

METROPOLITAN TIMES

Group says it forced church to expose 4 pedophiles

By Greg Seigle
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The Archdiocese of Washington, which last week disclosed that four priests had molested the same altar boy more than 20 years ago, was prodded into breaking the news by a Chicago-based support group that threatened to call the media, the group's director said.

Since that revelation, 14 local men have contacted the group, Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse Linkup, claiming to have been molested by the four Catholic priests, group director Tom Economus said last night.

Mr. Economus praised the archdiocese's decision to publicize the molestations, but he made it clear that church officials did not initiate the announcement as they

had said.

"The underlying understanding was that if they had not self-disclosed, we probably would have," Mr. Economus said from Chicago.

"It's in their best interest to work with us, not run away from us. If they had run away from us and slammed the door, I would have had a press conference," he said.

"We saw an opportunity for the church to work with us and to be open and honest," said Mr. Economus, who was molested by a priest in South Dakota from 1970 to 1974. "Otherwise, we would have made it public."

"That's the first time I've heard that," archdiocese spokeswoman Dawn Weyrich Ceol said when reached at home yesterday. "Tom Economus was one of many fac-

tors in our strategy" to break the story.

Last week the archdiocese gave The Washington Post an exclusive story about Cardinal James Hickey's announcement that four priests had recently admitted molesting an altar boy at St. Matthias Roman Catholic Church in Lanham in the 1970s.

Eight victims of the priests had contacted Mr. Economus in the fall after his group ran advertisements in area papers asking "those who remembered" the priests to call, he said. The 14 men who called the group last week raised the number of victims to 22.

Two former altar boys — a 34-year-old man living near Baltimore and a 29-year-old Clinton man — spoke with Prince George's County police Thursday and are considering filing felony child sex-

ual abuse charges, a police source said. Maryland has no statute of limitations on felonies.

Police spokesmen would only confirm that the 34-year-old was interviewed by investigators, but the police source said yesterday, "We have, in fact, interviewed two victims."

The priests — the Rev. Alphonus Smith, 70, of St. Bernadine of Siena Roman Catholic Church in Suitland; the Rev. Edward Hartel, 58, of the Shrine of St. Jude in Rockville; the Rev. Thomas Schaefer, 69, of Carrol Manor Nursing Home in Hyattsville; and the Rev. Edward B. Pritchard, 50, of St. Mary's Church in Northwest — admitted molesting the 34-year-old man when he was 11 and 12.

Father Smith also admitted having a five-year affair with a boy beginning in 1988 at Our Lady of

Sorrows in Takoma Park. The four priests are being treated for pedophilia at separate, undisclosed locations.

Officials with the archdiocese acknowledged they broke the news after the 34-year-old met with Monsignor William Lori, chancellor of the archdiocese. Monsignor Lori had called Linkup and promised to work with the group if it asked victims to call the archdiocese, Mr. Economus said.

Monsignor Lori and other church officials said it was their decision to disclose the pedophilia.

"We took very swift action, and we're telling people about it," Mrs. Ceol said.

"Our first concern is not the media or the titillation of the public," she said. "The first concern is for the people in the parishes who are going to be torn asunder by this

kind of news. Our first concern is for the parishioners and the victims."

On Wednesday, three days after the initial disclosure, the archdiocese revealed that Father Schaefer and Father Pritchard had been treated for pedophilia after child molestation allegations were levied against them as recently as 1986. Father Schaefer had been accused of sexually abusing children in the 1960s and 1970s and in 1982, church officials said.

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