

Pray for the priests, pastor urges

Parish seeks healing after sex scandal

By Matt Neufeld
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The pastor of the Church of St. Matthias the Apostle in Lanham yesterday urged his congregation to keep the faith, pray and take advantage of counseling in the wake of revelations that four priests molested an altar boy more than 20 years ago at their church.

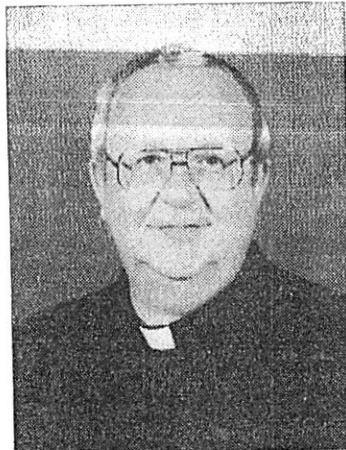
"Our response must be, fall on our knees and ask God's forgiveness for these men who committed these acts, to ask for healing ... and reconciliation," said the Rev. John Scanlan, pastor at the 35-year-old church in the 9400 block of Annapolis Road. "We need your support. We desperately need your prayers at this time. May God bless us all."

In his sermon, Father Scanlan, who has been a priest for 36 years, asked his congregation to stay together, offer support whenever they can and join each other in prayer during a time of needed "emotional healing."

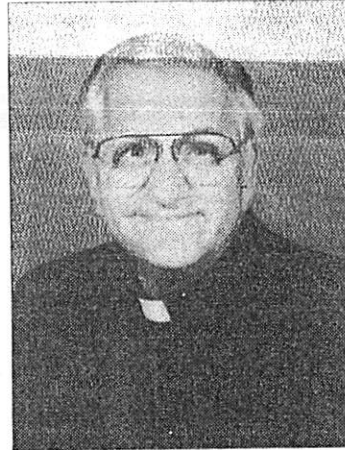
A week earlier, the Archdiocese of Washington revealed at two churches and in the media that the four priests had admitted molesting an altar boy at St. Matthias during the 1970s.

The four priests were removed from their ministries and are being treated for pedophilia in separate, undisclosed locations, according to officials for the Archdiocese of Washington.

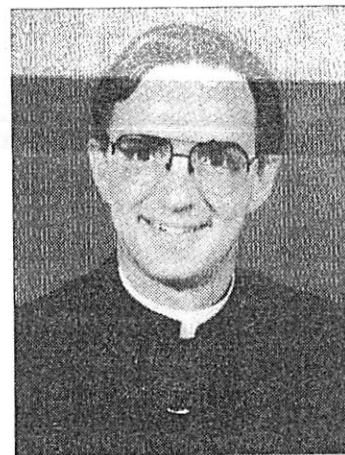
Those removed are the Rev.



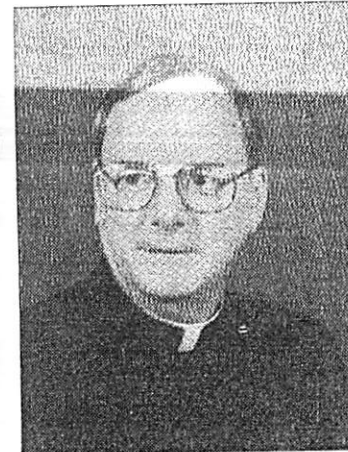
The Rev. Edward Hartel



The Rev. Alphonsus Smith



The Rev. Edward B. Pritchard



The Rev. Thomas Schaefer

Alphonsus Smith, 70, pastor of St. Bernadine of Siena Roman Catholic Church in Suitland since 1989; the Rev. Edward Hartel, 58, pastor at 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.

Father Smith, 70, has also admitted to having a five-year affair, ending in 1993, with a boy starting at Our Lady of Sorrows in Takoma Park.

That announcement, and other subsequent revelations, have shaken churches, Father Scanlan said.

At Mass yesterday and in an open letter in the church bulletin handed out yesterday, Father Scanlan announced a series of counseling and educational meetings and special prayer sessions to help his congregation deal with the incident.

Two therapists are scheduled to meet with parishioners Thurs-

day night to offer "group counseling and support," he said in his letter. Also, a trained counselor and family therapist is scheduled to speak to parents about child abuse Feb. 23. Both meetings are scheduled to be held in the church's Friendship Hall.

Father Scanlan encouraged parishioners to attend a special 8 a.m. Mass on Friday to mark "a day of parish prayer," to say the Rosary for the church and to attend a Parish Appreciation Night on Feb. 26.

St. Matthias parishioners yesterday praised the archdiocese for dealing with the issue in an open manner. They also praised Father Scanlan and St. Matthias for quickly taking steps to deal with the matter.

"I think they're doing their best and trying hard to get over it," said Lottie Krok, 74, of Seabrook, a St. Matthias member since it opened. "It was a big shock to us. The pastor's taking it very hard, and trying to console people, and doing things for

the parish. I think it's a good way to handle it.

"It's all so unbelievable, and we have a hard time accepting it. But it doesn't turn us against our faith — there's good and bad in all. The Devil tempts most of all those close to God."

"The most we can do is pray for them," said Margaret Swift, 83, a retired schoolteacher from Seabrook and also a St. Matthias member since the first day. "We don't hold them down for it, because they're human. Whatever treatment they're giving them will be the right thing. We'll pray for them."

At the Shrine of St. Jude in Rockville, where one of the priests who committed the abuse served, the church brought in four counselors on Thursday night to meet with parishioners, said the Rev. Lee Fangmeyer, the church administrator. St. Jude, he said, will also make more counselors available, have a special session for parents, and urge parishioners to pray.

Father Scanlan spoke to about 270 people at the crowded 11 a.m. Mass yesterday and another 300 people at the 9:15 a.m. Mass, said cantor and choir director Regina Loffredo, 37, of Mitchellville, a six-year church member. The attendance at the services were about normal for Sunday, she said.

"As I sat there and listened to this letter [from Cardinal James Hickey] ... my sadness and my sorrow became deeper and deeper," he said. "It is a tragedy, of course. We look up today to the crucified Christ, asking him to hear our cry ... and to comfort us."

Father Scanlan said he saw symbolic "tears in the eyes of Christ," real tears in the eyes of his parishioners "and there are tears in my eyes."

"As I sat there [last] Sunday, I was stunned and overwhelmed, and I really couldn't speak about it," said Father Scanlan. "As your pastor, I have to comfort you, and heal you."