

Priest surrenders, faces 3 sex counts

Police call him child-sex 'ringleader'

By Greg Seigle
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A fourth Catholic priest surrendered to Prince George's County police yesterday to face charges that he sexually abused three boys at local churches in the 1970s.

The Rev. Thomas S. Schaefer, 69, was charged yesterday with three counts of sexual child abuse. Police say he abused two of the boys at St. Matthias Roman Catholic Church in Lanham in 1972 assaulted another boy at St. John's Roman Catholic Church in Clinton in 1975.

Father Schaefer was also charged with four counts of sodomy for abusing a fourth boy between March 1966 and February 1971, when he was pastor at Sacred Heart Church in Compton, starting when the boy was 11 years old.

Father Schaefer's surrender, arranged by his attorney, came two days after three other local priests turned themselves in.

One police source described Father Schaefer, formerly the pastor at Carroll Manor Nursing Home in Hyattsville, as the "ringleader" of the group. Like the others priests, Father Schaefer was released on personal recognizance after a brief hearing before a District Court commissioner.

Each count of sexual child abuse carries a maximum 15-year penalty. In addition, each count of sodomy that state police charged Father Schaefer with carries a



The Rev. Thomas S. Schaefer

20-year prison sentence.

The three other priests — the Rev. Edward Hartel, 58, former pastor at the Shrine of St. Jude in Rockville; the Rev. Edward B. Pritchard, 50, formerly of St. Mary's Church in Northwest; and the Rev. Alphonsus Smith, 70, former pastor of St. Bernadine of Siena Roman Catholic Church — turned themselves in to detectives Wednesday.

Police charged Father Smith and Father Pritchard with two counts and Father Hartel of one count of sexual child abuse. Warrants were issued for the four priests on Monday because there is no statute of limitations for felonies in Maryland and complaints were not filed until last week, police said.