young boy at Our Lady of Sorrows in Takoma Park. Prince George's County police have yet to charge any of the priests with sexual assault because no complaints have been filed.

The church took the unusual step of going public with the discovery rather than waiting for the news to break later.

Admission by priests enabled prompt response

By Larry Witham
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Though the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington dramatically disclosed sexual abuse by priests on a newspaper's front page, this method for winning back public trust amid the pedophilia crisis is likely to stay rare.

In this case, the archdiocese rapidly dismissed the priests, announced their guilt in five parishes Sunday at Mass and gave the story exclusively to The Washington Post.

"The Washington Archdiocese was able to establish the facts," said Monsignor Frank Maniscalco, spokesman for the United States Catholic Conference. "Sometimes the facts are in dispute and it takes longer, or [church officials] can't talk to the media because someone made an accusation and someone denies it."

When the problem of pedophilia by priests became public in the mid-1980s, victims complained of church cover-ups.

In November, after two years of study, the nation's bishops received a task-force report, "Restoring Trust," that said public disclosure was key to helping victims and healing public mistrust.

"This is extraordinary, but it does not reflect the church in general," said Barbara Blaine, president of Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), which claims 1,300 members. "The church wants us to believe there's a new disclosure policy."

Her group has released a list of the six worst dioceses — which did not include Washington.

By disclosing the cases during Mass and through a single media source, she said, the archdiocese "seems to have carefully orchestrated a publicity event. Our sense is that they had a reason behind that."

The four guilty priests, who served in five parishes in the Washington area, are the Rev. Thomas Schaeffer, 69, the Rev. Alphonsus Smith, 70, the Rev. Edward Hartel, 58, and the Rev. Edward Pritchard, 50.

The archdiocese said the priests admitted guilt on Jan. 20,

the day after an abuse complaint was made by a 34-year-old Baltimore man. They were dismissed and sent for psychological treatment. The announcement came two weeks later.

Prince George's County's Child Protective Services agency was notified, and it is supposed to pass the information to the police.

"We made a very honest disclosure of what happened," said Monsignor William Lori, chancellor of the archdiocese. "We didn't want to have a [media] circus at these parishes. We didn't want people mobbed with the media."

Since 1985, the Archdiocese of Washington has had a policy of response to abuse charges by

using an independent panel, suspension of accused personnel when warranted, collecting facts from all sides and alerting civil authorities.

The nation's bishops received an internal report in 1985 that said pedophilia looms as a future crisis for the church and that lawsuits could end up costing \$1 billion. Experts estimate there are about 400 cases, most of them being settled quietly out of court.

The bishops have said they were late as a group to realize the extent of the problem but note that the number of priests guilty of pedophilia is no more than the 1 percent or 2 percent found among men in the general population.